

ADVENTISM IN EAST AFRICA: WERE THE INITIAL MISSION STRATEGIES EFFECTIVE?

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Abstract

The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) is one of the fastest-growing Christian denominations in the world. Studies show that the SDA Church in Africa in general and East Africa in particular has recorded tremendous growth since it was introduced in the region in the early 1900s. This article surveys the first fifty years of the beginning and development of the SDA Church in East African (1903–1953). It focuses on the three initial mission strategies employed by early Adventist missionaries to East Africa, including education, medical care, and publishing work. Early Adventist missionaries to East Africa established educational and medical institutions alongside publishing houses to reach indigenous people in the region. These entities, which were strategically scattered throughout the region, provided education, medical services, and Christian literature to the local populations. By using church membership growth as an evaluative criterion, the article concludes that the three mission strategies were effective in fulfilling the goal of Christian world mission, which is to make disciples of all nations and win converts to Christianity. The article reveals that dedication and hard work on the part of the Adventist missionaries and native Africans, coupled with clear mission strategies, facilitated the rapid growth of Adventism in East Africa in the first fifty years.

Keywords: Adventism, mission strategies, East Africa, education, publishing work, medical work, membership growth.

Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is one of the fastest-growing Christian denominations in the world. According to *Christianity Today*, “in 2014, for the 10th year in a row, more than 1 million people became Adventists, hitting a record 18.1 million members.”¹ This report also reveals that the SDA Church has become the

¹Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “The Season of Adventists,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2015, 18. The membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide reached 21 million in 2018. “Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics 2016, 2017,” Adventist.org, August 27, 2018, accessed August 5, 2019,

fifth largest Christian communion worldwide, next only to Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicanism, and the Assemblies of God.² This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the steady growth of the SDA Church in East Africa.³

After 116 years of presence in the region, the SDA Church has claimed a membership of over 1,878,976.⁴ The church has established congregations in most parts of the region and is still growing faster than many other Christian denominations. It has churches, large and small, on both the mainland and the Indian Ocean islands, including Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia, Kilwa, and Mombasa.

The church has made a tremendous contribution to the development and welfare of the people of East Africa. Currently there are four universities⁵ and scores of secondary and primary schools operated by Adventists. Adventists also run hospitals, dental clinics, dispensaries, three publishing houses (one in each country),⁶ several TV and FM radio stations, and the Adventist World Radio (AWR) studios.⁷ Adventists are also active in development and relief programs through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).⁸ Indeed, the

<https://www.adventist.org/en/information/statistics/article/go/-/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2016-2017/>.

²Zylstra, "The Season of Adventists," 18.

³In a narrower sense, East Africa refers to the countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. However, in a broader sense, Eastern Africa may include countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and even Somalia. For a fuller description of these territories, see Robert M. Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History*, Rev. ed., (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 1994), 1. In this work, East Africa should be understood in the primary sense of the three countries—Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda.

⁴*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2018), accessed December 21, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/2018.pdf>.

⁵Each of the East African countries has an Adventist university. Altogether, there are four universities: the University of Arusha (Tanzania); the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (Kenya); Bugema University (Uganda); and the Adventist University of Africa, which is also located in Kenya. For statistics of other institutions mentioned in the text, see *ibid.*

⁶As this study reveals, the Adventist Church operates a relatively large school network in the region.

⁷For the history and effectiveness of the work of AWR in Tanzania, see Desrene L. Vernon, "A Historical Analysis of Adventist World Radio's Impact in the East Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: A Case Study of Tanzania" (PhD diss., Howard University, 2011).

⁸ADRA is an international development and relief agency that responds to disaster and also helps with development projects on behalf of the SDA Church. In November 1956 the Adventist Church founded SAWS (Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service) and changed its name to ADRA in 1984. This agency became operational in East Africa much later. For example, it began work in Tanzania in 1988. See Stefan Höschele, *Centennial*

success of the SDA mission in the region is fascinating. But when and how did the work of the SDA Church begin and develop in East Africa? Were the initial mission strategies effective? In this article, I seek to answer these two questions by giving an overview of the beginning and expansion of the SDA Church in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. I also employ church membership growth as an evaluative tool to determine the effectiveness of the three initial mission strategies employed by the church—namely, education, medical care, and publishing work. This research approaches the three East African countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda together as a region.⁹ In this article, I confine myself to the first fifty years of the Adventist presence in the region—1903 to 1953.

