

task of deciding who will lead the church. Nevertheless, devotionals, sermons and pageants can create a spirit profoundly important for the morale of the thousands of church leaders who are delegates to a General Conference session.

Unfortunately, the physical environment of the Superdome did not help. Its dark, overwhelmingly empty space clashed with the speakers and films reporting on a bustling Adventist Church. Years ago the treasurers of the General Conference understandably seized an incredibly good financial package, but the critical, intangible costs were high. During the week, even

on those rare occasions when the delegates were in their seats and guests were drawn to a crucial debate, only half the floor and one-half of one of the three tiers were filled. And everything remained bathed in a dim half-light. Sabbath visitors, still only filling half the Superdome, were confronted with a Manichean darkness—hardly the place to celebrate the power of God's goodness and sense the force of a church on the march.

Parade of Nations. Happily, the church did march—right down main street, or at least Poydras Avenue. The most flamboyant event of this General Conference led costumed delegates through the length of

Third World Looks Toward 1990 Session

Eastern African Educator:

Joel Musvosvi

To fully understand the excitement felt by Africans at the 1985 General Conference session, one must remember the 1980 session in Dallas, the first attended by a large number of African delegates and observers. In 1980, the novelty of being present overwhelmed many; they did not participate verbally. Five years later in New Orleans, our African delegates spoke out. We felt that the leadership of the church listened, and that the world church was sympathetic to our cry.

Two primary concerns dominated the minds of African delegates at this session. First, the hope that a more indigenous leadership would be elected for the two African divisions. Second, the expectation that an African would be elected as a General Conference officer to represent in Washington the one million African Adventists. Such changes would enhance the self-image and identity of the African church and allow it to take its legitimate place in the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In 1990, we expect more African delegates to participate in the General Conference session, calling for appropriate changes and demonstrating deep commitment to this church. Beyond 1990, we look forward to hosting a General Conference session on the African continent, giving more Africans the opportunity to experience the session.

Joel Musvosvi, a member of the faculty of theology at Solusi College, Zimbabwe, and candidate for a Ph.D. in New Testament at Andrews University, was a delegate to the 1985 General Conference session.

Inter-American Pastor: Wynall Kerr

The 54th General Conference session had high points as well as low points. On the positive side were well-presented devotionals, many displays, excellent organization and much joyful fellowship and reunion. Unfortunately, the session was also unbalanced and in many cases too abstract. First, North America possesses only about 15 percent of the existing church membership, yet from this small group came nearly one-quarter of the delegates and a majority of the church leaders elected at the session. This imbalance is a reflection of the desire to control and a deafness to the voice of a largely Third-World church. Minority rule is at best unsafe.

Second, the opportunity to formulate concrete plans for our church's future was ignored. Reports of growth and progress were given, but issues such as racism in the church, the escalating arms race and our stand on apartheid in South Africa—international issues that would define our church in relation to the current political, economic and sociological climate—were left untouched.

At the next General Conference session, the church must be more socially conscious. By 1990, the church must take positive action to meet the challenges of national and international politics and economics with positions that are clearly spelled out, including proposals for concrete and realistic reforms.

Also, delegations should reflect the membership size of each division. Decisions taken should reflect the thinking of the majority of the membership and not exclusively the desire of the leadership. Power and authority need to be decentralized. The time has

downtown New Orleans. Some delegations played marimbas; others, steel drums. One delegation sang the length of the march.

Most North Americans, dressed in their dark, three-piece suits, looked embarrassed. Not Ben Leach, president of the Southwestern Union. No one had more fun or looked more at home, waving and smiling from the back of his open limousine to the crowds lining the sidewalks. And they loved it. One would have to go back to Roosevelt or Eisenhower to see it done any better.

Having a parade is one innovation many hoped would become a tradition. Only next time, some said, all delegations should be

encouraged to play instruments or sing. They wanted entire cities to see Adventists with a festive face.

Sounds and Sights. This was the clappingest General Conference in memory. Chairmen at the general sessions didn't even try to stop it. Clapping for speeches at business meetings carried over into worship services. Donald Yost's superb statistics report received one of the biggest hands. It must have been a first when not only the musical numbers on Sabbath morning but Betty and Delmer Holbrook's first weekend Sabbath school received rounds of applause.

The music for this General Conference was

come when the church should not be seen as a North American church, but as a world church united under God. An important symbol of that fact would be to hold future General Conference sessions in areas of the world with large Adventist memberships.

Finally, it is good to report the glories, but if positive decisions are going to be made by the majority, the problems and challenges facing members in different areas should also be presented at the General Conference sessions.

Wynall Kerr, a pastor in the South Caribbean Conference was a visitor at the 1985 General Conference session.

South African Pastor:

Markheavens Tshuma

According to one Adventist church growth specialist, the membership of the Adventist Church in Africa should double within the next 20 years. This phenomenal numerical growth will demand an even greater amount of conceptual, economic and structural growth. It will also demand a great increase of qualified, dedicated personnel and intelligent, insightful leadership.

