

Education, Evangelism, and Nurture

A Dean of Education
Looks at Current Concerns

By R. L. Hilde

■ FOR A NUMBER of years I have held several convictions regarding Seventh-day Adventist education that I have stated vocally but have not articulated in writing. I'm confident that a number of church educators agree with this conviction. However, I am not certain that the church membership and leadership concur. These convictions include the following points:

1. Seventh-day Adventist education provides the most sustained, comprehensive type of evangelism the church can provide. The man-made dichotomy that distinguishes between evangelism and education presents an unfortunate position that reduces the value

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of Christian education in the minds of church members and denominational leaders.

2. Efforts by the pastorate and some educational researchers to develop a refined distinction between education as “nurturance” and as “evangelism,” do nothing to help establish the value of Christian education to the church. Actually, this distinction feeds the dichotomy and lessens the value of Christian education in the minds of church members. The “nurturance-evangelism” distinction also lacks a Biblical base since nurturing the children and youth of the denomination actually constitutes an intrinsic part of the evangelistic thrust of the church and its educational program.

3. The church will prosper as it focuses upon and supports Christian education as its most significant means of evangelizing its children, strengthening its base, and providing leadership for the worldwide mission of the denomination. Conversely, fears on the part of church members and leaders that education is too costly and demands too large a share of church budgets and expenditures are largely unwarranted. Vigorous and dedicated educational leadership by informed and accountable educators will enhance the work of the church in every phase of its evangelistic thrust. Worry that Christian education will grow beyond the church’s ability to cope with it can be compared to a farmer’s fears that his crop will be too bountiful.

A Background of Concerns Regarding K-12 Education

Statistics and observation suggest that a significant portion of

the denominational membership does not concur with the above conviction about the importance of Christian education to the mission of the church. The evidence for this lack of confidence is readily apparent. Although Seventh-day Adventist church membership has grown throughout the world, the number of students enrolled in its church schools has not grown proportionately. In North America, year-end reports from 1981 through 1984 show consistently declining enrollments in schools at every level—elementary through college.

A second concern relates to the heavy attack on K-12 public education in America over the past few years. Nowadays teachers are con-

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demned for all manner of real or perceived imperfections such as their purported failure to teach the basics, their inability to control drug problems, and their alleged lack of professional skills. Such accusations affect SDA education as well. Adventist teachers feel the “spill-over” of the criticism directed toward teachers in the public sector. As numerous quality public school teachers turn away

from teaching, SDA teachers also begin to ask themselves, “Who needs this?”

Few highly intelligent, dedicated Christian young people enthusiastically opt for teaching in church schools and academies anymore. With the opportunities for stature, pay, advancement, and acceptance in medical or business professions, the incentives for teaching grow dim.

Research and observation suggest that the “sharp” or “bright” students have a good chance of being dissuaded by college administrators and advisors from entering the K-12 teaching profession.

Third, partly as a result of the widely publicized criticisms directed toward schools, parents and constituents appear to have decreasing confidence in Christian education. This, along with the rising cost of tuition, makes it easier for them to withdraw their support. Furthermore, if Clark Kerr (former president of the University of California at Berkeley) is correct, rising parental “hedonism” can accelerate this problem. Kerr suggests that economic studies show that parents have “high income elasticity for travel abroad, a second or third car, . . . and a lower elasticity for spending money on education of their children.”¹ Whether this criticism holds true of SDA parents may be open to question, but it is a possibility.

Fourth, the nature of SDA social structure—a highly professional society, in certain areas of large SDA concentration especially—as well as the hierarchical structure of the SDA organization in which K-12 teachers have very little direct input into matters relating to

their personal welfare or their professional positions, and the absence of significant career ladders within the teaching profession, all tend to diminish the attractiveness of education careers in the minds of competent and dedicated young church members.

Evangelism or Education?

The fifth concern, and perhaps the most serious, lies in the dichotomy numerous church leaders create between evangelism and education. Such leaders, their eyes firmly fixed on yearly baptismal totals, frequently assert the need to put more money into evangelism and less into education. Arguments about the ratio of funds disbursed, however, only distract from the real concern. By creating a false division between education and evangelism, we suggest that they have little in common—that money spent on education robs the church's evangelistic thrust. Instead of education and evangelism being seen as complementary programs in the outreach of the church, they are perceived as being in competition.

