

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

July 13, 1998

UPDATE

A Report from Papua, New Guinea, the Priority of Faith: This week I learned a great deal from my fellow believers about the importance of priority development in the life of a Christian. On Wednesday, July 8, Anita and I, along with a family friend, Ferrell Hayes of Tennessee, stepped off an airplane and into the new airport of the capitol city of Port Moresby in Papua, New Guinea (PNG). For four days we fellowshipped with Adventists throughout PNG. And as we moved through an itinerary that took us to the Governor General's Home, Parliament House, the Highland mountains, Campmeeting and remote mountain villages we were privileged to be with people who place the development of their Christian faith at the highest level in their lives. Let me share with you some specific examples. During this trip we were partly accompanied by Sir Silas Atopare, Governor General of PNG and a faithful Seventh-day Adventist. Despite his challenging government duties, Mr. Atopare cancelled appointments in order to travel to Goroka in the Eastern Highlands to attend the Keiya Campmeeting and offer his testimony to fellow believers. Currently, in PNG politics, fully 1/3 of Parliament are Adventist Church members including the Speaker, The Honorable John Pundari, as are two Supreme Court Justices. Each of these church members and government leaders must daily face the struggle of balancing and reconciling Adventist Christian faith with political duty. This is no easy task, but it is one that is taken very seriously by believers in PNG.

Another striking and unforgettable example of the priority of faith was the Keiya Campmeeting. It has been several years since Adventists in PNG

have come together for Campmeeting. On Sabbath, July 11, and the 10 days previous, there have been an estimated 50,000 people gathered for this event. The daily management of this is massive and fully organized by our lay members. Members help and feed one another and sit on the ground in the heat of each day to be a part of this corporate, spiritual event. And, when two believers were killed in a truck accident on the way to the campground, their fellow believers collected over 2000Kina (a great deal of money in PNG) to help the victims families. Then on Sabbath thousands gathered at and in the nearby river as over 1,700 people were baptized, each baptismal candidate being escorted in and out of the river by a church member and friend. There is, of course, no way to adequately summarize this experience for you in FTP. I urge you to learn more about our faith community in PNG by visiting the Travel Highlights section of the Presidential pages at the GC's web site at: www.adventist.org.

FOCUS ON FAITH

The Crisis Over Scripture: As Seventh-day Adventists, we have a profound respect for the Bible. We believe that it is the Word of God and that it is the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice.

For most of our history as a church, this understanding of Scripture was accepted by all. In recent decades, however, there has been a change in the attitude of some Adventists towards Scripture. As a result the church is today facing a crisis over Scripture. There are a number of reasons which can be given for this. Probably the most important are the following: (1) The

influence of the creation/evolution debate; (2) the acceptance of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation; and (3) the spread of postmodern thinking in our churches.

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have been strong defenders of a literal six-day creation. Our understanding of the 7th day Sabbath is based on the historical validity of the creation story. For some time now, however, public statements by Seventh-day Adventist scientists and scholars indicate that alternatives to a six-day creation are being given serious consideration.

Such ideas as a common ancestry for chimpanzees and humans (*Spectrum*, vol. 22, no. 4 [1992], 16) or the concept that some forms of life were extinct before other forms of life came into existence, as the geologic column seems to indicate (*Spectrum*, vol. 25, no. 3 [1996], 27), may represent extreme views among Adventists, nevertheless they are publicly stated or published and create a climate in which other scientists and scholars can put forward their views which may be less controversial yet equally damaging to the six-day creation view which the church holds.

Ariel Roth, former director of the Geoscience Research Institute, wrote 10 years ago, "the history of other major Protestant churches suggests that were we once to lose confidence in the authenticity of the creation account, we would soon lose confidence in the validity of Genesis 1 through 11. This would subsequently raise questions regarding the validity of the Bible as a whole and the concepts of right and wrong contained therein" (*Adventist Perspectives*, vol. 2 [1988], 26). ■

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