

# From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

September 28, 1998

## UPDATE

### A Milestone Anniversary in

**Argentina:** After a busy week of Annual Council pre-session meetings, Anita and I, along with other church leaders, travelled from Foz do Iguasu, Brazil to River Plate Adventist University in Argentina. In 1898 the Seventh-day Adventist Church began a small mission school in what today is known as the Austral Union Conference. River Plate Adventist University is now considered one of the finest privately-run universities in Argentina, offering degrees in Business, Education, Health Sciences, Music and Theology. National, regional, and local news media covered this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration as the president of Argentina attended part of the special Sabbath services. Upon my arrival I was greeted by Dr. Luis Schulz, president of the university, who allowed me the privilege to speak to the students, faculty and honored guests during the worship hour.

**Annual Council:** On Tuesday evening, September 29, the 1998 Annual Council begins. Please allow me to share with you a synopsis of my presentation to the delegates.

"I believe the world is becoming increasingly more impersonal. As life becomes more fragmented, people want something more permanent, something that gives them a sense of who they are. And spiritually? We find the fulfilment for our most basic spiritual needs in God's family—His church. God's church is built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. So let's look at some characteristics of His church.

1) God's church is characterized by love among the members, one for another. (John 13:34,35). Love is the quintessential defining characteristic of God's church.

2) God's church is characterized by unity among its members. (John 17: 20,21,23). Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one—so the members of God's church are to be one. Spiritual unity rejects any form of discrimination within the body, whether it is ethnic, cultural, or racial. Clearly, based on the authority of the Word, racist conformity is sin. Does not God tell us, "be not conformed, but be transformed. (Romans 12:1,2)

3) God's church is characterized by accountability to each other among the members. (Genesis 4:9; Philippians 2:4). Authority in God's church rests on a mutual willingness to be accountable to each other, to be willing to be self-sacrificing for the good of the whole body."

## FOCUS ON FAITH

**The Witness of Josephus:** The witness of the manuscripts from Qumran was the subject of our last segment. In this segment we turn to the Jewish historian Josephus. Josephus, writing at the end of the first Christian century, compares the sacred Jewish writings with those of the Greeks and says:

"For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two books which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were

after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time" (*Against Apion*, 1,38-41).

This statement contains a number of important points concerning the Old Testament canon: (1) The writings in this canon were believed to be divine, i.e., to have been composed by inspired men and they cover history from the creation to the time of Artaxerxes; (2) books describing the history after Artaxerxes were not considered to be inspired, since the succession of the prophets ended in the Persian period; (3) the contents of the books are consistent and without discrepancies; (4) Josephus refers to only twenty-two books and the number of the books in his three divisions are different from the Talmudic canon (e.g., Daniel is included with the prophets). However, he, like Jerome in the fourth century A.D., refers to the same twenty-four books as the Talmud, Ruth being counted as an appendix to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah.

The witness of Josephus is largely neglected or brushed aside today, yet it is possible that Josephus, like the LXX, reflects an earlier order of the books in the canon, and the Talmud a later tradition.■

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