The Beginning (1903–1906)

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the opening of a new chapter in the history of Adventist foreign missions. With the presence of Adventist missions in East Africa, the Adventist world church began to talk, write, and read about East Africa as a new mission field. The SDA Church was a newcomer as a Christian denomination in the region. However, it was not the first attempt by Adventists to open work on the continent of Africa. Adventist presence could be traced in other parts of the continent even before the arrival of the missionaries in East Africa. In South Africa, there were Adventists as early as 1878.¹⁰ Malawi saw Adventists as early as 1893,¹¹ while Ghana and Zimbabwe had an Adventist presence as early as 1894.¹² East Africa seems to have been the next region to be entered systematically by the Adventists.

Album of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania: Pictures from Our History, 1903–2003 (Arusha: Tanzania Union of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003), 54.

⁹Most research on the rise and development of the Adventist mission in East Africa tends to look at individual countries in isolation. Some dissertations and book-length materials that have been published on this subject tend to follow the same approach. See for example, *Religion and Social Change* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1993), by Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, which looks at the SDA Church from a sociological standpoint. His study does not deal with the church in East Africa as a whole, but Kenya in particular. Another major study is Stefan Höschele, *Christian Remnant—African Folk Church: Seventh-day Adventism in Tanzania, 1903-1980* (Boston: Brill, 2007). Other works in this category include Nathaniel M. Walemba, “Approach to Holistic Ministry in a Seventh-day Adventist Urban Church in Uganda” (DMin diss., Andrews University, 1988). In this work, Walemba gives a background of how the Adventist mission work was established in Uganda. See also Gershom N. Amayo, “A History of the Adventist Christian Education in Kenya: Illustrated in the Light of its Impact on the Africans’ Social, Economic, Religious, and Political Development, 1906-1963” (PhD diss., Howard University, 1973).

¹⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “South Africa.”

¹¹*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Malawi.”

¹²*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Rhodesia.”

While the first Adventist missionaries to Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Malawi were of English-speaking heritage, those who came to East Africa first were not. The two young Adventists who answered the call to take the message to East Africa were J. Ehlers and A. C. Enns, both Germans. They were sent to Tanganyika (German East Africa) by the German Union Conference. They left Germany on October 22, 1903, and reached Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, on November 12. They walked from Dar es Salaam all the way to the Pare Mountains, where they arrived before November 25.¹³ On their arrival, they found out that there was no Adventist mission in the entire East African territory. They were the first Adventist missionaries ever to set foot in East Africa. Enns and Ehlers established their first mission station at Myamba-Giti, which they called “Friedenstal” (the Valley of Peace).¹⁴

Three years after they had opened their first mission station in Tanganyika, another set of Adventist missionaries arrived in the neighboring country of Kenya (British East Africa). These two were neither German nor British, but they spoke English; one, Arthur Asa Granville Carscallen, was Canadian-born, and the other, Peter Nyambo, was Malawian-born. The two missionaries to Kenya were sent there by the British Union Conference. They left Hamburg, Germany, on October 1, 1906, and reached Mombasa, Kenya, three weeks later.¹⁵ Instead of landing at Mombasa Port in Kenya, they decided to proceed to Tanganyika, where they could meet the German missionaries who had been there since 1903. They spent some time together, and after a short stay, Carscallen and Nyambo sailed back to Mombasa in the company of A. C. Enns.¹⁶ After their arrival in Kenya, the next step was to establish a mission station.

It appears that the timing was good for them to open the first Adventist mission station in British East Africa. The so-called Kenya-Uganda Railway had already reached Kisumu, on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria, about five years earlier (1901). This meant that transportation had gotten better, and the railroad would support the expansion of the Adventist missionary enterprise in Kenya particularly and British East Africa generally. So the choice of their first mission station was crucial if the Adventist work was to be successful not only in Kenya but also in the entire territory. The two missionaries chose Gendia strategically as the site of their first mission station, which they opened on November 27, 1906.¹⁷

¹³L. R. Conradi, “Latest News from German East Africa,” *Review and Herald*, January 21, 1904, 15–16.