A sixth concern is that our tertiary level institutions do little to foster the growth of the church's K-12 system or make certain that dedicated young people are called to the K-12 teaching ministry. This attitude is evident in several practices of, and positions taken by, college educators and institutions. Elementary and secondary educators are frequently criticized by teachers and administrators at the college and university level, who complain about the accomplishments (or lack of them) at the "lower levels."

In my view, this unfortunate

attitude is all too prevalent in higher education. Colleges reap the high school harvest (the latter's seniors) while taking little responsibility for nurturing the growing plant through the K-12 years. The marketing processes of colleges greatly resemble a plantation owner swooping down on the profit-making of the sharecroppers.² Worse yet, the owner often criticizes the lack of productivity and the poor quality of the harvest

problem areas.

2. SDA colleges should activate a marketing program that begins with the client, that involves planting the seed and nurturing the plant as well as harvesting the crop. One way this might be done is by seeking grants for research to help schools experiencing difficulties.

A very real challenge exists in the large number of one- and two-teacher schools in the SDA system.

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the sharecroppers have brought forth.

Recommendations for SDA Colleges and Universities

By no means can all the problems of K-12 education be laid at the doors of our colleges. Nor should colleges seek to take credit for all the positive accomplishments by the lower levels of education. However, higher education institutions must seek to do everything in their power to help elementary and secondary education prosper and grow. They should make a serious commitment to care for and nurture the K-12 system.

I would like to offer here some suggestions for solving the above listed problems:

1. Our colleges should survey the elementary and secondary levels of SDA education to help identify existing and potential

How can the college or university ensure that effective learning experiences go on in these small "remote, but necessary" schools? Other areas of college and university involvement may include research to discover means of creative funding for church schools and academies, economical curriculum planning to provide adequate course offerings in secondary schools, and techniques for recruiting students from among constituent church members.

3. Our colleges should recognize that the academic disciplines (the subject area departments) are a very real part of the teacher preparation program. A large percentage of the undergraduate academic work of any teacher at either the elementary or secondary level is taken outside of the department or school of education. Conversely,
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An accredited education is not a luxury in the twentieth century; for most lines of professional work it is a necessity. Ellen White apparently glimpsed our day when she wrote that "in the future there will be more pressing need of men and women of literary qualifications than there has been in the past."²⁷

The necessity of degrees for many lines of work is recognized by nearly all Adventist educators in the 1980s. Even the new generation of self-supporting Adventist colleges has made arrangements to have their unaccredited graduates accepted by certified Adventist institutions so that they can earn accredited graduate degrees, when required, for entrance into the professions.²⁸

It should be remembered that even though the identity-crisis struggle has been settled in the area of degrees, the battle still goes on in the realm of the curriculum. The real challenge to the denomination's educators in the current generation is teaching each course within the context of the Christian world view and attempting to develop a "Christian mind" in every student. That is the greatest contribution that Adventist educators can make in the field of higher education.

The Christianization of the curriculum is a field in which the denomination's educators have made some significant progress, but much more needs to be accomplished. In the long run, it is in this realm that we must continually come to grips with the identity of Seventh-day Adventist higher education—an identity that is still in the process of definition. □

FOOTNOTES

¹ See for example Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), pp. 381, 474.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 220-230.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵ W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, November 8, 1893; W. W. Prescott to E. G. White, November

8, 1893; Wilmotte Poole to parents, December 16, 1893.

⁶ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 373, 375, 378, 379.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁸ Ellen G. White, diary, July 22, 1897.

⁹ Ellen G. White to W. C. White, June 10, 1897.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, "A Missionary Education," Ms., June 18, 1907 (*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943], p. 533).

¹¹ Milton Hook, "The Avondale School and Adventist Educational Goals, 1894-1900," Ed.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1978, pp. 308-310.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943), p. 374.

¹³ _____, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 368, 373-380.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of the problem of accreditation see George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism: An Interpretative Study of Ellen White, Education, and Related Issues* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1985), pp. 37-45.

¹⁶ W. W. Prescott to E. A. Sutherland, April 29, 1896.

¹⁷ E. A. Sutherland, "Why the Battle Creek College Can Not Confer Degrees," *Review and Herald* (October 10, 1899), p. 655; (November 14, 1899), p. 740; E. A. Sutherland, *Studies in Christian Education*, reprinted ed. (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1977), pp. 137, 138.

¹⁸ *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 255.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, letter reproduced in "A Medical School at Loma Linda," *Review and Herald* (May 19, 1910), p. 18 (italics supplied); cf. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 480.

²⁰ *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 479, 480 (italics supplied).

