

From the G.C. President

May 19, 1997

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O RON WATTS ELECTED SOUTHERN ASIA DIVISION PRESIDENT: Last Thursday, subsequent to my consultation with the Southern Asia Division Executive Committee, the General Conference Committee elected D. Ron Watts, associate secretary of the General Conference, as president of the Southern Asia Division. Pastor Watts replaces Dr. M.E. Cherian who was unable to continue to carry the heavy pressures of leadership after undergoing surgery to correct a brain aneurysm he suffered in mid-February.

Pastor Watts and his wife, Dorothy (who is director of the General Conference Department of Women's Ministries), served in India for 16 years (including president of the South India Union). They returned to the North American Division in 1981, and since then they have served in the Michigan and Oregon Conferences. Pastor Watts served as president of the Alaska and British Columbia Conferences as well.

Please pray for Dr. Cherian as his recovery continues and for the Watts as they take up their new responsibilities in India. Also pray for the General Conference and for the Lord's clear guidance in the search for those who will replace the Watts in these two major responsibilities.

O TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION NEWS: ✓ **Israel**—Recently, 600 believers, mostly young people, traveled to Jerusalem from all over Israel to attend a full day of Sabbath fellowship. Bertil Wiklander, TED president, introduced Richard Elofer, the new president for the Israel Field. Elofer grew up as a Jew in Morocco and France, but when he became an Adventist at age 18 his Jewish father rejected him as a son. The Seventh-day Adventist community in Israel is growing at an unprecedented rate increasing from 50 to over 700 in about 10 years, especially from among the various immigrant groups. The Israel Field has called a Russian-speaking pastor of Jewish origin to work among the Russian-speaking immigrants, many of whom worship with Adventists on Sabbath. ✓ **Croatia**—Tears of joy accompanied the baptism of three precious souls at the close of an evangelistic series conducted by Newbold College students in Varazdin, Croatia, and another 25 are preparing for baptism. ✓ **Egypt**—Sixty persons, including pastors, teachers and members traveled from Upper Egypt, Alexandria and Cairo to Nile Union Academy, near the Biblical land of Goshen, and spent nine days attending the first Bible Conference to be held in this land of the Pharaohs. Those attending were richly blessed by the intense focus on the scriptures and a fresh understanding of the priesthood of believers.

O WHAT! IS IT TRUE?—PROBABLY NOT!: I never cease to be amazed at the gullibility of human nature. That our willingness to believe a rumor seems to increase in direct proportion to its improbability was again evident during a phone call I received last night. It seems an acquaintance called him to verify an announcement made during a meeting at his church—that the General Conference had appointed a “representative to the Vatican!” My esteemed colleague, was certain of the answer but before responding he wanted to go through the formality of calling me. The answer should be obvious to any Seventh-day Adventist. Of course not! Such an

idea has never been discussed and hasn't even entered my mind!

But this is symptomatic of a far deeper problem. Contrary to the “innocent until proven guilty” premise of most legal systems, within our community the opposite seems to be true. Is there no limit to the wild rumors some are willing to spread on the assumption that “since it is bad it must be true?” I confess I've had to learn this lesson the hard way and have apologized to those whom I've hurt in the process. But we can't correct the problem until we identify it as such, which is the reason I've shared this anecdote with you.

What it will take for us to assume the best about our church and its leaders is to rise to the defense of our church, to verify the facts and then hold the authors of distrust accountable. Unlikely, yes, but at least worth mentioning.

Off the Back Burner

Segment #64: Continuing our series on inspiration, we noted in the last segment that misunderstanding how God speaks to His prophets will lead to a misuse of the prophets' writings.

In selecting His prophets, God chooses men and women who will follow His leading and accommodates Himself to their limited “mental and spiritual endowments.” He does not dictate His revelations (or send them by E-mail or Fax). Ellen White described very clearly the divine-human cooperation in the revelation/inspiration process: “The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man ... Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony. ... The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language; yet it is the testimony of God” (GC:vi, vii.).

With all this enormous diversity of “mental and spiritual endowments,” as diverse as there are writers, how can later readers of these prophets find coherence and unity in what all declare to be “the word of the Lord”? The unity of their messages is guaranteed by the one Author who inspired them all. Ellen White wrote: “The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction” (ISM:22).

In our next segment, we will observe how a belief in verbal inspiration can abuse both Biblical writers and Ellen White.