¹⁴Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 53–54.

¹⁵Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii* (Kendu Bay: Africa Herald, 1997), 22.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 21–22.

¹⁷See Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii*, 23, and Abraham C. Enns, “German East Africa,” *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1909, 14–15.

In the space of three years, two of the East African counties had been reached by Adventists, at least initially. But there was a third country that needed the message of the soon coming Savior as well: Uganda.

While it took only three years for the Adventists to open their mission in Kenya, Uganda had to wait twenty more years before its first Adventist mission opened at Nchwanga in 1926. It is likely that the many years of war complicated the situation so much that the church focused on saving and restoring the existing missions in Tanganyika and Kenya before they could send missionaries to a new country. Whatever the case, it seems that Uganda had to wait for at least two decades to receive the first Adventist missionaries.

When the fullness of time finally arrived in 1926, Spencer G. Maxwell, a British missionary who was working in the Pare Mountains at the time, was sent to Uganda along with two Pare missionary teachers—Petero Risase and Anderea Mweta from Tanganyika.¹⁸ A third Tanganyikan missionary, Furaha Mwangi, joined them later. The establishment of the Adventist mission in Uganda in 1926 completed the dream of starting initial missions in all the three East African countries; the focus now turned to expanding the Adventist influence and presence to the rest of the region.

Expansion of Mission Work (1907–1953)

As we have seen, the initial mission stations had been established in Tanganyika (German East Africa), Kenya (British East Africa), and Uganda by the end of 1926. The next challenge was to expand Adventist influence and mission to the rest of the East African territory. This would take several mission approaches and emphases. The expansion of the SDA mission in East Africa can be traced in at least five major areas: mission stations, education, medical work, publishing work, and membership growth. I will now survey these five areas.

Mission Stations

As we have seen above, the German missionaries in Tanganyika opened their first mission at Giti-Myamba in the Pare Mountains in 1903. Four months later, they were joined by four other German missionaries—Christoph Wunderlich, August Langholf, Frieda Breitling, and Rosa Ehlers. Their leader, Ludwig Richard Conradi, accompanied them because he wanted to assess the development of the mission project in German East Africa that he had initiated. This group of missionaries was followed by Bruno Ohme and his wife Helene, as well as Ernest Kotz, in the month of May 1905.¹⁹ With the coming of additional missionaries,

¹⁸*Seventh Day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Uganda”; S. G. Maxwell, *I Loved Africa* (n.p.: n.p., 1976), 92.

¹⁹Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 54.

the idea of expanding the Adventist mission activities became more feasible. After the initial station at Mamba-Giti, they started three more stations in the Pare Mountains—Kihurio, Suji, and Vunta—so that by the end of 1906, they had four stations. However, they were not satisfied with that success. They needed to cover more ground and reach more people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Four years had passed, and their missionary activities were still concentrated only in the South Pare area. In 1907, Ernest Kotz was sent to Lake Victoria to survey the whole region. The result of this exploratory trip to the region was the opening of a string of mission stations. The first mission center was Busegwe, which was opened in 1909; the second was Bwasi, to be followed by Majita and Ikizu in 1910. Nyabange and Iramba were started in 1911. After that were Utimbaru, Itilima, and Bupandagila in 1912. These were followed by Sizaki, Shirati, Kanadi, and Mwangala, all of which were opened in 1913.²⁰ In the short space of ten years, since Ehlers and Enns set foot on Tanganyikan soil, at least sixteen mission stations had been started in the country—four in the Pare Mountains and twelve around Lake Victoria.²¹ It should also be mentioned here that by 1953, SDA mission stations were scattered over almost all of the country. For example, Adventists opened stations in the Mbeya region in 1938, which included Masoko, Tukuyu, Tenende, Izumbwe, and Kyela. Heri mission station was founded in Kigoma in the 1940s. In the northeastern regions, a mission station was opened among the Iraqw people in 1945,²² and the Adventist message was introduced to the people of Bukoba in 1950.²³

²⁰See K. B. Elineema, *Historia ya Kanisa la Waadventista Wasabato Tanzania, 1903–1993* (Dar es Salaam: printed by the author, 1993), 51–52; and Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 106.

