

The Library of Faith

INCLUDING
THE
ACADEMIC
LIBRARY
IN THE
MISSION
OF THE
COLLEGE

BY KEITH CLOUTEN

When we talk about integration of faith and learning on an Adventist college campus, we generally mean elements such as classroom instruction, daily worships, chapels, and campus recreational programs. Whether the library gets any attention and how it is included is often less clear.

Indeed, the library of the typical Seventh-day Adventist college may seem to have a primarily secular role and philosophy. Apart from a small Spirit of Prophecy collection and directional signs to a "Heritage Room" where most Adventist publications are corralled, the library may resemble that of any secular liberal-arts college, and be evaluated by the same standards.

How does one implement the uniqueness of Adventist educational philosophy within a school library? Should it matter that the campus is Seventh-day Adventist? Indeed, does the library of an Adventist college or university have any unique role? This article will explore these questions.

Ellen White, Education and Libraries

Although Ellen White scarcely mentions the library in her education writings (not surprising in light of the typical schools of her time), she does elaborate some principles relating to library resources as they support the academic program.

In the opening chapter of *Education* Ellen White describes one of the great objectives of Christian education:

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think

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and to do. . . . It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts.¹

The concept is repeated several times in

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her writings. Youth are to be trained "to think and act for themselves"; failure to do so will produce young people who "are trained, like the animals, and not educated."²

Her words resonate well with modern educational theory. Because of the 20th-century

knowledge explosion, students must learn to research, think critically and independently, interpret and evaluate information, and synthesize data. Creative learning and research methods are achieved only in connection with a wide range of learning resources. The library therefore becomes the heart of the campus.

Other important principles affect the use of learning resources. Ellen White stressed education for individuality and creativity,³ as well as life.⁴ She criticized educational ideas with "too narrow and too low a range."⁵ She advocated the total integration of faith and learning when she wrote that "by some, education is placed next to religion, but true education is religion."⁶ And she herself possessed and used an extensive personal library reflecting a variety of subjects and viewpoints.

So there is substantial evidence that the Adventist philosophy of education, based on the writings of Ellen White, strongly supports a library-based education program. Her concepts match current educational theory, with its emphasis on individual learning methods and development of critical thinking.

The Role of the Library on the Adventist Campus

With this background, we will explore some features that should characterize the special role of Adventist college and university libraries.

1. The library should not only contain a broad and balanced collection of resources, but also provide access to the world of information.

The recent knowledge explosion has cre-

ated a dynamic new role for libraries. Emphasis has shifted from memorization to information skills. The increased importance of learning and thinking skills demands a comprehensive and balanced library collection with up-to-date resources.

But a broad and balanced collection of books and periodicals is not enough. Libraries facing the 21st century find themselves in a period of change and transition. The combined effects of the knowledge explosion and new information technologies have produced a dynamically changed role for the library. Today one does not ask about the number of books in a school's card catalog, but about a library's access to a large pool of resources through electronic devices such as CD-ROM, and whether the library has resource-sharing arrangements with other libraries. No academic library today can be an island, pretending self-sufficiency. Emphasis must be upon interdependence, not independence.

Seventh-day Adventist schools are not exempt from these trends and influences. Indeed, there is every reason to expect the Adventist college library to meet these expectations and to achieve excellence in its collections and services

2. *The library's collection and organization should reflect a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.*

The Adventist philosophy of education emphasizes two interrelated concepts—the wholistic nature of education, and a commitment to the total integration of faith and learning. The ideal has rarely been achieved in either area, but that does not lessen their importance.

These concepts are not unique to Adventist education. Arthur Holmes, an influential Christian educator, writes:

*Why a Christian college? Its distinctive should be an education that cultivates the creative and active integration of faith and learning, of faith and culture. This is its unique task in higher education today.*⁷

Holmes is adamant that “the Christian college refuses to compartmentalize religion.”⁸ Rather it seeks to develop a Christian worldview that unifies all aspects of campus life and activity.

