

Euro- Africa Division

Serving Europe and the World Through Education

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Ronald Strasdowsky

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe created numerous opportunities to expand Adventist education. As the walls came tumbling down, gone also were the restrictions that had dwarfed Christian education in Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and East Germany. Our church members in these countries rallied to the challenge. Reports about “open doors” filled the headlines of our church papers and elicited a wave of loving cooperation with Adventists around the world. This helpful attitude also extended to our schools. One focus of this report is therefore the international network of care and concern.

Romania

At lunch with the teachers of the

newly opened secondary school in Bucharest, I sat next to a young English teacher. Her American accent provided a starting point for conversation.

“Are you from America? Or have you been to America?” I asked.

The answer was No. After attending a series of meetings conducted by an American evangelist, she had been baptized, and soon after received a call to teach English. She started to teach with little more than textbooks. But gradually our schools are developing libraries and computer rooms, thanks to donations and a big shipment of books from ADRA USA.

Another example of cooperation between Romania and North America is a three-week seminar on the “Principles of Christian Education” and “The Integration of Faith and Learning,” conducted by educators and psychologists from Southern College (Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.) and Collonges, France.

Our 50 teachers in Romania are eager to know more about Adventist education and to get acquainted with Adventist teachers and deans in other countries. This is one of the chal-

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Students learning French at Institut Adventiste du Salève, France.

lenges for the years to come.

Years ago, when the Romanian seminary was confiscated, the leaders retrenched their activities in a small building in Bucharest. There was ample space for the few students the government allowed to come, sometimes only three. Bible teacher Dezideriu Faluvegi remembers how pastors organized clandestine tent meetings or traveled two nights in order to have a day of fellowship and study.

When freedom was restored, the classrooms were inadequate for the 130 full-time students from Romania and Moldavia (Ex-USSR). In Cernica, Romania, 10 miles from the capital, a new campus is under construction, thanks to special Sabbath school offerings and a generous donation from the U.S.A., as well as the united efforts of the Romanian church.

In addition to running a full senior-college program for about 130 students, the seven instructors at the Romanian seminary have about the same number of “correspondence students” who study at home and occasionally attend seminars in Bucharest. Also, groups of ministers return to

their alma mater to write a diploma thesis and take exams to upgrade their education. They all benefit from a government charter that converted the little house in Bucharest into the well-respected Institutul Teologic Adventist de Grad Universitar.

At the secondary level, we have three schools, with a total of 500 students. Robyn Wheeler (of Hagerstown, Maryland, U.S.A.), the first English-teaching volunteer in Romania, is giving evening classes in English language in Cluj and teaching English and history at our “Maranatha” school. Living with a Romanian family, Robyn works in a part of Romania that used to belong to the Austrian empire, the home of some of her ancestors.

Other American volunteers are teaching English at Prague. For legal reasons, it was decided to turn the denominational language school into a private enterprise called the “McNeilus School.”

Although we do not have a network of language schools, many young Adventists volunteer work in privately or church-sponsored language schools in Romania, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Italy, and Austria.

At Braila Junior College, Adventist doctors have started a two-year nurses’ training course, which is fully recog-

nized by the state. Doctors also do most of the teaching for the 176 students in buildings that still need a lot of improvement.

Czechoslovakia

During the days when the church was banned and the school was without a seminary building or a library, students assembled in a church on weekends. Many had worked hard all week in coal mines, an assignment deliberately selected for those who wanted to become Christian pastors.

In the presence of a prominent guest speaker, a professor of Protestant theology from Prague University, the seminary reopened in 1990. After moving twice, it has recently settled on church property about 40 miles from Prague. New buildings will soon augment those that were bought with the property at Christmas 1994.

The academic standard of the seminary is high. Its well-qualified teachers are supplemented by visitors from Collonges, France; the Geo-Science Research Institute at Loma Linda University (California, U.S.A.); and the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

Germany

There was more tolerance toward Christian seminaries in the former

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Ministerial students, their teachers, and two visitors at the Adventist Bible Seminary, Czech Republic.

German Democratic Republic than in most other Eastern bloc countries. With interruptions caused by the great wars, this campus has been open since 1899. The seminary in Marienhoehe was merged with Friedensau in order to reduce expenditures for theological education in Germany. The new name, Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, signals its university status.

Millions of dollars had to be invested for repairs, remodeling, and new buildings at Friedensau. To keep down expenses, some changes were made in existing buildings. The old dining room has been converted into a beautiful library. And where a dirt-throwing brown-coal burner had been, the visitor will see a gymnasium that promotes the health of the Adventist village and the people of the vicinity. Despite much creative remodeling, there is still an urgent need for student residences, as well as the relocation of the research center for European Adventist history.

Unlike the past, when Friedensau University sent missionaries to Africa, it now provides an education for students from Africa. In fact, about half

of its 100 full-time students in theology and social work come from Africa or Eastern Europe. Those who opt for the three-year course in social work can specialize in areas that are relevant to their home countries, such as health education or social work for developing countries.