²¹Even though by 1913 there was this much Adventist presence in Tanganyika, it is interesting to note that the British Foreign Office did not include the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the list of Christian missions operational in Tanganyika by 1920. In the spring of 1917, as the First World War was coming to an end, as part of the preparation for the work of the Peace Conference, the British Foreign Office prepared a series of “Handbooks” to furnish the British delegates with the needed information to help them make informed decisions at the conference. This included geographical, economic, historical, social, religious, and political information. In the religious section, a number of Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, are listed, which include German Evangelical, Moravian, and Lutheran Societies, and the University Mission of Central Africa. Others listed were the Algerian “White Fathers,” the so called “Black Fathers,” and the Bavarian Benedictines. See *Tanganyika (German East Africa)* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920), 37.

²²For a detailed treatment of the establishment of Adventist mission stations in these areas, see Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 178–197.

²³A man called Agustino Kamuzora, who was baptized at Ikizu Training School, returned home to his family in Bukoba town. He introduced the Adventist message to his family, and they started holding worship services in his house until an SDA company was

In Kenya, the work grew very rapidly as well. After the first mission station was started at Gendia in 1906, it took only eight years before there were seven mission stations in British East Africa. Most of these stations were located around the Lake Victoria area. The six other stations were Wire Hill, Karungu, Rusinga, Kisii, Kaniadodo, and Kamagambo.²⁴ The first mission station outside the Lake Victoria area was opened in 1929.²⁵ The establishment of this station at Karura in Nairobi was an important development toward the expansion of Adventist mission work in Kenya because of the centrality of its position. What was experienced in Tanganyika and Kenya, in terms of establishing mission stations, was also experienced in Uganda after the work had started there.

As previously observed, the Adventist mission work in Uganda began twenty-three years after the work in Tanganyika and twenty years after that in Kenya. After the work began in Uganda in 1926, it took only a few years for them to realize a substantial growth in the number of mission stations. By 1933, there were already three mission stations in Uganda alone. Nchwanga station, which was opened in 1926, was followed by Kakoro station in 1934 in the Eastern Province. Other stations followed, including Ishaka in the early 1940s, Katikamu in 1946, and Ruwenzori in 1948.²⁶

In the first fifty years—1903 to 1953—alone, Adventist mission stations had been planted in most parts of East Africa. The growth of the work led to the organization of the Tanganyika mission in 1933.²⁷ Kenya became part of the East African Combined mission as early as 1921, and in 1938 there were already five field missions, which together formed the East African Union Mission under the leadership of Spencer G. Maxwell.²⁸ Uganda missions, though latecomers in the process of evangelization by Adventists in East Africa, also grew rapidly, so that by 1943 Uganda was returned to “field” status, with G. A. Lewis as president.²⁹ The three countries continued to be under one administrative organization—the

established there in 1950. Elisha A. Okeyo, *Kanisa Safarini Tanzania: Historia ya Kanisa la Waadventista wa Sabato Tanzania 1903-2013* (n.p.: Tanzania Adventist Press, 2014), 44–45.

²⁴Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii*, 28.

²⁵Before 1930, not much work had been done outside the Lake Victoria area. However, in 1933, the Karura station was opened near Nairobi. This was an important development as far as the expansion of the Adventist mission in British East Africa was concerned. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Kenya.”

²⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Uganda.”

²⁷*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Tanzania.”

²⁸For detailed information on the growth of the work in Kenya and the need for several organizations and reorganizations until the 1960s, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1966 ed., s.v. “Kenya.”

²⁹See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Uganda.” In the earlier organization, Uganda was part of the East African Union.

East African Union—until 1960, when Tanganyika was organized as a separate union.³⁰

Education

One of the effective methods Adventists used to gain more converts and strengthen the faith of believers was education. Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to East Africa established a school network that encircled most of the region. They established schools in each of the three countries. Here I will investigate the expansion of their educational system in Tanganyika, Kenya, and Uganda. The extent of the expansion of their education network within a relatively short period of time is amazing.

