

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

November 30, 1998

UPDATE

In the next few paragraphs, please allow me to inform you about two denominational employees who have been recognized as outstanding individuals by the country in which they serve.

Adventist Minister Wins Award: Ian Sweeney, 33, a pastor in the Sheffield district in Great Britain, was named Preacher of the Year in a London Times competition. More than 250 clergy from Great Britain participated in this "celebration of faith and prayer." As part of the competition, Pastor Sweeney preached a sermon entitled "It's the Thought That Counts" at the Methodist Central Hall to a congregation of 1,000. Without his knowledge, Pastor Sweeney was entered in the contest by a friend. The purpose of this prestigious award is to heighten public awareness regarding the art of preaching and to pay tribute to the thousands who minister daily to the people of Great Britain. The Times printed a short version of his sermon and commented positively about our church in Britain.

AWR Director named to government Committee: AWR Resource Center Director, Ray Allen, was appointed a permanent member of the Experts Advisory Panel. This committee is part of the Christian Communication Commission established by members of the House of Lords in Great Britain. It functions to provide knowledgeable input on policies that effect the moral tone in British broadcasting. Recommendations from this panel influence, modify, or introduce new legislation related to media in general. Mr. Allen hopes this committee assignment gives him the opportunity

to image the Adventist faith in a positive way to the other committee members.

Church Employee Imprisoned: I was deeply saddened by an update on the imprisonment of Anthony Alexander, a former Global Mission pioneer in Sri Lanka. He has been in prison since March on charges of aiding the Tamil guerillas. So far, Pastor Alexander has been detained without a trial. He had been working in the northern part of Sri Lanka, in the middle of the war zone. Gary Krause, of GC Global Mission, tells me that Pastor Alexander is a gentle, caring, and wonderful Christian man. He established church work in the north and also began work in the hill country where he established five churches and led 175 people to baptism. Pastor Alexander once commented, "We can't just preach to the people. We need to first work with them in their suffering." Please pray for Pastor Alexander, his wife, Saratha, and their five children during this time of suffering.

FOCUS ON FAITH

History of the Canon: In segment 20 we noted that the New Testament canon came into existence to combat heretical teachings and spurious books claiming to originate with the apostles.

The earliest extant list of New Testament books, published in 1740 in Milan, comes from c. 170 and is called the Muratorian Fragment. It is named after Cardinal L. A. Muratori, the antiquarian, who discovered the manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. The beginning and ending of this manuscript are missing, but it

mentions Luke as the third Gospel (Matthew and Mark most likely being the first and second) followed by John and Acts. Then it enumerates thirteen letters of Paul, Jude's epistle, two letters of John, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and the Apocalypses of John and Peter.

Other books are referred to as not belonging to the apostolic writings, e.g., *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the forged letter of Paul to the Laodiceans. It is interesting to note that the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* are accepted as inspired, though eventually they did not become part of the New Testament canon. This indicates that there was a period of sifting and testing during which some books were accepted in some places, but rejected or accepted much later in others. For example, the Eastern churches accepted Hebrews as the work of Paul quite early, while in the West it took almost another two hundred years before the book was admitted into the canon. In the case of the book of Revelation the situation was reversed. It was accepted as canonical by the Western churches by the end of the second century, but consistently rejected by many in the East. Dionysius of Alexandria (died 264), Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386), Chrysostom (347-407), and Theoderet (386-457), all questioned the book's apostolic authorship and therefore its canonicity. It was not listed among the canonical books at the council of Laodicea (sometime between 340 and 380) and was subsequently omitted from the Peshitta, the official Bible of Syriac speaking Christians. ■