Adventist libraries that separate their denominational materials into a self-contained collection such as a “Heritage Room” are literally compartmentalizing religion. Whatever the reason for the separation, the practice perpetuates the idea that religious life

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and study are distinct from secular pursuits. A Heritage Room may be appropriate to preserve unique and rare materials, but placing most church publications there seems to reinforce the separation of the sacred and the secular.

The Christian is inundated with secular influences in virtually every aspect of life, not least in exposure to books and magazines. The vast proportion of 20th-century publications convey perspectives that conflict with a Christian worldview. As a result, young people come into contact with these secular viewpoints just as they are forming their own worldviews.

Adventist librarians cannot and should not prevent the acquisition of secular materials, but they must provide a degree of balance by giving priority to materials with a Christian perspective. An increasing number of significant publications in a wide range of disciplines are compatible with a Christian worldview. The librarian should identify and acquire these materials.⁹

3. *The library's collections should represent diverse ideas and viewpoints.*

Responsible academic freedom demands that the college library not restrict itself to materials that support only one side of a question. Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”¹⁰ A document produced by the 1987 Annual Council of the General Conference strongly defends the concept of academic freedom within Adventist institutions of higher education.¹¹

Students in a Christian school must be encouraged to pursue and investigate truth, testing their discoveries against a scriptural

framework. The campus library must therefore provide a diversity of learning materials that reflect a variety of viewpoints and interpretations.

4. *The library's materials-selection policy should reflect the unique mission of the institution.*

Although the Adventist college library must provide a wide range and diversity of materials for study and leisure reading, their selection should harmonize with the mission and objectives of the institution. Ellen White summarized the purpose of Adventist education this way:

*To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.*¹²

Whatever meanings we assign to “the image of God,” it must include the gift of free choice, the power to think, the ability to decide for God or against Him. The Christian school must never deny students' freedom to think and act for themselves. Indeed, it is called upon to develop and restore this power within its young people.

But the “image of God” involves more than just free choice. The Christian college must provide a positive environment conducive to a choice for God. Edward Heppenstall describes the goal succinctly:

*The purpose of the Christian college is to instruct and capture the life of the student for Christ without violating his freedom or bypassing his right to think for himself.*¹³

The library must share this purpose.

Indeed, the choice to serve God or turn from Him may well be made within the quiet halls of the library as the student contemplates the message of a book or magazine article.

How can the library fulfill its mission responsibly? How does it tread the narrow path between the demands of free inquiry on one hand and its redemptive purpose on the other?

A philosophical resolution of this problem may occur in the library's collection development policy. The policy should clearly articulate the unique mission of the library in relation to the institutional mission. It should guide librarians and teachers in choosing library materials (an example of a library mission statement is printed at the end of this article). The Adventist librarian has a special opportunity to select reading material that will challenge the minds of students and help

them make the most important decisions of their lives.

Every Christian college library should have a carefully prepared collection development policy. Without such a document, the library is likely to drift into the waters of secularism. Making such a written policy available for scrutiny by evaluation teams and accrediting bodies will create an awareness and appreciation of the unique nature of the school and the values for which it stands.

5. *The teaching faculty along with members of the library faculty are equally responsible for the redemptive goals of the institution.*

Librarians may be tempted to believe that their job requires a sort of spiritual neutrality. They see themselves as the keepers and providers of literature and information of all kinds, without bias. They do not wish to be perceived as censors. They boldly uphold the right of their clients to obtain whatever knowledge they seek. So they may consider themselves "above the battle," or at least as non-combatants in the church's spiritual warfare.

The conclusion is faulty, for it ignores the redemptive role of every employee on a Christian campus. This does not mean, however, that the student's right to access published information is in question. But should it not make a difference that those who work at the library are Adventist Christians? Their responsibility to the special mission of the school is just as important as that of the teacher or dean. The librarians' commitment to the mission of the school should make a difference in the way they serve their patrons, provide encouragement or counsel to their employees, demonstrate Christian virtues, and lead inquiring minds to the source of true wisdom. Indeed, the work of the librarian can be redemptive.

