

GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION:

A Critical Need

By Cyril E. Roe

The *National Geographic* magazine for January 1988 features an editorial entitled "Sounding an Alarm for Geography Education." One statement stands out:

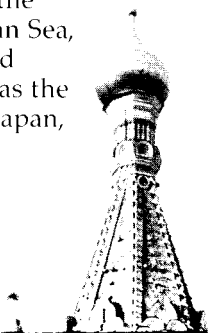
The United States cannot successfully compete in world markets or conduct enlightened foreign policy if its people are ignorant of geography and its inseparable ally, history. And the sad fact is that most students today are ignorant of both.¹

For Seventh-day Adventists an addition to this quotation is equally true. The Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot properly conduct its world-wide, God-given responsibilities if its young people are never seriously challenged to study the world in which we live, the different cultures and the many economic and climatic factors that affect the spread of the gospel.

Alarming Ignorance

College-age Adventist young people as a group are woefully ignorant of the world in which we

live. When students mistake New Zealand for Korea, label the Black Sea as the Mediterranean Sea, confuse island groups such as the Philippines, Japan, and Hawaii, to give just a few examples, we have real



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Dr. Cyril E. Roe is Professor of Education at Southern College of SDA, Collegedale, Tennessee.

cause for alarm. Asking them what one could expect weatherwise as an overseas worker in Bombay or Narvik causes complete consternation.

Surely our educational system can do a much better job of preparing students to live in a shrinking world. Developing in our young people a realistic vision of service to humanity depends on it!

Colleges Lack Courses in Geography

A brief glance at the college curriculum offerings in the North American Division would make one wonder whether we are really serious about informing our young people about the world in which they are to work.

Although we offer history majors in most colleges, try to find even one geography major at the baccalaureate level! Yet history is largely the result of the interactions of people with geography.

Further, geography is a living, moving subject constantly being called upon to help interpret news and views. This in no way implies that history is unimportant. However, it is not so exclusively important that geography should be neglected or relegated to a minor place in the curriculum.

Marketable Skills

Add to this picture the fact that many history majors find that their skills are unmarketable except to perpetuate the species—i.e., teaching more history. By contrast, geography majors have a wide range of possible careers. City planning, cartography, meteorology, ecology, economics, and farming are just a few of the careers to which geography can and does lead. Also trained geographers are much in demand as consultants in business, industry, travel, and humanitarian services.

James Michener, famous author of epics like *Centennial* and *Hawaii*, writing in *Social Education*, extolled the value of geography:

The more I work in the social studies field the more convinced I become that geography is the foundation of all. . . . When I begin work on a new area—something I have been called upon to do rather fre-

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aloud. After all the clues are read, students try to name the mystery event, the date, place, and primary characters.

- Patriots under the leadership of Samuel Adams and John Hancock gathered weapons and ammunition and hid them.
 - Paul Revere and William Dawes were couriers for the Committee of Correspondence.
 - Harriet Tubman helped many slaves escape.
 - On April 18, 1775, two couriers were sent to warn the Minutemen, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock.
 - A courier in Charlestown watched for the signal of light from the Old North Church in Boston.
 - The carpetbaggers traveled South to help.
 - General Gage planned to send troops to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock.
 - The Sons of Liberty were a group of colonists who resented British rule.
 - Minutemen were farmers and townspeople who drilled regularly so they could be ready to fight in a minute.
 - The Committees of Correspondence were groups of colonists interested in carrying news from colony to colony.
 - Couriers were prepared to make fast rides from city to city any time of the day or night.
 - The Sons of Liberty wanted to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock that they were going to be arrested by General Gage and the British army.
 - General Gage and his British army wanted to arrest Adams and Hancock and destroy the hidden guns in Concord.
- Event:* Midnight ride of Paul Revere
Date: April 18, 1775
Place: Old North Church, Boston to Lexington, Massachusetts
Primary Characters: Paul Revere, William Dawes, Dr. Samuel Prescott

Evaluation and the Inquiry Process

A vital yet often frustrating aspect of inquiry activities is the final pulling together of the unit, including summarizing the information and preparing final tests.

In the following activity students determine what should be common knowledge for each grade level, then categorize and place important concepts and facts on a bulletin board or chart titled: "It's Common Knowledge." Teachers can then use this information on test questions. This activity may go on during the unit or at its conclusion.

The teacher assigns unit subtopics to groups of students who then determine what information is important. Group members write each concept or fact on a separate

strip of paper. Next, the students rearrange the strips from easy, or most common information, to difficult, or least common information. After determining the difficulty of each strip of information, the students indicate the grade level that should be responsible for knowing the information. Finally, the strips are arranged under the appropriate subtopics in order of difficulty.

