
ADVENTIST GLOBAL STRATEGY

An Ambitious Outreach Project Is Taking Shape.
What Role Can University Students and Professionals Play?

Humberto M. Rasi and Charles R. Taylor

The figures are stark and the trends unrelenting: at the beginning of 1989, world population stood at 5,200,000,000, while Seventh-day Adventist world membership was 5,700,000; world population increasing by 238,000 per day, Adventist membership growing by about 1,200 per day.

Observers of the religious scene have documented the remarkable growth achieved by our church in its short history. They have been impressed by the leap from our modest regional beginnings in the 1840s to our broad international presence. In several countries we constitute one of the largest and most dynamic religious communities. Our teaching, healing, preaching, publishing, broadcasting, welfare and relief ministries are known and appreciated. In proportion to our size, we maintain one of the strongest overseas mission programs. And yet, it's clear that we are quite far from the goal of communicating "the eternal gospel . . . to every nation, tribe, language and people," as envisioned by John (Revelation 14:6).¹

In October of 1986 Elder Neal C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presented to the denominational leaders assembled in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the challenge of developing a global strategy to fulfill the assignment Christ had

given to his followers almost 2000 years ago: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Wilson vividly depicted the vast areas of the world without an Adventist presence and the many millions who have never heard the gospel story.

What has happened since that bold dream was sketched in Rio? What are the main features of the Adventist Global Strategy that is currently taking shape? What role can we play in it, as we rapidly move toward the 21st century?

The Dimensions of Our Task

For more than 120 years Seventh-day Adventists have been actively obeying Christ's command to communicate the good news of his first and second coming to the people of the world. We have taken seriously his prophetic words, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). We have invested major human and material resources toward this objective. While the results have been encouraging, we are becoming more aware of the huge

dimensions of the task still ahead of us, as Adventists, along with other Christians. (Figure 1, "Status of Christian Global Mission - 1989.") Consider the following facts:

1. **Sobering demographics.** Although we are baptizing approximately 1,300 new Seventh-day Adventists each day, the world population is increasing by almost 200 times that number. Even when we include the broad evangelistic work carried out by all Christian churches and agencies, one-fourth of the world's population—1,300,000,000 million persons—is still unevangelized.

2. **Uneven membership growth.** While on average there is one Adventist for every 905 people in the world, in many countries the ratio falls considerably below that mark. In addition, we have yet to establish a Seventh-day Adventist presence in several nations, such as Afghanistan, Albania, Kampuchea, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. A quick look at a denominational world map shows that our membership strength resides in the Americas, in Africa, and in the Australia/South Pacific area. (See Figure 2, "World Population and Adventist Presence.")

3. **Five Major Challenges.** An analysis of the current global scene reveals that five large population blocs deserve our special attention:

Figure 1

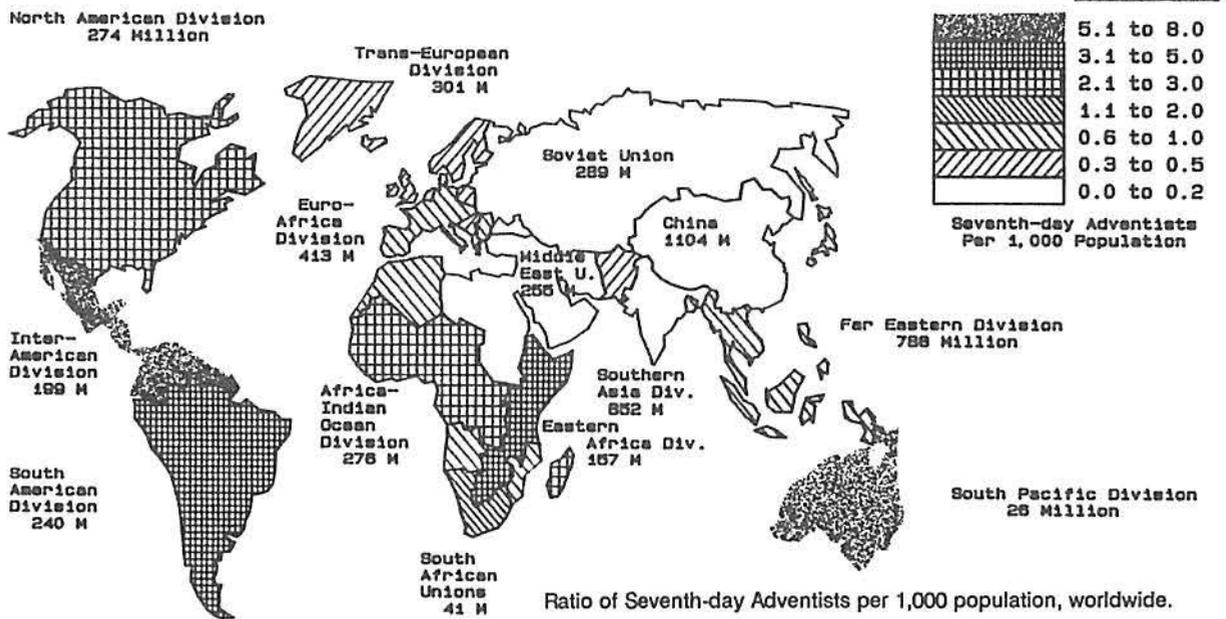
Status of Christian Global Mission, 1989²

