

Recently my mail has included an abundance of bulletins, news-sheets, even advertising for videos-tapes, all purporting to expose the sins of pastors, other church leaders, and/or institutions. The clear implication is **a)** only the senders can be trusted to provide unvarnished "truth" (bad news) and/or **b)** you can't trust the Church.

Sadly, some of the charges are true. Some are not. Some half-truths are publicized and slanted in the most disparaging manner possible. Yet, it is true. Calamities happen. Leaders make mistakes. We live in a sin-cursed earth, and the devil levels some of his strongest attacks against leaders. Determining an appropriate response to failure at times is clear. In others it is very difficult. However, some responses are definitely out of place.

If my son or daughter were to fall into sin, would it be consistent with a loving family if my response was to publish an expose revealing his or her failure? Of course not. His or her sin stands condemned before God, waiting to be confessed, forsaken and forgiven while my broadcasting of his or her sins is a priori evidence of my own spiritual deficiency.

"Yes," you may ask, "but what about the charges? I know some of these critics are out of place, but is leadership dealing with the failures in the Church?"

My answer is "Yes" and "No." I am more aware than most of failings in the Church. Many cause me sleepless nights. Here are a few examples:

◆ A former professor of theology rejects today many of our fundamental beliefs and thus, in my opinion, cannot be considered a Seventh-day Adventist. To the embarrassment of loyal members around the world, he uses his status as a member in "good and regular standing" to validate his aberrant theological positions. So far, in spite of urging on the part of Church leadership, the congregation has not seen fit to formally consider his membership status. However, using this situation, in spite of Church leadership's urging of disciplinary action, to justify painting "the Church" as untrustworthy and supportive of aberrant theology smacks of opportunism and is reprehensible.

◆ Another critic, while selectively ignoring the counsel of the very Spirit of Prophecy he ostensibly promotes, seems committed to precipitating an apocalyptic confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church. After embarrassing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in several major North American cities, he has bought billboards at each major entrance to Kingston, Jamaica (according to Church officials), and we are warned of even more abhorrent activities to come!

This tragic situation is magnified because **a)** the leader of this group is also a "member in good and regular standing" and **b)** funding for these activities is provided largely by SDAs who have been deluded into thinking that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has rejected The Great Controversy,

which, coincidentally, he promotes at US\$19.95 while the Church distributes it by the millions around the world for a pittance (in the USA for 75 cents each)! Again, his congregation has abdicated its responsibility to the world Church by permitting this individual to retain membership and, by its inaction, exposes the Church to criticism potentially greater than the tragedy in Waco, Texas, and alienation of an unknown number of people who are prejudiced against the Church through his activities.

◆ The student editor of a college newspaper published a "special" edition which brought reproach on the Church and embarrassment to the institution. The critics correctly point out that the content was completely out of place. Much that was included was in poor taste and did not represent a Seventh-day Adventist institution. However, the critics neglected to mention that administration took appropriate steps and accepted the student editor's resignation. Yes, the critics were right in their criticism, but slanted reporting leaves me wondering about their motives.

◆ I recently received a letter, widely circulated in North America, which clearly was not intended for the upbuilding of the church. The author describes as real life, scenes video-taped by some workers while on vacation. The video content was reprehensible and indefensible, and those involved were reprimanded for their behavior. But to represent this parody as actual events is blatantly dishonest. The cause of God is not advanced by such muckraking and misrepresentation.

◆ Yet another is my concern that some institutions are not implementing, as fully as God intended, the spiritual mission for which they were established. Carefully-designed processes are under way which should improve their contribution to our soul-winning and -keeping mission. Furthermore, I will do my best to communicate constructively both the successes and failures of these processes.

As Adventists we know the signs of Matthew 24 show the end is near. The signs in the Church are just as evident, and many members are in a Laodicean condition. Pride, collective-selfishness, materialism, pernicious-individualism (the "but-I-think" mentality) provide ample evidence of our spiritual anorexia. Yet we know this is the Remnant Church. It will be shaken and appear to fall, but it will go through to the end.

My plea to pastors is, preach the Word, preach the full gospel, and preach our distinctive message for the end-time. Make your flock hungry for God's Word.

Fellow believers, study the Word for yourself, don't depend on any person (pastor or critic) to do it for you. We have not followed cunningly-devised fables. Jesus is coming, and soon! Maranatha.

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