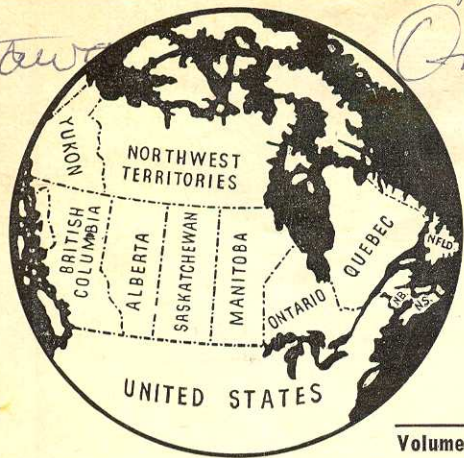


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As Others See Us

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*"Oh, wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us."*

—ROBERT BURNS



Though we sometimes quote these words as a fine expression of our own needs and desires, yet it might be well to ponder how genuinely willing we

really are to see ourselves clearly in the mirror of private or public opinion, or as God sees us. When a member of our family or perhaps an intimate friend feels obliged to point out, in a kindly manner, some fault or failing which is hindering us from being our best selves, we sometimes catch ourselves, like the two in Eden, almost automatically looking for words to justify our ways. The "inner man" may censor the words before they are spoken, and we may admit and accept the reproof with good grace, but inwardly self-justification struggles for expression. That is human nature.

But it is a valuable, and oftentimes enlightening and helpful, though very seldom flattering experience, occasionally to do some introspection with the help of unbiased, but kindly frank, friends. Those of us who were privileged to attend the Seventh-day Adventist public relations conference held at our new evangelistic center in New York city, January 14-17, were subjected to just such an experience on a denominational plane.

On the afternoon of the first day of the council the approximately 130 public relations leaders from the General Union, and local conferences, as well as from a number of our colleges and hospitals, were introduced to three speakers,

each of whom knew us as a people and knew something of our failings, publicity-wise, and who yet were our friends. They were Walter R. Martin, contributing editor, *Eternity Magazine*, and author of a series of articles on Seventh-day Adventists which has caused no little stir in the religious world; Mark Foster, of the McCann-Erickson Advertising Agency, and John Coffman, former editor of the *Takoma Park*, Washington, D. C., newspaper, and presently an information specialist with the United States government. They were invited to give us their opinion of Seventh-day Adventists, "no holds barred."

There was an interesting—and, we must conclude, significant—similarity of opinion expressed by the three speakers, so much so that the final panelist, Dr. Martin, felt obliged to assure us, laughingly, that "there is no collusion between us."

Our denominational failings, public relations-wise, as suggested by the three speakers, might be separated into five or six more or less closely related points. Two of these points relate to our identifying ourselves *to* and *with* our communities. Or, in other words, in telling our neighbors who we are and in blending with them in the life of the community.

Regarding our failure in telling people who we are, Mark Foster said that a survey conducted by his organization, aimed at discovering what the man-in-the-street knew about Seventh-day Adventists, revealed an appalling confusion and ignorance. "If people are confused in their own minds as to whether a Seventh-day Adventist is a Jehovah's Witness, and whether a Jehovah's Witness is a Seventh-day Adventist, you can't possibly make any gains." In ex-

pressing his opinion that we are too "standoffish," John Coffman said, "Seventh-day Adventists set themselves too far apart from others. People think you are too clannish, confining all your principal interests to the church and associated activities." Later on in the conference another speaker remarks that we are inclined to move in civic affairs only when we can gain something, and then only in concert.

The other criticisms were in many ways parallel to these, except that they were in the area of theology and personal and public evangelistic methods. As there has been a stand-offishness in community affairs, so there has been a theological separatism, it was alleged. "There has been a spirit of . . . theological exclusivism, so much so that the special truths of the Advent message have in many contexts received more attention than the plain, simple, foundational truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ," stated Dr. Martin.

We were also accused of deliberately concealing our identity under certain circumstances. While we may have good reason for following this practice, one speaker affirmed, yet, "That is defensive thinking, not offensive thinking. There is nothing for you to be defensive about." Again, one of the panelists observed that Seventh-day Adventists are too much inclined to force their beliefs upon others. "People do not like to be 'reformed,' and today are even more impatient with any intrusion into their personal affairs If you are a fisherman you know you can go after the fish only so far. After that *he* comes to you, and takes the bait if it is enticing enough. Don't try to push it down his throat, no matter how much *you* like it."

These, briefly, were the main criticisms, offered in a constructive spirit,

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to our denomination. They can hardly be called ego-inflating. They are inclined to probe certain nerve-areas where it may hurt. But they deserve very careful consideration, not only by our leaders, but by every member of the church, for we are all involved in this business of public relations, from the most youthful schoolboy or schoolgirl who is a baptised member, to the oldest or most influential Seventh-day Adventist adult in the community. With this in mind we shall endeavor in a future article to evaluate the criticisms offered and shall try to point out wherein we may all profit by them.

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