Friedensau University has also opened a special institute for development work, which has already completed a survey of social work needs in Bulgaria, financed by the government. A similar survey is planned for Tanzania, East Africa.

For many years now, Friedensau has performed religious music in nearby towns, drawing talented musicians from all over Germany and Hungary for special performances. The theology students have also been active, winning the support of the local population by organizing Pathfinder groups for families, 90 percent of whom hold atheistic and materialistic views, according to a survey that was conducted by seminary students. The local government of Mockern has provided, free of charge, a house for Pathfinder work, counseling, and social work.

Among several institutes in Friedensau, one operates in former Moab, Jordan, during summers, doing active

excavation work. Udo Worschech's research activities in Jordan have been reported in local papers as well as in academic circles.

Austria

Recently, the newsweekly *Profil* placed Bogenhofen Seminary as number four among all the secondary schools in Austria, noting especially the excellent possibilities for student participation there.

Bogenhofen offers courses for 100 students in three areas: theology and one-year Bible courses, German as a foreign language, and a full secondary school. Dormitories of hotel quality have been built, attracting seminars and conventions for most of each summer.

France

Institut Adventiste du Salève, located high above Geneva, is the only Adventist secondary school in France and Belgium, and serves as a senior college for several junior colleges in southern Europe.

Collonges also serves as a center for francophone Adventism, enrolling students of theology or French language from many nations. Every year several theology professors receive invitations to lecture in faraway places in

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Children relaxing on their rooftop playground at Niscemi SDA School in Sicily, Italy.

German class at Bogenhofen Seminary, Austria.

the Caribbean, Africa, or the South Seas.

Angola

Work has begun to repair Huambo Secondary School. Everything was gone, looted by soldiers, rebels, or the marauding bands that followed in the wake of war. Even the library books were stolen and probably sold in the marketplace.

Theological Education

Our division offers good ministerial training. Operating in eight language areas, we have seven seminaries, five of which offer a full four- or five-year program. The quality of theological education is enhanced by the sponsoring of doctoral students at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.), at the seminaries' regular conventions for theology professors from all European divisions, and the participation by several theology teachers in a division-sponsored Biblical Research Committee.

Several extension courses are being staffed jointly by professors from Europe and Andrews University or the Loma Linda University School of Public Health. Preventive medicine specialists from Loma Linda held a full month of summer courses in Friedensau and in Arad, Romania. More than 400 participants enrolled, including 50 medical doctors.

Research-oriented institutes have been opened to strengthen special areas of theological education: In Friedensau we have institutes for biblical archeology, work in developing countries, European Adventist history, family and social research, integrated research on children and youth, and religious liberty. Our college in Collonges houses a branch office of the Geo-Science Research Institute.

The influence of our major institutions has gone far beyond Europe. Professors from Collonges have been called to all the francophone areas of the world, as far away as Tahiti. In Collonges, as well as in Friedensau,

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On a sunny day, class meets outdoors at Marienhoehe Seminary, Federal Republic of Germany.

students from many parts of the world have received their ministerial training. Also, there are positive "side effects" of theology on general Adventist education. All seminaries in Western Europe and even the one in Angola have spawned high-quality secondary schools as well as a few primary schools.

Advertising Adventist Education

Increased financial support has been won in some places by more professional fund-raising activities. Several special projects are promoting a general awareness of Christian education.

For more than a year, the German church paper, *Adventecho*, has devoted one or two pages every month to "Blickpunkt Erziehung" (Perspectives in Education). Dr. Manfred Bottcher contributes to each issue a "Letter From Friedensau," which has won many friends and donors for the only Adventist college in Europe with full university recognition for all its departments.

Bogenhofen is running an effective campaign for Adventist education in the form of a special paper, "Bogi," that is mailed into every Adventist home in Austria and Switzerland.

The Evangelization of Our Children

Only a fraction of Adventist children live near our 27 primary and sec-

ondary schools. About 1,000 children from Adventist homes attend our schools, but more than 100,000 have to be reached in other ways. Our aim will always be that every Adventist child should receive some Adventist education.

In our division, 4,500 children are being taught by 720 religion teachers, mainly in Austria, Germany, Romania, and Switzerland. The most inclusive program of religious instruction has been developed in Austria. All Adventist children from 6 to 16 get Bible stories suited to their age group. In Linz, for instance, parents with their children and some honorary teachers of religion all congregate at the church each Wednesday night. The various age groups meet separately at the same time.

German and Swiss churches operate a well-organized program, mainly for children over age 11.

Religious instruction has now been introduced in all Adventist churches in Yugoslavia. The experience in our church in Croatia proves that it is possible to introduce such church-based religious instruction within a few months, making use of the materials and expertise already available in other places.—Ronald Strasdownsky, Director of Education, Euro-Africa Division.

