

# From the G.C. President

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Robert S. Folkenberg

**O GLOBAL RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION** is the focus of legislation proposed in the United States Congress and discussed last week during hearings conducted by the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee, according to a report I just received from Wintley Phipps, GC Associate Director for Religious Liberty.

In his testimony Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) said that the persecution of Christians abroad is the great untold human rights story of the decade. Religious persecution, he said, especially the persecution of Christians, did not dissipate with the Cold War. It persisted and accelerated. He cried out against, the 1.5 million killed in Sudan as the Khartoum government wages war against both Christians and Muslims, the millions in China who worship in secret to keep their faith independent of government control, the violent mobs in some Muslim countries who terrorize Christians and are left helpless by governments unwilling to take a stand, Tibetan Buddhists who have seen their holy places destroyed and their religious leaders imprisoned, tortured, raped and beaten. "We do not scream for justice," said Rep. Wolf, "when Bahai's are executed in Iran."

The proposed legislation focuses on aid, not trade sanctions, to encourage change. It shuts off foreign aid and denies loans to certain countries, improves refugee and asylum procedures and, imposes sanctions (virtually identical to those imposed on South Africa in the anti-apartheid act of the 1980s) on the government of Sudan until it ceases all religious persecution.

The big surprise of the day came when Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights John Shattuck announced the Clinton Administration's opposition to the bill. "This bill", said Mr Shattuck, "could do more harm than good" and added, "It could undercut diplomatic efforts and lead to reprisals, hurting the very people it's meant to help." We will keep you informed as this issue of vital importance to believers is addressed.

**O PROGRESS IN LITHUANIA:** The three apartments in Mazeikiai, Kedainiai and Marijampole, Lithuania—purchased and refurbished with the help of Global Mission—now serve as evangelistic centers and the first church buildings for the 1,400 new members in this challenging part of the world.

**O FROM A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE:** Last week and this week the GC staff is deeply engaged in preparing for the cycle of year-end meetings beginning with the '97 Annual Council. Some of the major agenda items will include rewriting GC policies regarding deployment of Inter-Division Workers, providing church members around the world much more information regarding use of funds, and considering strategic initiatives to better accomplish our Global Mission.

This week and next will be filled with interviews (with leaders of each Division and GC Institution), councils, strategic planning sessions, board meetings, and the Message and Mission Committee, and Annual Council itself begins on Monday evening, September 29, and concludes October 7. The North American Division year-end meetings begin the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> and conclude on Sunday, October 12.

I urge you to please pray that the Holy Spirit will guide in every decision. We live in an extremely troubled world and from my vantage point it is overwhelmingly evident that Satan

is doing everything possible to divide, weaken, and distract us from the task our Lord has entrusted us to perform. His arsenal not only includes the arsenal of the godless society which surrounds us but also the weapons of the well-intentioned but partially informed. It is painfully clear that the unity which preceded and was a precondition to Pentecost and which will also precede the Latter Rain, is not within the grasp of man-made initiatives or proposals, but can only come about with fasting, prayer and personal revival. The evidence that this is happening will be that distrust will be replaced by a trust in God and a certainty that the Holy Spirit is leading this Movement and will do so to the end of time.

## Off the Back Burner

**Segment #80:** We are unfolding the Great Controversy Theme as reflected in Steps to Christ. The main issue in the Controversy is, Who is telling the truth, God or Satan? (See John 8:44). Ellen G. White clearly sets forth this incredible, yet sad, conflict. After describing some ways that God has used to reveal His character, she noted: "Though all these evidences have been given, the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them" (SC:10, 11).

Wherever one looks in philosophy and theology through the centuries, we see evidences of Satan's deceptions. We even find his misrepresentations in Judaism and Christianity, as well as in all pagan religions. In "Christian" doctrines such as eternal punishment, predestination, universalism, "name it, claim it," etc. we see the deceiver's handiwork. Pagan philosophies which describe a deity that must be appeased by human sacrifice, physical mutilation, or extravagant offerings, provide further proof of His presence. Whenever God is depicted as the Grand Exterminator rather than the Loving Father or as Cosmic Policeman rather than the God-Who-Cares, we know that Satan has distorted the truth.

How has God responded to these misrepresentations, these efforts to cloud the character of God—each designed to entice sinful men and women to set themselves up as their own gods? Jesus came. He came primarily to tell the truth about God. He came to "remove this dark shadow [Satan's charges] by revealing to the world the infinite love of God" (SC:11; John 1:18; Matt. 11:27; John 14:8, 9). Most of the arguments within Christianity regarding such subjects as the atonement, the problem of suffering, judgment, etc., would vanish when the main reason for Christ's coming to earth sets the agenda. The main thing is to keep the main thing—that has been God's method of telling the truth.