

From the G.C. President

November 10, 1997

Robert S. Folkenberg

O DATELINE AUCKLAND: Friday morning, twenty-nine hours after leaving home, United Airline's flight descended through the overcast sky and the lush green countryside of New Zealand's north island beckoned me to this, my first stop on a four-week trip to the South Pacific Division. As we circled Auckland, which spans most of the island's 28 km (17 mile) width, my attention was drawn first to the unusual dual harbors, one opening east to the Pacific Ocean and the other west to the Tasman Sea, and second to the 38 small volcanic cones which dot the city. Soon we touched down in Auckland which, with 1.2 million residents, is home to one-third of the country's population. Of these 60 percent are of Polynesian ancestry making it the largest Polynesian city in the world.

In recent years the North New Zealand Conference has enjoyed a surge in evangelistic growth and membership is approaching the 10,000 mark. Of these well over 3,000 attended Sabbath morning worship services and an afternoon Global Mission report.

I bade our believers farewell and 11:00 p.m. Saturday night I boarded Air Vanuatu for the 3 hour+ flight northeast to Port Vila, Vanuatu where, by the time I arrived at the hotel it was 3:30 a.m. (New Zealand time). Located well south of the equator, the 150,000 citizens of the 82 islands that comprise Vanuatu enjoy moderate, semi-tropical climate, and seem to take for granted the striking beauty of the crystal clear water and exquisite beaches. Almost 10 percent (12,000) are Seventh-day Adventists worshipping in 140+ congregations/companies and operate 9 primary and 1 secondary school.

Since I arrived earlier than originally planned, I welcomed the opportunity for an early morning dive to visit a wreck that sank in the entrance to the harbor. Sunday evening 500 of our believers in Port Vila, along with several Ministers of Parliament and other government officials, attended a worship service. Today, November 10, I'm scheduled to meet with the President of the Republic prior to flying to the northern island of Espiritu Santo to visit our academy.

O MISSIONARY TO RWANDA KILLED: About midnight, November 4, Dr. Ranjan Kulasekera, a missionary dentist from Sri Lanka, was murdered on the front steps of his home in Kigali, Rwanda. Awakened by a noise he went to investigate and found thieves in his house. One of the thieves, dressed in military uniform, shot him, and then they all fled. When Ranjan followed them as far as his front gate the armed thief returned and shot him two more times.

Dr. Kulasekera, his wife and two sons (both now students at Maxwell Academy in Nairobi, Kenya) were among those evacuated at the time of the killings about two years ago. When calm returned he wanted to continue his service at the dental clinic in Kigali. Please pray for the Kulasekera family as they lay their loved one to rest in Sri Lanka.

O GLOBAL MISSION PIONEERS IN INDONESIA: ✓Johanes Rubimain was a protestant pastor for 22 years before learning about the Sabbath at an evangelistic seminar and being baptized. He has been instrumental in baptizing more than 100 people, including 30 pastors who previously worked with him, fourteen of whom now serve with him as Global Mission pioneers in southern Sumatra.

Off the Back Burner

Segment #87: I hope you have been enjoying these weekly trips through *Steps to Christ* as much as I have. This little volume is power-packed with insights into the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, beginning long before this planet was created. In this segment we are looking at some of what was involved in John 3:16: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . ."

Ellen G. White drives to the core of the incarnation: "He gave Him not only to live among men, to bear their sins, and die their sacrifice. He gave Him to the fallen race. Christ was to identify Himself with the interests and needs of humanity . . . by ties that are never to be broken" (p.14).

When did this "giving" take place? That it was an action, completed in the past, is conveyed by the aorist tense of "gave" (in John 3:16) and suggests that God "gave" Jesus to the world of intelligent beings long before this earth was created. John affirmed that Jesus was "slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8). The angels also heard this "good news" before the line in the sand had been crossed by their heavenly colleagues who chose not to "believe" in Him (See PP p. 36-38).

But from this planet's viewpoint, His gift to human beings takes on enormous dimensions. Jesus didn't come to earth as only a great Teacher or as a moral Model alone. He did not come only to die. As we noted in earlier segments, He came to "remove this dark shadow [Satan's lies about the character of God] by revealing to the world the infinite love of God" (p. 11). The plan of salvation rests on the effectiveness of God in telling the truth about Himself, and the nature of sin, and the only way sinners can be restored to God's eternal family. In other words, who is telling the truth, God or Satan?

From the standpoint of humanity, Jesus put on human nature in order to tell the truth about how God wants to rescue "perishing" men and women and give them "everlasting life" (John 3:16). Ellen G. White calls this act of declaring the truth about God "nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ" (p.14). We are talking about something infinitely more staggering to the human mind than hours of excruciating pain on Calvary. We are talking about a Creator who locked Himself within His own creation, never again to stand outside of time and space. He did all this in order to save His creation. In our next segment we will listen to Ellen White as she unpacks what this "gift" means to us today.