German Adventist missionaries to Tanganyika opened their first school only one year after their arrival in the Pare Mountains.³¹ As many more German missionaries came to join them in this new mission field, more schools were established in various parts of the country. When World War I began in 1914, there were at least thirty-four Adventist schools in operation, both in the Pare Mountains and in the Victoria-Nyanza missions in Tanganyika.³² The number of schools established in the first eleven years of the Adventist presence in Tanganyika reveals that Adventist missionaries used education as one of their major mission approaches.

After World War I in 1918, most German missionaries were returned to Germany. The Germans had lost the war, and Tanganyika was mandated by the League of Nations as a British trustee. All the Adventist schools that had been established by the German missionaries in Tanganyika were closed. In 1921, Spencer A. Maxwell, a British missionary who had been working in Gendia, Kenya (British East Africa), was sent to continue the Adventist work in the Pare Mountains. He was the first British Adventist missionary in the area and the first

³⁰It is important to note here that while East Africa became a union in 1921, it went through several reorganizations and was put under different divisions as often as the world church saw fit. However, the countries stayed together until 1960, when Tanganyika was made a separate union, leaving Kenya and Uganda under the East African Union. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Trans-Africa Division.” For a detailed report of the first executive committee of the Tanganyika Union Mission, which started its work officially on June 15, 1960, see Okeyo, *Kanisa Safarini Tanzania*, 92.

³¹See Enns, “German East Africa,” 16; and Elineema, *Historia*, 36–38. Elineema shows that between 1904 and 1910, at least five schools were established in the Pare Mountains: the first school was opened at Giti in 1904, then Kihurio (1904), Lugulu (1909), Kiranga (1910), and Mpinji (1910).

³²William A. Spicer, *Our Story of Missions for Colleges & Academies* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1921), 234–235.

post-World War I white Adventist missionary to be sent there.³³ When he arrived in the Pare Mountains, he found most Adventist day schools in bad shape. School buildings had fallen into ruin, and the difficult years of war had left most teachers behind the standards, as Maxwell reported in November of that year. Since education was an important method of mission, he made sure that nearly all the mountain schools reopened before the end of that year.³⁴ Under the British and German missionaries, many more schools were opened so that by 1963, there were at least seventy-six Adventist schools in Tanganyika alone.³⁵

In Kenya, the missionaries also took education seriously as part of their mission activities. As early as 1909, only three years after the Adventist missionaries arrived in British East Africa, there was a report that two schools had already been established in Kenya.³⁶ It is important to note here that A. A. Carscallen was the first missionary who studied the language of the Luo people and was able to reduce it to writing. This development made it possible for the Luo people of Kenya to read and write in their own language. He prepared a Dholuo grammar book to facilitate learning.³⁷

It is interesting to note that the British East African government did not establish a department of education until 1911. This is to say that for the first five years that the Adventist missionaries were operating in Kenya, the British government in the country was not participating in the process of educating the people.³⁸

The Adventist missionaries started Kamagambo School in 1913 under the able leadership of Carscallen. The school grew over the years until there was a high school and even a teacher training college right on the same compound.³⁹ In only

³³For more details on how he was called and sent to the Pare Mountains, see Maxwell, *I Loved Africa*, 56–72.

³⁴See Spencer A. Maxwell, “More News from Tanganyika,” *Missionary Worker*, November 16, 1921, 1–2; Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 128. Höschele observes that primary education, even in the British missionary era, “remained the crucial missionary method” of Adventists.

³⁵Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 387.

³⁶Hellen B. Carscallen, “Life among the Kavirondos,” *Review and Herald*, November 4, 1909, 23–24.

³⁷A. A. Carscallen, “The Need among the Kavirondo People,” *Review and Herald*, February 11, 1909, 13–14.

³⁸For a more detailed account of this development, see Amayo, “A History of the Adventist Education in Kenya,” 78.

