

From the G.C. President

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OHonored for Service: On Friday, January 23, Dr. Bert B. Beach was presented with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. Presented at the Polish Embassy in Washington, DC by Ambassador Jerzy Kozminski, Dr. Beach earned this honor through many years of work with and for the people of Poland. He helped them develop faith, religious liberty, government and inter-church relations during and after the difficult years of the Cold War. Dr. Beach has been a diplomat to government and religious leaders on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and has most recently retired as director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department (PARL), but continues to be in charge of inter-church relations and is a general advisor to PARL.

I am thankful to Dr. Beach for his unique ministry. His leadership has reached far beyond the walls of Adventism.

AWR Starts New Broadcast: Dr. Robert Wong, director of broadcast ministry for the East Asia Association, informed us that the medium wave (AM) broadcast of AWR programming to China will begin this coming Wednesday, January 28. AM broadcasting greatly increases the number of people in China who can receive AWR programming. These new programs will be broadcast on leased time on a 600kw station near Vladivostok in the former Soviet Union.

It is incredible to witness the Church's growth in the former Soviet Union, and a true gift to know that the broadcasts for China come from a country filled with believers who can sympathize with the plight of Chinese Christians. Recently, I have received a very encouraging report from Uzbekistan. A new church in Navol, originally started in 1994, has had over 200 baptisms and now 222 believers worship there each Sabbath. The new church building is almost completed and construction will begin on a lay-training center this summer. Also, a company of 11 new believers was started in Karschi and 12 members meet each Sabbath in Bucharra where five more baptisms will take place this month. The Central Asia Conference is planning to plant churches in another 20 cities!

Off the Back Burner

Segment 98: In the book, *Steps to Christ*, Ellen White unfolded the Great Controversy Theme. We have been looking at the place of reason in our responsibility to hear God's side of the story. We learned that Satan has made it appear that God expects "blind submission, an unreasoning control." But the truth is that God "appeals to the intellect and the conscience" and "does not force the will." As a God of love, "He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly

and intelligently given" (SC:43).

When we think about Satan's attack on God's strategy to appeal to our intellect, we note that it is the intellect that has been under attack in the twentieth century, in both Christian and secular circles. For too many, even to use the word "intellectual" is to suggest something "anti-spiritual," or "high-brow." But in the great controversy, the spiritual and the intellect are inseparably joined. To by-pass the intellect in the pursuit of truth is to invite a fundamental obscuring of reality.

I think of the late University of Chicago professor, Allan Bloom and his best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. He argued convincingly that since mid-century a massive upheaval in the way people think has occurred, that higher education has trained a whole generation against real thinking. His indictment exposes the chief error of our time: nothing is absolute, all is relative. We see evidence of his charge everywhere, whether it is in how we make up laws, how to govern a home, how to decide ethical standards, etc.

And the Adventist Church has not been immune from this tidal wave of relativism. We hear or read that we ought to feel more (translate that, "think less,") that we ought to "listen" to God more without an equal emphasis on dealing with the Spirit through Biblical study. Feeling in worship supersedes an intelligent interchange between a thinking worshiper and a thoughtful revelation from God's Word. In other words, experience is in and thinking is out. This is simply a modern form of what happened to Cain, he began to "feel" what is right without listening to the quiet authority of God. Relativism was in, authority was out!

The whole point of the plan of salvation and the Great Controversy Theme is that sinful, self-absorbed, self-gratifying minds are to be "transformed" so that we "will be able to know the will of God--what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect" (Rom. 12:1, TEV). Satan will do all he can to amuse us, to enchant us, to cause us to "feel good,"--and then have us call it worship and Christian "experience." The only way that we can see clearly when Satan attempts to captivate us with "signs and wonders" is to be "fortified" with objective truth as revealed through God's messengers (GC:593).

The test we all must face is not "What works," or "What seems to be right for me," but "What's true"? The battle for the mind is over Satan's deceptions and God's reasonable appeals. When we listen to God's appeal to reason, we respond with mind and spirit, sensing that God's plan is exactly what satisfies our deepest longings for meaning and freedom from all that enslaves.