6. *The college library should conduct a strong program of bibliographic instruction.*

College freshmen coming from small Adventist secondary schools or academies may have only minimal library skills. Given the increasingly complex nature of information retrieval and reference resources, the Adventist college library should develop a strong program of bibliographic instruction. Without such a program, students may manage to "get by" in their studies, but may not be truly educated individuals who are at home in the world of ideas and people.

A carefully designed program of biblio-

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The library's materials-selection policy should reflect the unique mission of the institution.

graphic instruction should deal not only with methods of research, but should also introduce students to a range of reference tools for accessing Christian literature. The *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index* is an essential tool for finding Adventist perspectives on a given topic.

7. *The library should explore creative ways of serving its community.*

Librarians may find creative ways to support the Christian objectives of the institution as they provide services to both on-campus and off-campus communities. Book-review discussions, services for community professionals, public readings by Christian authors from their own works—there are many unique opportunities to promote a Christian worldview.

Even the design and decor of the library can reflect its Christian philosophy. The appearance and design of the library building, the choice of art objects and exhibits, the use of Christian symbols such as a cross or an open Bible, the provision of an appropriately

furnished room for spiritual meditation—all these offer opportunities for imaginative ideas.

The Challenge

Little attention seems to have been given to the special role of the library within the Adventist college. The literature of Christian educational theory and practice seems to have ignored the library, despite the often-mouthed phrase that it is the heart of the campus. It is time to focus attention on the library's role in a Christian school.

More than 3,000 years ago, a wise man understood the ultimate dynamics of research:

If you look for it [wisdom] as for silver,

And search for it as for hidden

treasure,

Then you will understand the fear of the Lord,

And find the knowledge of God.¹⁴

Those words are a fitting inscription for the library of any Adventist college. ☺

At the time this article was written, Keith Clouten was Library Director at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada. He is currently Library Director of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), p. 17.
2. ———, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), p. 17.
3. *Education*, p. 17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
5. *Ibid.*
6. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1913), p. 108.
7. Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 16.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
9. Useful sources for bibliographies on faith and learning materials are the Institute for Christian Teaching (General Conference Office of Education), and the Institute for Christian Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada.
10. John 8:32, NIV.
11. *Academic Freedom in Seventh-day Adventist Institutions of Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: Annual Council of the General Conference, 1987).
12. *Education*, pp. 15, 16.
13. Edward Heppenstall, "Academic Freedom and the Quest for Truth," *Spectrum*, 1:4 (1969), p. 37.
14. Proverbs 2:4, 5, NIV.

EXTRACT FROM A COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

A. MISSION STATEMENT

1. Within the context of a Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher education, the mission of _____ College library is to provide bibliographic resources and services that do the following:

1.1 Support the academic program.

1.2 Encourage students to develop a Christian worldview and commitment.

1.3 Enhance development of personal information skills.

2. The library seeks to provide learning resource materials and services to its campus clientele, specifically, college students and faculty.

3. In fulfilling its mission, the library operates with these assumptions:

3.1 The library is central and integral to the academic program.

3.2 Students are encouraged and helped to discover, evaluate, and utilize information resources that are relevant both to class topics and their general interests.

3.3 Access to a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives is foundational to Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy and goals.

3.4 Resource self-sufficiency is not a realistic goal of an academic library. Remote database access, inter-library loan, and resource sharing with other libraries are necessary components of library development and services.

3.5 The library serves a primarily undergraduate campus and does not provide materials exclusively for faculty research.

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B. COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The goals for the library's collection development are as follows:

1. To provide in-depth resources in support of campus academic programs.

2. To provide at least minimal resources in most fields of knowledge.

3. To acquire materials that support or reflect a Christian worldview.

4. To provide materials that foster personal development and positive moral and spiritual values.

5. To collect and preserve both published and manuscript materials relating to the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the region it serves.