

From the G.C. President

September 22, 1997

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○ TWO WARRIORS HAVE FALLEN:

✓**Pastor J. Robert Spangler** lost his life on Friday morning, September 19, in a multi-car accident, reportedly caused by a drunk driver. Among the other nine injured was Pastor Spangler's wife, Marie who, at the time of writing, remains hospitalized in stable condition. Pastor and Mrs. Spangler served in the then Far Eastern Division for many years before his 1962 election to the GC Ministerial Association. During his 23-years as editor of *Ministry* (the longest of any editor of this journal) he launched the "Preach" program—sending *Ministry* to non-SDA clergy—and was instrumental in producing "Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . ." before his retirement in 1990. Between 1990 and 1993, after "retiring," he coordinated the extraordinarily successful evangelistic thrust into Russia, facilitated the translation of the Bible into the Russian language, and then for four years he assisted Pastor Mark Finley with the evangelistic ministry of *It Is Written*.

✓**Pastor Bill May**, who with Pastor Cyril Miller founded *Amazing Facts* and then called Joe Crews to the AF ministry, passed away September 13 after an extended illness. Pastor May's tireless, fruitful service included many years in pastoral and evangelistic ministry and church administration. Among other projects, he wrote the *Revelation Seminary Study Guides* and the *Amazing Facts Bible Guides*. After tragic death of Pastor Crews, Pastor May led in the selection of Pastor Doug Batchelor as the new speaker-director and oversaw the ministry's transition from Maryland to California.

○ RUSSIAN BILL ON RELIGION VOTED BY DUMA:

On September 19, the Russian Duma voted by an overwhelming 357 to 6 to adopt a slightly modified version of the proposed law on church-state relations. It is a compromise bill negotiated between the Duma religion committee and the Yeltsin administration. The legislation was considered under rules which allowed little opportunity for debate which is unfortunate since most deputies were probably unaware that Roman Catholics and other protestant churches opposed the bill. According to the Keston News Service (KNS), the passage by the Federation Council is now certain, though the upper house now has two options—either to pass or to defeat the Duma-approved "compromise." The new version of the bill reportedly incorporates without change the version of the controversial Article 27, with its '15 year rule' for new religious entities, which was proposed by Yeltsin in early September and another section which diminishes religious organizations' access to schoolchildren. KNS reported that the president Yeltsin's representative to the Duma stated during the debate that "the controversial '15-year rule' will not apply to organizations registered before the new law comes into effect."

Catholic and protestant leaders (including Seventh-day Adventists) sent a protest letter to Yeltsin stating, "When on 22 July 1997 you rejected the unconstitutional law... the entire Christian world expressed its gratitude to you as a consistent and firm defender of freedom and democracy in Russia ... We expressed our support of the work of the negotiating group after being assured that our proposals would be taken into account in the writing of the bill's final text. But that did not happen."

Please pray that God will keep open the doors of opportunity to witness in this vast country.

○ **AWR SECURES BUILDING PERMIT—AFTER 9 YEARS!** Pastor Don Jacobsen, AWR President, told me on Friday that the Mayor of Argenta, Italy (site of the next AWR transmitter) called the AWR office in Forli and reported that (nine years after the application was filed) the zoning change necessary to begin building had been approved! Great news!

Off the Back Burner

Segment #81: (*Continuing our study of the Great Controversy Theme as unfolded in Steps to Christ.*) Earlier we noted that the fundamental concern of men and women in all ages is: How to get right with God. Last week we noted that our Lord's primary reason for coming to earth was to counter Satan's misrepresentations regarding the character of God. We catch glimpses of the Father's character through the life of Christ, such as how Jesus brought the truth to thoughtful Nicodemus or dealt with promiscuous Mary Magdalene. Note His grief at Lazarus' tomb or His long-suffering patience with dissembling Judas. Observe how He welcomed Zacchaeus, the profiteering extortioner, and the children who climbed on His lap. Add to this list dozens of other human situations where He revealed some fresh aspect of God's character—the character into which He promises to transform each of us.

To doubting Philip and His disciples Jesus said, "Believe because of the things I do" (John 14:11). "Believe what? Believe that God the Father is just like what you see me do!" More than anything else, whether one to one or to crowds, Jesus talked about His Father—the loving creator of heaven and earth. Jesus' primary topic was not our sins and God's wrath. I pray all who occupy pulpits will learn this lesson from Jesus: to tell the truth about God. Telling the truth about God, as taught through the life and words of Jesus will lower the heat that is generated by doctrinal debates. For most doctrinal debates are the result of a misunderstanding of how God runs the universe and how He leads men and women to get right—be reconciled—with Him.