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"Truth Well Told"

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In our recent report on the North American public relations council, held by our denomination in New York City, January 14-17, we enumerated a number of friendly, but nevertheless direct, criticisms offered to Seventh-day Adventists as a people respecting our relationship with other churches and with the community at large. The alleged shortcomings which we noted were: (1) A failure to make clear to others what we believe and who we are. (2) A tendency to stand aloof from others in the community and in community affairs. (3) A "theological exclusivism" in which we are inclined to emphasize unduly the doctrines peculiar to us, rather than to advance the "first things" of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (4) We were accused of a tendency to hide our identity under a cloak of secrecy in pursuing mass and individual evangelism. (5) It was stated that we have an inclination to "push our religion down others' throats."

In evaluating these five points we might offer the observation that it cannot be said that there was any really new thing told us. All of the main criticisms offered have been recognized and pointed out by many, both laymen and workers, in our ranks. But sometimes it takes someone outside our immediate circle to tell us these things before they are forced home with an effect sufficient to arouse us to a recognition of a need for action.

It is possible, in the limited space available, to offer only the briefest of comments on the criticisms noted. We offer them only as points of departure

for our readers.

The first point is not, of course, a criticism, but a statement of failure in communications, involving in general every member of the Seventh-day Adventist church. In spite of the fact that we have spread millions of pages of our literature across the continent, in spite of the *Voice of Prophecy* and *Faith for Today*, in spite of the personal witnessing of our members, it is patent that we are not known as we should be—indeed, as we must be. "Explain more, more, more," is the advice given.

Closely linked with this need of being better and more widely known, is the problem of Seventh-day Adventists being connected with community life. It can hardly be denied that generally the accusations of social separatism is valid. A discussion of the cause of this attitude is not possible here. But a moment's reflection will suggest several ways in which we are the losers by this exclusiveness. It is a situation which we all need to endeavor to correct. To break the habits and outlooks of a century will hardly be easy. Most of us will hardly know how to begin a closer community fellowship. But the steps need to be taken.

The third criticism, that we have emphasized, let us say, the doctrines of the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the necessity of commandment keeping, and other doctrines to the seeming neglect of the basic Biblical teachings of such essentials as grace and faith, may, I think, be linked in with another observation which was made by one speaker at the public relations council. That was that we often take it for granted that people

know what we believe. "Why, of course we believe that we are saved only by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ," is the answer frequently given when an Adventist is questioned on this subject. And it is uttered in a tone which suggests that the questioner ought to *know* that we do. The truth is that many times the inquirer does *not* know, it was pointed out. The lesson again is obvious. We must let people know that Jesus is the center of our lives and teachings. All

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our doctrines must be shown to emanate from Him.

To the accusations of our having on occasion concealed our denominational identity in our evangelistic work, we must again assent. There have been valid reasons for it in the past. However, more and more we as a people are beginning to realize that such a practice, no matter how reasonable it may have been in the past, is not now necessary or advisable. Walter R. Martin, one of the speakers at the conference, and author of a book about Seventh-day Adventists which will be off the press shortly, said that hiding our identity "gives it a mysterious air which only fires the antagonism which already exists." Good public relations is not to hide, but to reveal.

(Continued on page 123)