YEAR	1900	1970	1980	1989	2000
WORLD POPULATION Total	1,619,886,800	3,610,034,400	4,373,917,500	5,200,782,100	6,259,642,000
CITIES					
Metropolises (over 100,000 pop)	400	2,400	2,700	3,370	4,200
Megacities (over 1 million pop)	20	161	227	317	433
RELIGION					
Christians (all kinds)	558,056,300	1,216,579,400	1,432,686,500	1,721,655,700	2,130,000,000
Muslims	200,102,200	550,919,000	722,956,500	908,261,000	1,200,653,000
Nonreligious	2,923,000	543,065,300	715,901,400	850,881,600	1,021,888,400
Hindus	203,033,300	465,784,800	582,749,900	689,655,200	859,252,300
Buddhists	127,159,000	231,672,200	273,715,600	319,775,200	359,092,100
Atheists	225,600	165,288,500	195,119,400	230,163,600	262,447,600
Tribal religionists	106,339,600	88,077,400	89,963,500	99,312,700	100,535,900
Jews	12,269,800	15,185,900	16,938,200	18,574,400	20,173,600
Sikhs	2,960,600	10,612,200	14,244,400	17,584,800	23,831,700
GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY					
Total Christians as % of World	34	34	33	33	34
Affiliated church members	521,563,200	1,131,809,600	1,323,389,700	1,589,516,300	1,967,000,000
Practicing Christians	469,259,800	884,021,800	1,018,355,300	1,193,073,400	1,377,000,000
Average Christian Martyrs per year	35,600	230,000	270,000	325,800	500,000
MEMBERSHIP BY ECCLESIASTICAL BLOC					
Anglicans	30,573,700	47,557,000	49,804,000	53,098,500	61,037,200
Orthodox	115,897,700	143,402,500	160,737,900	177,466,900	199,819,000
Protestants	103,056,700	233,424,200	262,157,600	318,064,100	386,000,000
Roman Catholics	266,419,400	672,319,100	802,680,000	944,495,800	1,144,000,000
MEMBERSHIP BY AREAS					
Africa	8,756,400	115,924,200	164,571,000	221,767,300	323,914,900
East Asia	1,763,000	10,050,200	16,149,600	80,101,500	128,000,000
Europe	273,788,400	397,108,700	403,177,600	408,087,100	411,448,700
Latin America	60,025,100	262,027,800	340,978,600	427,902,300	555,486,600
Northern America	59,569,700	169,246,900	178,892,500	188,280,000	201,265,200
Oceania	4,311,400	14,669,400	16,160,600	17,666,600	21,361,500
South Asia	16,347,200	76,770,200	106,733,200	138,945,900	185,476,700
USSR	97,002,000	86,012,300	96,726,500	106,566,200	118,101,000
WORLD EVANGELIZATION					
Unevangelized Populations	788,159,000	1,391,956,000	1,380,576,000	1,273,930,000	1,038,819,000
Unevangelized as % of world	49	39	32	25	17

Figure 2

WORLD POPULATION AND ADVENTIST PRESENCE

By Divisions and GenConf-Attached Areas, in Millions, 1989



* China, with 1,100 million people and perhaps 60,000 Seventh-day Adventists—about one for every 20,000.

* The Moslem world, with 900 million, a militant religion, and a small number of Adventists scattered in many countries.

* India, with more than 800 million, most of whom are either Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, or Sikhs.

* The Soviet orbit, with more than 450 million and a socio-political system that opposes or, at best, barely tolerates Christianity.

* The secularized, post-Christian world, represented by millions who live mostly in the affluent nations of the West and in the major urban centers.

In addition, we still need to establish a broad presence in megacities such as Tokyo, Calcutta, Bombay, Moscow, London, Cairo, Manila, Jakarta, Tehran, Delhi, Shanghai, Kinshasa, Lagos, Beijing, Istanbul, and Bangkok.