These information strips, along with questions pertaining to the process of obtaining the information, provide the teacher with possible test questions.

The above suggestions can help multigrade teachers organize their time and make social studies exciting for elementary students. □

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- ¹ Thomas Turner, "People Scavenger Hunts: New Twist to an Old Game," *Learning*, 10:1 (September 1981).
- ² From "Mystery Event," a mimeographed activity by Thomas N. Turner, professor of education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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quently in my adult life—I invariably start with the best geography I can find. This takes precedence over everything else, even history, for I need to ground myself in the fundamentals which have governed and in a sense limited human development. . . . If I were a young man with any talent for expressing myself, and if I wanted to make myself indispensable to my society, I would devote eight or ten years to the real mastery of one of the earth's major regions. I would learn languages, the religions, the customs, the value systems, the history, the nationalisms, and above all the geography, and when that was completed I would be in a position to write about that region, and I would be invaluable to my nation, for I would be the bridge of understanding of the alien culture. We have seen how crucial such bridges can be.²

Geography and the Church

Trained geographers can also play an important role in the work of the church. Michener's quotation offers an apt description of the skills we would like to see church workers develop. Insights gained from geography can help guide church work in cities, as they offer information about physical, eco-

Geography Quiz

Here is a little quiz to whet your students' interest in geography. Have them work individually or in small groups to find the answers. Suggest resources such as almanacs, *National Geographic*, and the *SDA Yearbook*.

1. You are on an itinerary for the church in Africa, just south of the equator. After a hot night, you waken to see, near the horizon, a mountain with snow on the summit. Which mountain is this and in what division of the world field are you visiting?

2. You have just received a letter from a cousin in Dacca who says that the leading industry of the country is survival; all else is luxury. What country is she writing from, and why would she make such a statement? What two rivers are at the same time a blessing and a curse to the country? Why?

3. You have answered a call to serve the church in Christchurch, New Zealand. What type of clothing would you need to take with you? In what kinds of occupations would you expect your neighbors to be engaged?

4. Tibet is often called the "Roof of the World." Why? What kind of Christian church work is carried on there? What are some of the problems missionaries would encounter in that country?

5. Identify the country you think has the most Seventh-day Adventists per thousand in the population. Why do you think this is so? Which country has the fewest per thousand? What factors might have kept the figure so low?

nomic, and ethnic factors that impinge on evangelism. Geographers are hired to coordinate marketing for many large international firms—why not for the church and its world-wide mission?

Curriculum Changes Needed

There is a pressing need for the church to develop a three-pronged

approach to address the needs in this area of the curriculum:

1. At the elementary level serious attempts should be undertaken to make geography a subject in its own right, not just a part of the social-studies curriculum. Further, a consecutive and expanded curriculum should be developed covering the major aspects of the subject.

2. At the academy level we should offer a series of courses in general world geography, physical geography (sometimes called earth sciences), and cultural and human geography. The emphases in all these courses should include the work of the church, denominational problems and possible solutions relating to geography, and general knowledge of the organization of the world church.

Each senior college in North America should develop at least a minor in the subject area of geography, building on the base of new courses in the academies, while at the same time helping those new to the discipline to achieve a standard of excellence.

The church can enhance the attractiveness of such curriculum changes by using graduates' talents to the greatest extent possible, both on the active payroll and as consultants. This would help advance the denomination's goal of spreading the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; and would help us avoid many costly mistakes, both in human and financial terms.

Better geography education is a *must*. Every teacher, from kindergarten through graduate school, needs to sound an alarm for improved geographic education at all levels. □

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¹ Editorial by Gilbert Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society, in *National Geographic Magazine* (January 1988), n.p.

² Quoted in Harm J. de Blij, *Geography, Regions and Concepts* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 5th edition, 1988), p. vii.

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their former Millerite friends, we now know that the family of J. N. Andrews were themselves subscribers to the "no-work" fanaticism after the Great Disappointment.⁶

Dangerous Times

These are dangerous times for Adventist history. A generation of Adventists, reared on faith-confirming stories, are finding out that those stories don't always stand up to careful examination. Some react by dismissing the stories, and hence an important part of their identity. Others dismiss the troublesome historians—and thus begin to split the community of faith.

Disappointments over childhood "stories" may seem trivial until we realize what a powerful role stories play in the shaping of a person's identity and belief system. If the stories prove not to be "true" in quite the sense we thought, we are tempted to reject not just the story but also the storytellers, i.e., the authority figures in our past who helped shape our beliefs.

Once again, however, an analogy from personal growth and development can be helpful. As children, we see our parents as all-powerful and all-wise. When we are teenagers, they seem to be bumbling hypocrites. After we finally mature they seem human: imperfect to be sure, but much wiser than they