At the last General Conference session it was evident that Africans do not have the input or authority that they might. First, there is a lack of communication. In North America there is much more sharing of information and ideas on basic issues and needs—in short, networking. Networkers arrive at a session prepared to support one another on various issues.

The election of officers involves a certain amount of caucusing before and during the session. Since we were told in Africa that such lobbying was not within the spirit of Christ, I was surprised to find official caucuses meeting prior to nominations. I wish this procedure would be explained to all delegates so they would feel free to confront each other with no fear

of being called "anti-Christian."

Second, a colonial mentality leads the older generation of Africans and many whites to discriminate against blacks in terms of educational requirements for identical jobs. For example, one job that had always been filled by a white with a master's degree required a black applicant to have a doctorate.

Many Americans have the paternalistic idea that they know everything that is good for the Africans. This is a mistake. The issues that affect Africa today cannot be addressed by one who has been brought up in an Anglo-Saxon First-World community; what is relevant to a Third-World person would require Anglo-Saxons to undergo a complete incarnation. We need Third-World Christians addressing current African issues. South Africa is one obvious case in point, but other issues also need to be addressed, such as how the Adventist Church, born in capitalist America, can flourish in socialist communities.

By the 1990 General Conference session, I anticipate many exciting, concrete advances. I hope to see at least one other African take an administrative office at the General Conference. I foresee the rise of at least five more African missions to conference status; this presupposes an increased economic growth. I foresee that the 1990 session will plan for the 1995 General Conference session to be held in Africa. I project that there will be no need for the two South African unions to be attached separately to the General Conference; if the church has failed to unite them by 1990, some other power will surely do so. I project a greater interchange of missionaries, so that their selection will not follow the current slogan of "From America to everywhere," but rather "From everywhere to everywhere." This would help include Africa in a more widely shared power base instead of the predominately North American base which now rules the rest of the world.

Markheavens Sibagobe Tshuma, a pastor in South Africa was a delegate to the 1985 General Conference session.

the most eclectic ever. In addition to gospel songs, modern evangelical hymns and Negro spirituals, choirs from Adventist colleges sang renditions of Handel, Mozart and Bach. A full symphony orchestra and brass choir played at evening meetings. Classical musicians from Russia and other countries around the world joined with American musicians for a superb Saturday afternoon concert. The profusion of music spilled over into the Hyatt Regency Hotel. During the supper hour, chamber music and choral groups from Adventist schools across North America performed in the central atrium of the high-rise hotel.

The visual arts—which included the first exhibit at a General Conference session of art by Adventists—gained access to the main stage. Alan Collins, a sculptor at Loma Linda University, shaped a mounted block of clay for 45 minutes, portraying “The Ages of Man” from childhood to old age. Accompanying readings from Scripture and the great poets reminded delegates struggling to use power wisely that each person’s human efforts are transitory. Collins’ final death mask transfixed the session with its message: today’s ruler is tomorrow’s corpse.

Sights and sounds combined to make the traditional mission pageant during the afternoon of the second Sabbath the emotional climax of the entire General Conference. By then the Cuban delegation had finally arrived. Once again, all the delegates paraded their costumes. This time, even the North Americans dressed up, as Eskimos and Indians. Delegates who remained suspicious of each others’ policies became caught up in the swirl of color and commitment.

Finally, these delegates coming from disparate social, economic, educational and cultural backgrounds—delegates who remained sharply divided on who should lead the church in the future—joined in singing the *Hallelujah Chorus*, celebrating the future triumph of the sovereign Christ. “And He shall reign forever and ever. . . .”

Beyond the Circles

The officers of the General Conference approached the 1985 session preoccupied with strengthening the unity of the church. They therefore urged the adoption of documents that made unprecedented claims for the authority of the General Conference. Obedience and uniformity were defended.

The intensity of the struggle over who would lead the Adventist Church disturbed the officers. They saw the demands of the church of the South as a threat to church unity. But it remains unclear whether the church of the South objected to a more authoritarian General Conference or simply to being excluded from such authority.

Indeed, for quite a long while, it may be that unity will not be achieved through debates about *who* will lead—the General Conference or the divisions, North America or the Third World, the rich or the many. It may be that unity will be forged through enthusiasm about *what* the church does—commitment to a challenge beyond merely getting bigger, a mission that inflames an increasingly divergent Adventist community.

In the future, with the inevitable emergence of a more independent North American Division, it may be that the formal authority of the General Conference over North America’s purse and personnel may give way to more informal authority. Leadership may depend less on controlling the inner circle of the nominating committee than on issuing profound statements on issues that articulate a vision of Adventism to the entire church membership—and indeed, to the world. Presidents of the General Conference may come to be less like chief executives of General Motors and more like H. M. S. Richards. We may come to expect the unique authority of the General Conference to be an ability to lead Adventists to undertake the impossible and to embolden the Adventist community with the courage to challenge the deepest fears and needs of mankind.