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■ EDITORIAL ■

Geography — The Handmaiden of Missions

This issue of the JOURNAL focuses on the need for the church to be globally knowledgeable and aware of the challenges it faces as it seeks to interpret the Three Angels' Messages to God's scattered children. This is especially true of those Seventh-day Adventist centers that have accepted the responsibility and challenge of providing missionaries to serve our global needs.

Geography, in whose compass we would include human environment, resources, economics, and selected formative cultural characteristics, is truly the handmaiden of missions, even as history may be said to have served prophecy.

While we readily acknowledge that a person is more than the sum of heredity and environment, we would affirm that in noticeable ways, a person's geography affects his or her basic responses to nature, to others, to experience, and to such crises as may arise.

As one who studied world geography during high school days, I am grateful for the parental choices and divine providence that sent me to schools where I gained an awareness of the variety of resources and differing environments humanity has experienced. Such a study helped me to become familiar with environmental differences, the creative ways in which humans have sought to master them, and the resulting cultural evolution that societies have experienced. The study of geography also motivated me to stretch my imagination and aspirations beyond the limits of the rural city in east-central Cuba where I was born.

With the aid of an expanded vocabulary and some history, this knowledge has facilitated my pilgrimages through lands as varied as Great Britain, Nigeria, India, and the Andean heights of Bolivia and Peru.

To help our students recognize their wider environment is to free them from the prison of a narrowed vision and distorted self-awareness or understanding. It is to place them at the convergence of a variegated natural tapestry whose enriching threads provide the basis for a fuller appreciation—even enjoyment—of life and society.

Human beings' capacity to extend themselves, to explore, to create, to achieve, and to be heroic become a part of our enlarged sensibility when we recognize what various groups have had to face in their environment, and how they have used their ingenuity to improve their living space, health, tools, and quality of life. Conversely, we can more readily recognize how shortsighted is a view of life that would exploit nature for pure human aggrandizement. Effects of environmental policies—smog, red tides, oil spills, atomic seepage—dramatically remind us of this principle again and again.

As a church we need a global mission. We need to become increasingly aware of the need for geographical as well as language studies. Our mission mandates a greater saturation of Seventh-day Adventist consciousness, especially among societies that tend to focus on the past. As the men of Issachar were aware of their times, so we today must become progressively more sensitive to the shared needs and challenges of major metropolitan areas of the world, be they in the developed, developing, or so-called "third world."

"Into all the world" bids us to become more geographically aware of our neighbors, so that we may witness to them in a way that will enhance their ability to respond to and profit from this world-wide truth.