²¹ Warren E. Howell, "Letter From Prof. W. E. Howell," *Review and Herald* (October 16, 1930), pp. 6-9.

²² [E. A. Sutherland], "Why Should Madison Become a Senior College," *The Madison Survey* (January 7, 1931), p. 1.

²³ Clifford G. Howell to E. A. Sutherland, March 18, 1932.

²⁴ O. J. Graff to E. A. Sutherland, January 26, 1931.

²⁵ E. A. Sutherland to O. J. Graff, May 18, 1931; O. J. Graff to E. A. Sutherland, June 8, 1931; C. G. Howell to E. A. Sutherland, May 11, 1932.

²⁶ W. W. Prescott to E. A. Sutherland, April 29, 1896.

²⁷ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 192.

²⁸ Telephone interview with Norman J. Roy, Director of Academic Records, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, December 16, 1985.

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schools and departments of education are an intrinsic part of the college since they provide anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of the college coursework needed for the teaching profession.

4. The college or university

should continue to seek to improve the quality of teaching that takes place in its classrooms. Not only will this enhance the learning experience of college students, but it also provides potential K-12 teachers with appropriate teaching models.

5. SDA administrators and college boards should stress to denominational leaders and laity that, in reality, Christian education, at all levels, constitutes one

Efforts by the pastorate and some educational researchers to develop a refined distinction between education as "nurturance" and as "evangelism," do nothing to help establish the value of Christian education to the church.

of the church's strongest forms of evangelism. Although a longitudinal effort that may lack the electrifying results of public evangelism, it sustains and maintains the message throughout all its practices. It helps the learner, through the years, to "settle into the truth."

6. Our colleges and universities should seek every opportunity to work together with the field to provide the full range of education needed to prepare K-12 personnel. Extended campus programs, in-service education seminars, and union package plans for elementary and secondary educators are but three types of cooperative effort that can improve Christian education. Creative minds can

develop other techniques and programs to achieve their common goals.

Conclusion

Our colleges and universities need to take the initiative in bringing about a cure for the malaise that exists in Seventh-day Adventist education. Educators and administrators need to exalt the role of education as a truly evangelistic mission backed by quality academic training and spiritual commitment.

I wish those of us committed to

Worry that Christian education will grow beyond the church's ability to cope with it can be compared to the farmer's fears that his crop will be too bountiful.

Christian education could write with the authority found in the Biblical pleas, "Hear O Israel . . ." and "Hear, you who have ears to hear . . ."—for these suggest an imperative. They imply a command to hear.

However, perhaps the best we can do is to work for change and remain optimistic. Emily Dickinson expressed the sentiment well:

Perhaps you laugh at me. . . . Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can't stop for that! . . . I found a bird, this morning, down—down—on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore sing, I said, since nobody hears? One sob in the throat, one flutter of the bosom—My business is to sing—and away she rose!³ □

FOOTNOTES

³ Clark Kerr, "Earl V. Pullias Lecture in Higher Education," University of Southern California, 1984.

² Ernest L. Boyer, *High School. A Report on Secondary Education in America*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), pp. 265, 266.

³ Quoted from Betsy Erkkila, "Emily Dickinson on Her Own Terms," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Spring, 1985), p. 109.

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Extended Campus Program

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dents themselves? How do you handle an expanding program when a limited number of well-prepared faculty are available? How do you assess faculty workload: Is the off-campus teaching part of the regular load, or above and beyond it? Should faculty be paid an additional amount for off-campus teaching? Or should they receive a small amount of "combat

pay" for being gone from home on off-campus teaching assignments? Should the School of Health add additional faculty just for the purpose of off-campus teaching, and if so, what standards of faculty selection should apply? What kind of academic control should be exercised over course offerings in the off-campus program, and by whom?

Currently, the School of Health faculty is exploring these questions, seeking input both from within the university and from other universities. While other schools of public health do offer extended-campus programs, usually these are limited to communities in close proximity to the institutions. This was the major reason why the University of Washington School of Public Health deferred to Loma Linda when a request came in from Alaska for such a program. It was also why the Utah State Department of Public Health requested an M.P.H. degree off-campus program in environmental health from Loma Linda.

The School of Health found that off-campus programs furnished sufficient student enrollment to keep the institution financially viable. The faculty has been rewarded by the visible success of the graduates, both in terms of personal advancement and contribution to the church's program. Although the development phase can be viewed as complete, the expansion phase is just beginning. The School of Health must continue to address the questions posed by that expansion. □

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