³⁹For a more detailed history of Kamagambo High School and Teacher Training College, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Kamagambo Secondary School and Teachers’ College.”

one section of Kenya, known as Kisii, there were about seven Adventist schools started between 1912 and 1927.⁴⁰

In Uganda, schools were also established quite early after the first Adventist missionaries arrived there in 1926. By 1947, Nchwanga Training School had been established to take care of students from all over the country. The school was incorporated into Bugema Training School in the following year. In 1948, a two-year junior ministerial course began, to be followed by a two-year post-grade-six teachers' course.⁴¹

By 1953, Adventists in East Africa had opened many elementary schools and had at least three junior colleges—Ikizu in Tanzania, Kamagambo in Kenya, and Bugema in Uganda—offering various courses. With these three institutions, the church was able to train its own ministers to lead the churches and prepare educators to teach in the many Adventist schools scattered all over East Africa. This education also meant that some Adventists were educated and competent enough to train in the medical field and work at Adventist hospitals and dispensaries.

Medical Work

Adventist mission and medical work have always been identified together in East Africa. Wherever the Adventist missionaries opened new stations, they also thought of establishing health facilities to help alleviate pain and cure disease among the African people. So when did the Adventist medical work begin, and how did it grow? In answering these questions, as with the others, it is logical to begin with Tanganyika, the first East African country to be entered by Adventists.

Adventist medical work in East Africa started in Tanganyika. Only one year after the first school was opened at Myamba-Giti in 1904, Ernst Kotz opened the first dispensary at Kihurio, a short distance away from Myamba-Giti. In 1906, A. C. Enns, who was a trained nurse, opened another dispensary at Suji station, which became the second Adventist dispensary in East Africa.⁴² The number of Adventist dispensaries increased to at least six by 1937.⁴³

The SDA commitment to medical work as an approach to mission led Adventists to build a hospital in Kigoma in the western part of Tanganyika. The construction of Heri Hospital, a seventy-bed health facility, started in 1947, and it

⁴⁰See Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii*, 59.

⁴¹*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. "Bugema Adventist College."

⁴²See Elineema, *Historia*, 47.

⁴³G. A. Ellingworth, "Mission Work in Tanganyika," *Review and Herald*, March 11, 1937, 11. In this article, Ellingworth, who was at the time in charge of Adventist mission work in Tanganyika, said that there were six dispensaries, one in each of the existing mission stations.

opened its doors for service in June 1953.⁴⁴ From the very beginning of the Adventist missionary activities in Tanzania, medical work was emphasized as part of the mission enterprise in the country.⁴⁵

In Kenya, Adventist missionaries were quick to realize the potential of medical ministry in evangelizing the indigenous people in various parts of the country. However, it took about sixteen years before the first missionary doctor arrived in Kenya. The arrival of Dr. G. A. S. Madgwick and his wife in March of 1921 marked the beginning of the Adventist medical work in Kenya. No sooner had they arrived in British East Africa than they started planning and fundraising for the establishment of an Adventist hospital in the country.⁴⁶

In 1925, a 133-bed hospital was opened near Kendu Bay in Kenya. The hospital, which began as Kenya Hospital, was renamed Kendu Hospital afterward.⁴⁷ The establishment of this hospital and other Adventist health centers all over the country played an important role in spreading the Adventist message to the Kenyan people. The Adventist missionary work in Kenya under the leadership of Dr. Madgwick, three Scandinavian nurses, and several Kenyan dressers and helpers seems to have been so successful that it drew the attention of the colonial government in Kenya. One report published in 1938 on general progress and development in the colony of Kenya included a very positive statement on the Adventist medical work: “The efficiency of the medical work of the Seventh-day Adventists is beyond all question.”⁴⁸

In Uganda, the Adventist medical work began only three years after the first Adventist missionaries started their mission station at Nchwanga in 1926. The first report on the presence of Adventist medical work in Uganda was published in 1929. In his article, missionary S. G. Maxwell observes that there were many prejudices held against the Adventists by other Christian missions and the local people. According to this article, no amount of preaching would change the negative impressions some people had, “but the ministry of love” and “the

⁴⁴*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1966 ed., s.v. “Heri Hospital.” It is recorded that in 1949, while the construction of this hospital was underway, a clinic was opened to take care of the sick in the area. So while the hospital opened officially in 1953, the actual health care in the area began when the clinic opened in 1949.

⁴⁵Elineema, *Historia*, 47; Ellingworth, “Mission Work in Tanganyika,” 11–12. Both Elineema and Ellingworth give a picture of what was happening at the dispensaries and the kinds of services people received. While Elineema tells stories of the early years of Adventist medical work in Tanganyika—namely, before World War I—Ellingworth describes what was happening in the second half of the 1930s.