4. Our limited resources. On a per capita basis, Seventh-day Adventists rank among the most generous church supporters from all religious groups. Our tithes and offerings provide the means necessary to maintain our growing nurture and outreach ministries. However, since most of our membership gains take place in the developing nations and among the less affluent sectors of society, our resources are being stretched as we attempt to provide chapels and pastors, schools and teachers, clinics and medical personnel, and other basic services for the new members and for Christian outreach. However, our mission offerings do not seem to keep pace with our expanding needs. Where will we find the additional funds required to establish an Adventist presence in the unentered areas of the world? Should we reallocate

some of our resources to fulfill Christ's commission?

5. Areas closed to missionaries. Political and religious barriers prevent full-time Christian missionaries from entering broad areas of the world. In some countries the gospel can not be shared in public, under penalty of the law. We must acknowledge that in some cases the inconsistency of so-called Christians has contributed to the imposition of these restrictions. As a result we have been prompted to utilize alternative methods to share the good news with the people that live behind those walls. For the time being, radio and television broadcasts, Bible correspondence schools, inexpensive publications, and foreign Christians who live temporarily in those areas seem the best approaches for mission in those closed countries.

Favorable Trends

We know that the final triumph of good over evil in this planet is in the hands of a powerful, wise, and loving God. Working through free human agents, he creates favorable opportunities to advance his plan of salvation. Here are some of these positive developments:

1. Wider access to the Bible. The pace of translation, publication, and distribution of the Scriptures has been accelerating in the past 25 years. The valuable service of the United Bible Societies has been supplemented by the Wycliffe Bible Translators and other agencies. The Word of God is now accessible to billions of readers in all the major and in most of the minor languages of the world. Even the Roman Catholic Church, in a remarkable turnabout, has been promoting the study of the Scriptures among its faithful. Last year alone 50 million

Bibles and 73 million New Testaments were distributed in the countries of the world.

2. Closed areas are opening up. Forced by social and economic factors, some governments ideologically opposed to Christianity are now allowing believers to openly practice their faith and even to share it with others. Their leaders have realized that most Christians are also upright citizens, reliable workers, and contributors to the general welfare of society. Countries that until recently prevented the circulation of the Bible, such as China and the Soviet Union, are cooperating in its publication for national distribution. In spite of the high number of Christians who still face persecution and martyrdom, new opportunities for service and witness appear in unexpected places.

3. Our shrinking world. Easier travel facilities allow the movement of large numbers of people among the nations of the world as tourists, foreign workers, or migrants, creating opportunities for witness. By 1990 between 400 and 600 million tourists will be crisscrossing the globe annually, compared with 25.3 million in 1950. Large numbers of students from non-Christian countries are attending foreign universities in the West and becoming generally acquainted with Christian culture. Modern radio and television stations are utilizing new techniques to broadcast Christian programs to the farthest corners of the earth. Our world is rapidly becoming a global village.

4. Emerging spirituality. God has implanted in all human beings an irrepressible sensitivity to spiritual matters. And in spite of the powerful secularizing trend sweeping Western culture, men and women continue to search for

a transcendent meaning in life. As a result of growing disenchantment with purely human solutions to our predicament, new forms of spirituality are emerging. Biblical Christianity still offers the most satisfactory world view of our origin, purpose, and destiny. While the world population grows at the rate of 1.7 percent per year, our church continues to attract new believers, enlarging its membership by 6.3 percent per year worldwide.

5. Adventist visibility. Seventh-day Adventists, individually and collectively, are attracting the attention of researchers and journalists in many countries. As a result, a fascinating mosaic of human-interest stories is emerging. Some focus on our healthful habits and longer life, on the pioneering medical activities of our specialists, and on the positive impact of our educational programs. Others chronicle the relief and development achievements of ADRA, our increasing presence in national governments, and the uplifting influence of thousands of our professionals, businessmen, and volunteers. This growing visibility allows us a unique opportunity to share with others our Christian faith.

Developing A Strategy

The Global Strategy Committee (GSC), made up of representatives from the world divisions of the General Conference, has been appointed to rationally mobilize all the resources of our church in order to accomplish the worldwide mission Christ entrusted to us, his followers. Here are the main features of the plan that is now emerging from the study:

* **Segmentation.** In order to proceed systematically, the GSC has divided the world into popula-

tion segments of approximately one million persons each, grouped ethno-linguistically. An analysis of the resulting 5,200 segments reveals that there is an Adventist presence in approximately 3,200 of them. This leaves roughly 2,000 population segments of one million each where currently there is no Seventh-day Adventist.

* **Objective.** The Global Strategy Committee has proposed that, through a systematic approach, we seek to establish by the year 2000 an Adventist presence in each one of the remaining 2,000 population segments of one million where presently there is none. To achieve this objective, the GSC will outline a plan, set time frames, allocate resources, design monitoring systems, and implement evaluation procedures.

