

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

October 5, 1998

UPDATE

1998 Annual Council in Brazil: The picturesque town of Foz do Iguaçu was the venue of the 1998 Annual Council of the GC Committee. Meeting in an international setting, testifies to the Church's global perspective and now in Brazil, it allowed the delegates to taste of the spirit of the Church's vibrant Adventist presence in the country with the largest Adventist membership. Here are some of the highlights of the Council:

● "Experience the Fellowship of His Family" was the over-arching Message & Mission topic for all devotionals, beginning with my keynote address "The Family of God." The six presentations that followed were: Leslie N. Pollard's "Jesus as the Founder and Lord of the Church," and "The Church as a prophetic Movement;" Aecio Cairus's "The nature and Purpose of the Church," and "The Responsibility and Privileges of Church Membership", and Raul F. Dederen's "The Authority of the Church," and "The Church as a Remnant Community." [These presentations are being made available through the "Travel Highlights" section from the Presidential Pages at www.adventist.org].

● The Council included two special features: (1) In order to acquaint the world leaders with each department's newly-defined measurable outcomes and action plans, each director made a presentation and provided delegates an opportunity to react to what they were presented; and (2) Time was scheduled to discuss three significant issues facing the church. Presenters highlighted the significance of each and sought reactions and suggestions from attendees. The topics included: "The role of the General Conference in the Seventh-day Adventist Church structure at the beginning of a new century" (presented by H. L. Lee, president of Columbia Union); "The strength and limitation of congregationalism" (presented by G. R. Knight from Andrews University), and "The empowerment of the local pastor" (presented by Adrian Craig from SPD).

● The delegates voted to place the

document titled, "Total Commitment to God" (voted during the 1996 Annual Council in Costa Rica) in the GC Working Policy book between the mission statement and operating policies thus indicating the bridging, or process-oriented role it was designed to play in the life of the church and its organizations and institutions.

● Annual Council approved a major document intended to provide a framework for dialogue between the world divisions and those who provide pastoral education in their respective institutions.

● The following personnel changes were voted: Lowell C. Cooper, GC Associate Secretary as GC General Vice President; Donald R. Sahly, Associate GC Education Director as GC Associate Secretary; Robert E. Lemon, GC Associate Treasurer as the Undertreasurer; Steven G. Rose, Treasurer of SSD as GC Associate Treasurer; Jeffrey K. Wilson, Director of Planned Giving & Trust Services, Andrews University, as GC Associate Director of the Trust Services Department; Bert B. Haloviak as GC Director of Archives and Statistics (he was serving as Acting Director); C. Garland Dulan, Chairman of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and La Sierra University, as Associate Director of the Education; Peter J. Prime, president of the Carribean Union as GC Associate Secretary of the Ministerial Association; Sharon Cress as an Associate Secretary of the Ministerial Association.

FOCUS ON FAITH

Jamnia and the Witness of the Christian Church: Segment 12 looked at the witness of Josephus in regard to the Old Testament canon. After Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the rabbis under the leadership of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from the Romans to set up their headquarters in Jamnia in western Judea, to carry on their literary activities.

Jamnia soon became an established center of scriptural study. About the same

time as Josephus wrote his work *Against Apion*, discussions took place in Jamnia relating to the canonicity of certain Old Testament books. From the recorded discussions in the Talmud we know that the books concerned were Ezekiel, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. However, the question was not whether these books should be included in the canon, but whether they should be excluded from it. Some of the reasons given were: (1) Ezekiel's temple and its services could not be harmonised with the Pentateuch; (2) neither Esther nor the Song of Songs refers the name of God; (3) Ecclesiastes contained too much Epicurean thought, and (4) Proverbs seemed to contradict itself in two adjacent verses (Prov 26:4,5). In the end no changes were made and the books which had already been accorded canonical status in popular esteem were confirmed.

The oldest Christian catalogue of the Old Testament is that of Melito, bishop of Sardis (ca. A.D. 170). The list of book, which he secured during a visit to Judea and which is preserved for us in *The Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius (A.D. 325), includes all the books of the Hebrew Bible except Esther. Daniel is listed between the Twelve and Ezekiel as part of the prophetic books. None of the apocryphal books found in the LXX are listed by Melitos.

The great biblical scholar Origen (185-254) in his commentary on the first Psalm says, "We should not be ignorant that there are twenty-two books of the [Old] Testament, according to the tradition of the Hebrews, corresponding to the number of letters in their alphabet" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.1,2). He then lists the books according to their Greek and Hebrew names. The last five books in this list are Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Job, and Esther. "Outside of these," he says, "are the books of Maccabees." He mentions no other apocryphal books. He does, however, include the "Letter of Jeremiah" as part of Jeremiah. ■

Robert S. Folkenberg