

From the G.C. President

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O ABC BROADCASTS ADVENTIST SPOTS: You may have heard that ABC will broadcast Seventh-day Adventist spots during the “ABC Evening News with Peter Jennings” and other prime time ABC network programming, beginning in February. Specific dates and times for broadcast are not known yet. The spots emphasize that everyone can make the world a better place by offering a helping hand to those in need, and close with the words, “This message was brought to you by the Seventh-day Adventists.” Produced by the Adventist Media Center, the spots feature 1) the problem of teenage runaways and shows a couple extending a helping hand, and 2) a man’s struggle to befriend an AIDS patient.

This opportunity was due to the witness of one member who was married to an ABC Television executive. When she died of cancer, he offered to broadcast the spots to honor her faith, her memory and the caring support of church members in New York City. “The spots will be available for Adventist churches to place on local television and cable stations after ABC has full opportunity to air these spots,” said Kermit Netteburg, spokesperson for the North American Division.

O MARANATHA WINS VERDICT: Golden Giant, the steel building supplier which Maranatha Volunteers International contracted to design and provide steel for a building at our seminary in Zaoski, Russia, was found liable by a federal court in Toledo, Ohio, on February 3 for the damage caused when the building collapsed under the weight of snow. The same jury will hear the further evidence and decide the amount of damages to be paid. Though additional delays are expected before any funds are available for construction, Maranatha remains committed to seeing that this building is completed.

O NORTH AMERICA SETS BAPTISMAL RECORD: North American leaders are rejoicing following the announcement that 39,004 were baptized in 1996—more than any year ever before—pushing the membership above the 850,000 mark.

O SANCTUARY MODEL ON “THE MALL:” Permission was granted to exhibit a full size model of the Old Testament sanctuary on “The Mall” (between the Washington Monument and the Ellipse) in Washington, D.C., between March 21-30. Along with the full size model, smaller replicas of the sanctuary and Ezekiel’s temple will be displayed in adjacent tents.

For several years, a Seventh-day Adventist Church in San Diego, California, has erected the sanctuary, called “The King’s Castle,” in several cities in the United States and Canada. Project director, Pastor Ted Tessner, says the large crowds attending each showing have been impressed with the clarity of the plan of salvation highlighted in the sanctuary tour.

O ON A PERSONAL NOTE: After spending almost three weeks attending North American Division and Loma Linda University meetings and an International Children’s Care Board meeting, I return to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday and continue Wednesday to visit our believers in Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Africa, from which I will send the next edition of *From the GC President*.

Off the Back Burner

Segment #53: A topic I’ve been studying recently is the interaction between common sense and revelation, between conscience and theology. This tension motivates much of the debate about the principles of biblical interpretation.

On one extreme are those whose understanding of salvation tends to be the type of works-orientation we label as “legalism.” For these, justification is a footnote to the gospel and their sanctification emphasis leads to a verbal-inspiration Biblical interpretation which supports a rule-based Christianity.

On the other extreme are those whose understanding of salvation tends to be justification-alone, forensic righteousness. For these sanctification is a mere footnote to the gospel. Their “write your own politically correct rules” brand of legalism denies absolute truth and leads to acceptance of the faith-destroying presuppositions of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation and the worship of the creature above the creator.

Ellen White stood directly between these two extremes. She understood that theology which didn’t result in a transformed life would create prejudice against the gospel and that the primary testimony of God’s grace was the graciousness of Christ revealed in the born-again child of God. She emphasized that word and deed, doctrine and life, cannot be separated: “We are to be guided by true theology and common sense” (CT:257).

But common sense alone does not constitute ultimate authority. Secular society’s highest value, the worship of self and the denial of absolute right and wrong, merely restates in modern language Lucifer’s sin of attempting to crown himself as an alternate god—“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; ... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:13,14).

Common sense, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and tested by God’s Word, never contradicts Bible principles. Rather it applies eternal truth to daily life. Ellen White demonstrated that applying timeless principles requires common sense.

This principle was evident even in her counsel regarding matters as basic as diet. For example, she wrote about health principles, including some that were generally far in advance of the conventional thinking of her day. But these principles were to be understood and applied through common sense.

Regarding eating two meals a day, she wrote: “Some eat three meals a day, when two would be more conducive to physical and spiritual health” (4T:416, 417). Further revealing her common sense, she wrote in 1903: “I eat only two meals a day. But I do not think that the number of meals should be made a test. If there are those who are better in health when eating three meals, it is their privilege to have three” (CDF:178).

The principle of what is best under all circumstances, not merely what is good, should be the Christian’s benchmark. Too often, the good is the enemy of the best.