⁴⁶George A. S. Madgwick, “Expansion of Medical Work in Kenya Colony,” *Missionary Worker*, August 8, 1924, 4–5.

⁴⁷*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Kendu Hospital.”

⁴⁸W. G. Turner, “Medical Work in East Africa,” *Review and Herald*, June 30, 1938, 20.

medical work is proving itself the right arm of the message.”⁴⁹ As the Adventist missionary work grew in Uganda, the medical work did also. Most field missions performed medical work on the dispensary level. The Ishaka Hospital—an eighty-bed general hospital, situated forty miles from Mbarara—opened in 1950.⁵⁰

By 1953, East Africa had three general hospitals: Heri (Tanzania), Kendu (Kenya), and Ishaka (Uganda) The medical work was also supported by the presence of many Adventist dispensaries scattered throughout the region. As a mission strategy, medical work was able to open doors in the face of prejudice and remove several obstacles to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by Adventists in the entire East African territory. This fact was also stated in a report that was given in a medical departmental meeting at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in the 1920s.⁵¹

Publishing Work

The history of the Adventist mission in East Africa would be incomplete without the publishing arm of its mission strategy to reach local populations. Adventist missionaries in East Africa saw this need; that is why very early in their work, they employed publishing ministry as part of their mission strategy in the region. The work of translating and publishing Adventist materials in the region began very early: German missionaries in Tanganyika began doing so almost immediately after they opened the first mission station in the country. The arrival of a language-gifted, eighteen-year-old German missionary, Ernst Kotz, in April of 1904 started a long tradition of translation and publication of Christian materials by Adventists.

Kotz embarked on the Asu language in July 1905, just a few months after he first set foot in the region.⁵² He translated the New Testament into Chasu, the language of south Pare, and prepared a hymnbook and a grammar in the same language. However, these works were not printed as soon as people would have wanted because at that time Adventist missionaries in Tanganyika did not have a printing press; most of their books were published and printed by the Adventist

⁴⁹S. G. Maxwell, “Medical Work Opens Doors in Uganda,” *Missionary Worker*, February 22, 1929, 1. In this report, Maxwell shows that Dr. Andersen of the Nchwanga mission attended to about 1,000 patients a day and that his practice extended about fifty miles from the mission.

⁵⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Ishaka Hospital” and “Uganda.”

⁵¹W. H. Branson, “Our Medical Work in Africa,” *Review and Herald*, November 25, 1926, 10–12. Even though the report referred to in this article does not mention East Africa in particular, there is no doubt that the author had East Africa in mind as well. He mentions Dr. G. A. Madgwick, who was still in charge of the Adventist medical work in Kenya at the time.

⁵²See Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 83.

Publishing House in Hamburg, Germany.⁵³ Tanganyika would not have an Adventist printing press until the early 1970s.⁵⁴

Even though Kenya was the second country to be entered by Adventist missionaries in East Africa, it was the first to have a printing press. The publishing work in Kenya began in 1913, when Asa Carscallen's translation of the Gospel of Matthew was published in England. After the success of his translation and publication of his first work in Luo, Carscallen put a lot of effort into making sure that the mission in Kenya had a printing press at the head office in Gendia. The year 1914 witnessed the arrival of printing machines from England. Mr. L. E. A. Lane, who had a knowledge of printing, trained three local individuals, and the printing work started in Kenya.⁵⁵ This simple printing press was the forerunner of the famous Africa Herald Publishing House.⁵⁶ Before the establishment of the publishing house in Tanganyika in the early 1970s and the one in Uganda,⁵⁷ Africa Herald Publishing House was responsible for printing much of the Adventist material in several East African languages, including Luganda, Kiswahili, Luo, and Kikuyu. English materials were also printed by this publishing house.

Having discussed the implementation of the three initial missionary strategies employed by Adventists in East Africa, and since the ultimate goal of any Christian mission organization is to win souls to Christ, at this juncture we need to ask this evaluative question: were those missionary strategies effective in reaching the African populations and winning converts to Jesus Christ? To answer this question, we must now turn to Adventist membership growth during the first fifty years of Adventist presence in East Africa.