Trapped in Angola

Augusto Artur is an African ex-student of Friedensau who grew up in southern Angola. While studying in Friedensau on a scholarship, he recalls some fond memories he still cherishes from that time:

- A birthday cake baked by the wife of a teacher.
- Staying with German church members in Lubeck during holidays.
- Being invited to spend a night in the home of a complete stranger in Berlin as he was traveling in the midst of winter.
- The kindness of Karin Straube, German language teacher, who learned to speak Portuguese and other languages in order to better explain the intricacies of German grammar to her students. She always took time to answer her students' questions.

When he returned to Angola, Augusto concentrated on village evangelism, traveling with a slide projector and a portable generator. Then he and his family were called to the union headquarters at Huambo, where he is now secretary of the union. His wife served as one of three Adventist teachers in what used to be the SDA secondary school. It is now badly scarred by recent fighting, like most of the buildings, including Augusto's office, where he used to work on his German typewriter.

The long Angolan war, which has raged off and on for 26 years, hit Huambo very hard in 1993. For almost two years, the Artur family was trapped in the besieged city, without

work and pay, with only occasional letters flown in by transport planes chartered by ADRA to bring food and mail for Huambo's 40,000 people.

Now the Arturs are free to move around again. But they have to be very cautious, for millions of land-

mines have been scattered everywhere. Whenever they start rebuilding our school, Augusto Artur will be in the middle of things, contributing his optimism and abounding energy.—*Ronald Stradowsky, Director of Education, Euro-Africa Division.*

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A Stick Snatched From the Fire

My name is Purcarus Gabriel. I am 26 years old and a teacher at the Adventist high school in Bucharest.

I may never know in this life all the events that led to my conversion, about God's work and patience, until I see Him face to face.

"Is not this man [Joshua] a burning stick snatched from the fire?" (Zechariah 3:2, NIV). My parents were not Christians. During the communist regime, I had the chance to be an ignorant person, a middle-class man, or a genius of compromise. Politics, wealth, and power didn't interest me at all. Actually, after reading Emil Cioran and Eminescu, I reached the point where life seemed worthless. Their writings suggested that a person lives, matures, studies, and no matter what he does, ends up in death. And nothing more. I wasn't afraid of death, but of eternity.

Everybody considered me a lucky man. Seemingly, I hadn't had any hardships in my life. I had a loving family who raised me without a knowledge of evil things, keeping me clear of negative images and even funerals.

When I was only six months old, God saved me from death. At that time, we lived in an old house. Seconds after my father picked me up, the ceiling collapsed. Later, God's unseen hand protected me again from a car accident, though I didn't yet know Him. During the 1989 revolution, God even spared my life by leading me away from the multitude colliding with security forces.

Although I was timid, I wrote poems and history and adventure novels. I wanted to leave something behind. I found comfort in trying to live life to its fullest.

My first connection with God was a dusty Bible I found in my grandfather's garage when I was only about

14. When I entered in high school, I started thinking about my future occupation. I wanted a job that would leave me a lot of time to travel, write, and think. Finally, I chose to become a physics teacher. God guided me again, helping me pass all the exams. In 1986, I became involved in a political party, but I was soon disappointed. It seemed to me that not even democracy could solve life's problems.

However, after 1989 religious liberty became a reality in Romania. While vacationing at the Black Sea in 1990, I received a brochure proclaiming that Jesus Christ had died so that all humanity could have eternal life. When I arrived in Bucharest, out of curiosity I attended a conference about Creation and evolutionism. I bought a Bible and began reading. One by one, all my prejudices were destroyed and I could see clearly that the Bible was true. I met a group of believers, and I started studying with them. However, they didn't keep the Sabbath that I found in the Bible.

I began to study alone because I did not trust any church, especially when I found out that there are more than 2,000 churches. I was convinced of the true Sabbath and baptism. Because my wife and I did not know a qualified pastor, we decided to baptize each other at home. There was no hot water and I opened the Bible and I read in Acts 10:47: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" and I decided to do it. And another wonder, God heated the water.

Because of my many questions about the correct interpretation of the

Bible, I visited quite a few churches. After two years of searching, questioning, and praying, with God's help I became an Adventist.

A year after my graduation, the newly created Adventist high school offered me a teaching position. I believe that God ordered everything perfectly, because in Bucharest there were only two Adventist physics teachers: my wife and me. I do not think it is a coincidence that the Adventist high school opened just when I was ready to help.

I know that God has a great work for me to do. The Adventist children studying here come from different homes—some poor, some wealthy. Some of them are obedient, gentle,

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Romanian SDA teachers met in Bucharest for an education convention in April 1995.

and pious, while others are impulsive and sometimes even rebellious. To present Jesus to these children, not theoretically just in Bible classes or on Sabbath, but to present a God who is holy, just and full of love, is a serious challenge. And as teachers, we must also be taught by God.—Purcarus Gabriel, Teacher in Romania.