

From the President

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

February 1, 1999

UPDATE

A Challenging Time: As many of you already know, the events of the past few weeks have been painful and difficult for the church, my family, and myself. In an effort to resolve the concerns arising from a lawsuit filed in California against the General Conference, me, and other defendants, the church's administrative committee (ADCOM.) has put in place a process whereby the full General Conference Executive Committee will meet in March. I ask believers everywhere to pray that the Spirit of God will guide these proceedings.

A Global Mission Report: In Gujarat, India, non-Christian fundamentalists have been burning churches and troubling Christians. On Christmas day a group of these men surrounded the Adventist Church in the suburbs of Surat. The pastor and members who were there locked themselves inside. The mob began breaking windows as well as scooters, cycles, and other vehicles outside. Although there was a great deal of damage, none of our people were harmed. Despite these harassments, Gujarat is ripe for the message of Christ. In 1998, 693 people were baptized there. That is 35% of their current membership!

Letters to AWR: Every year Adventist World Radio offices and studios around the world receive thousands of letters from listeners. Of course, these letters are key to our understanding of listener needs. The following is an excerpt from a letter received in December. "I've found your broadcasts very comforting. Because of a serious health problem,

I seek out Christian broadcasts for spiritual guidance in coping with this illness. I feel you preach and give messages of love and hope and provide stories that are uplifting and are expressed in a kind and concerning way. Thank you!"

FOCUS ON FAITH

Revelation as Encounter: In the previous segment we defined special revelation as the revelation of God and his truths inscripturated in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

Until the rise of rationalism, this was by and large the view of the Christian church. In the nineteenth century, however, when rationalism made great inroads into the church, the concept of Scripture as the objective word of God began to change. The German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who became the father of liberal theology, sought to cut the tie between Christian thought and a revelation of God grounded in history. He built his theology on the "feeling of dependence" rather than on revelation and reason. In his book *The Christian Faith* (1821), he sought to produce a Christian system of thought which was not dependent on any objective revelation. The result was that Christianity was transformed into an ethical system without a supernatural foundation. The transcendent God became the God-consciousness in humanity, Jesus was reduced to a "mere man," and the Bible was changed from the inspired word of God to a record of

the religious experience of the people of Israel and the early church.

While the neo-orthodox theologians in the twentieth century (K. Barth, E. Brunner, R. Niebuhr, etc.) reacted sharply against the liberal theology of their mentors (A. Ritschl, A. Harnack, W. Rauschenbusch, etc.) they themselves were unable to rise above the quicksand of a mere relational theology. Influenced by the existential philosophy of S. Kierkegaard and M. Heidegger, they taught that revelation is a personal encounter with God, not something written in a book. Revelation is personal not propositional, they claimed.

"So when one asks how one knows what is true, the appeal is no longer to an objective rational norm, the word of God in the Bible, but to faith. God makes us know by faith alone. The emphasis is on immediacy with God. According to this viewpoint, revelation takes place in man's subjective experience, not in a book. Man's response is an essential part of the revelation.... The Bible is not truth in itself, that is truth objectively. The Word of God is not a given, a rational-content, a divine message. It is always a personal living thing. Revelation mediates God's presence, not doctrine, not verbal rational truths" (Heppenstall, *Ministry*, July 1970, p. 17). ■