Membership Growth

The combination of the three major missionary methods used by Adventists to propagate their message in East Africa—education, medical work, and publishing work—proved to be very effective, and the fruits of their labor were found throughout the region. The membership of the church grew slowly but steadily. The first baptism in Tanganyika took place in April 1908; six individuals were baptized. Their baptism was reported in the official general paper of the SDA world church to be read by all. The report mentions that mission schools played a

⁵³Höschele, *Christian Remnant*, 84.

⁵⁴Tanzania Adventist Publishing House has a history that dates back to 1969, when it started as the Voice of Prophecy Printing Press.

⁵⁵See Nyaundi, *Seventh-day Adventism in Gusii*, 167.

⁵⁶See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. "Africa Herald Publishing House."

⁵⁷The Upper Nile Press in Uganda is a young printing press compared to Tanzania Adventist Publishing House or Africa Herald Publishing House, which have been in business for a long time.

role in their conversion. The article reads in part, “Our missionaries came; they settled among these heathen people, they opened schools, they taught them the gospel; they labored to sow the seed, watering it with their own tears, trusting God to give the increase.”⁵⁸ This baptism was followed by several others so that by the beginning of World War I in 1914, there were 477 members both in Pare and around the Lake Victoria area in Tanganyika. Even after the Great War, at least 310 members remained faithful to the Lord and the teachings of the SDA Church.⁵⁹

In Kenya, the first baptism was realized after five years of work. The first ten persons from the Luo tribe were baptized on May 21, 1911. It took eleven more years for the first two individuals from a different tribe, the Kisii tribe, to be baptized.⁶⁰ Seven years later, there were four organized churches in Kisiland alone, with a membership of 313. There were eighty-six bush schools in operation, with an enrollment of 3,286 students, and forty-two Sabbath Schools, with an average total of 3,080 attendees.⁶¹

In the case of Uganda, the first baptism there took place in 1928. This was exactly two years after Uganda was officially entered by Adventist missionaries in 1926. From Nchwanga, where the first baptism took place, Adventists expanded their work to other parts of the country, making disciples and baptizing them; by 1953 there were at least 1,790 Adventists in Uganda alone. This number brought the Adventist church membership in East Africa to 27,893 by the end of 1953.⁶²

Conclusion

This article set out to investigate and provide answers for two questions: (1) When and how did the work of the SDA Church begin and develop in East Africa? (2) Were the initial mission strategies employed by Adventist missionaries effective? This brief survey of the first fifty years of SDA missionary activities in East Africa has revealed that the Adventist Church started small but grew up very rapidly. The three mission strategies the early Adventist missionaries employed in their work proved to be effective in establishing mission stations and winning people to Jesus Christ. A closer look at the development of the Adventist work in the East African region in the first fifty years gives a hint as to why the church recorded such a big success. This study establishes that there were at least three reasons for

⁵⁸Guy Dail, “First Fruits from German East Africa,” *Review and Herald*, June 4, 1908, 13–14.

⁵⁹Höschele, *Centennial Album*, 20.

⁶⁰*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v. “Kenya.”

⁶¹E. A. Beavon, “The Gospel in Kisii,” *Review and Herald*, August 15, 1929, 14–15.

⁶²See H. W. Klaser, ed., *Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1953), 181.

that success: dedication and hard work, clear mission strategies, and the receptiveness of the people.

First, the dedication of Adventist missionaries—both foreign and early native Africans—to spreading the good news of salvation was an important factor. Their dedication and love for the Lord and the people they labored to lead to Christ were extraordinary. Second, for any missionary enterprise to be successful, the mission methods employed must be simple and well defined. In this study, we have seen that Adventist missionaries in East Africa employed education, medical care, and publishing strategies to reach people. These clear and well-defined approaches proved to be effective throughout the region. Third, this brief study has clearly demonstrated that Africans were receptive to the Adventist message of hope. For the people of the world to accept and embrace the message of the soon returning Savior, Adventist workers must dedicate their lives fully to the Lord and use mission approaches that are simple, well defined, and relevant to the times and needs of the people they intend to reach.