* **Targets.** Of the 2,000 population segments without an Adventist presence, about 500 are located in the territory of existing division organizations of the world church, and their leaders will be responsible for developing plans to reach them. The remaining 1,500 segments fall in areas where there is no division organization. Most of these are in Asia and North Africa, in "closed" countries where religious or political barriers prevent the entrance of regular Christian missionaries. The General Conference will take the initiative in designing and implementing a penetration plan for each of them. It will also cooperate with the world divisions to enlarge the Seventh-day Adventist presence in their internal population groups of 20 million or more, where the ratio of Adventists is less than one in a thousand. Three-quarters of a million dollars have already been set aside to begin this program, and additional appropriations are anticipated.

* **Research.** It has been proposed that groups of specialists be appointed to focus their attention on the four major religious and ideological challenges we face as Christians—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and secularism. We expect that they will recommend methods and develop materials to successfully approach these vast non-Christian sectors of the world.

* **Facilitator.** The GSC has recommended the establishment of a not-for-profit corporation to operate a Center for International Relations designed to encourage contacts and exchanges between Seventh-day Adventists members and institutions, on the one hand, and non-Adventist populations and institutions in the approximately 1,500 segments targeted for direct action.

We hope that, once established, the center will facilitate service by Adventist students and professionals in the target areas, encourage professional and student exchanges, and foster the provision of Adventist business and technical services abroad.

Prospects

When Jesus Christ established his church almost 2,000 years ago, his order to communicate the gospel to every person on earth meant approximately 170 million. Paul, Peter, and many of the early Christians shared the message of Christ, risking their lives and achieving remarkable success. Since then the task has grown tremendously. Now for Adventists it represents at least 2 billion persons in unentered sectors of the world, in addition to millions in other areas! And yet, God's Holy Spirit remains as available and as powerful as when our spiritual an-

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cestors shook the Roman Empire with their witness.

How can we, as Adventist university students or professionals, cooperate with this ambitious project? Here are some possibilities:

* **Become familiar with the challenge of global evangelization.** Read as much as you can about the unentered areas and the unreached peoples of the world. "Adopt" one of those areas or peoples for an in-depth study. Perhaps begin to learn the language of one of the target populations.

* **Pray regularly for the area or people you have "adopted."** Submit your talents to God, asking him to use you for the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth. Nurture your spiritual life and fortify your mind by regularly studying the Bible. Remain alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and be ready to obey. Remember that full-time Adventist missionaries may not be allowed to serve in most of the 1,500 unentered population segments of the world. This means that we will have to use alternative modes of mission service.

* **Develop personal ways of sharing your faith with at least one of your fellow students or your professional colleagues.** If you can locate someone from one of the unentered areas of the world, so much the better. Organize a small evangelistic cell group to begin exerting an active Christian influence in the area where you study or work. (See "On New Wine and Wineskins," and article published in *DIALOGUE*, 1-1989.) As the saying goes, "Think globally, act locally."

* **Contact the Global Strategy Committee** representatives from your world division/attached union (their addresses are listed on page 2 of this journal) or the secretary of the General Conference GSC (Dr. Charles Taylor, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.). Share with them your ideas on ways in which world evangelization can be accelerated at home and abroad. They will be taken into consideration as the church's global strategy takes shape. Volunteer to study one of the 2,000 unentered population segments, preparing a brief outline of its characteristics, and listing the factors that will have to be taken into account when a penetration approach is selected.

In the last book of the Bible John the Revelator recorded a moving vision of the final triumph of Christ and his followers at the end of time. "Before me," he wrote, "was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). This prophetic vision assures us that God's global strategy will be successfully accomplished and that countless millions, representing all peoples of the world, will be saved for eternity. In the meantime—as we pray, plan, and work—he has promised that

through the Holy Spirit he will be with us "always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

NOTES

1. All Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

2. From David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1989," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January, 1989), p. 21.

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DISCUSSION

Global Strategy

1. What was your personal reaction to the information provided in this article? To what extent do you agree or disagree with the main points presented? Why? Were there important omissions?
2. What do these trends and statistics mean for the country in which you live? What new approaches should, in your opinion, be implemented to expand the Seventh-day Adventist proclamation and presence in your own country? What alternative forms of mission service would you recommend?
3. Is it proper for our church to target for penetration the unentered and more difficult areas of the world? Or should we leave that task to other Christians while we concentrate our efforts in areas where the people are currently more responsive to the gospel? What percentages of our resources should be devoted, on the one hand, to enter new territories and, on the other, to sustain current activities? Why?