
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM IN THE US: COMMITTED TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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In this article, attention is given to the historical context in which the relationship between the "religious" and "educational" arms of the Seventh-day Adventist church was forged; the commitment of Adventism to higher learning in the US is explored; strategies for maintaining a distinctive purpose in Adventist educational institutions are assessed; and a select number of challenges currently facing Adventist institutions in North America are addressed.

Each educational institution associated with the Seventh-day Adventist (Adventist, SDA) denomination has its own board of trustees, its own statement of philosophy, and its own mission. It is not uncommon for Adventist educators during their career to be employed by several of these institutions on three or four continents in countries using a variety of languages. In spite of these diverse experiences, on each of the campuses to which they may be appointed the educators are likely to feel quite at home philosophically.

The author of this article is a case in point. After serving the Adventist church for 20 years in Africa, Europe, and Asia, he was appointed to the faculty of an Adventist university in the US. Within 6 weeks of taking up his new assignment, he was requested to serve as a consultant in reformulating the educational philosophy of the university's school of education. The rewrite was to meet the challenge of an upcoming accreditation visit. Problems relating to articulation of the school's philosophy had resulted in an embarrassing probationary accreditation at the previous evaluation. Based on the diligent exploration of purposes undertaken by the faculty, the philosophy was reformulated. The results could not have been more gratifying. Suffice it to say that commendations made by the next accrediting team far exceeded expectations, and recommendations were few.

The two paragraphs above may appear as a rather odd introduction to an article focused on commitment of the Adventist church in the US to higher education. What insights may be gained in exploring this topic by making reference to the work of a foreign educator in some very "un-American" settings? The point is this: Adventist higher education in the US and around the world shares a perspective on learning that transcends national and cultural differences and that bespeaks a commitment to the task of education which is fundamental to the *raison d'être* of the denomination as a world church. It was not extraordinary to request a "foreigner" to participate in the development of a philosophy statement for an SDA school of education in the US, preparing as it was for a visit by an American accrediting body. The dean who appointed the "international consultant" could rely on some basic assumptions, which included: (1) informed Adventist educators around the world have a common understanding of Adventist education, its philosophy, and its purpose, and (2) the purposes of Adventist education are not an addendum to the theology and mission of the church, but are inherent, foundational elements of an Adventist understanding of the gospel commission (Matt 28:19-20).

If one is attentive to these assumptions, a number of questions quickly spring to mind such as: (1) How did the Adventist church arrive at this fairly unified conception of what Christian education is intended to be? (2) How does the church look to the future in seeking to avoid the slide into secularism which historically has often taken place as denominations and institutions "come of age" (Knight, 1990; Marsden, 1994)?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this article will give attention to the historical context in which the relationship between the "religious" and "educational" arms of the SDA church was forged; explore the commitment of Adventism to higher learning in the US; assess strategies for maintaining a distinctive educational purpose; and evaluate current challenges.

It has already become clear that North American Adventism must remain committed to higher education in the 21st century if it is to remain true to the historical and theological heritage it fostered in its 19th- and 20th-century diaspora to the world. The question is whether the denomination has the vision and will to continue implementing its educational philosophy in an increasingly secular, competitive, and financially demanding arena. To opt out, however, would be to lose not only an educational system but also an Adventist identity.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF ADVENTISM AND ADVENTIST EDUCATION

The SDA church has its roots in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Among the “left-wing” reformers of that time was a group known as Sabbatarian Anabaptists and, without denying a myriad of other influences, the history of Seventh-day Adventism can be traced from these European antecedents to the New World. The immediate context out of which Adventism developed was the ferment of the second great religious awakening which occurred in North America in the mid-1800s (Spalding, 1961). Conservative biblicism flavored by Methodist Arminianism were important factors in shaping the theology adopted by Adventists. Arminianism proposes that every person may exercise free will in accepting or rejecting the proffer of salvation afforded by Christ who sacrificed himself for the benefit of all humanity. The SDA church was formally organized in 1863 (Spalding, 1961).

The church’s distinctive history and conservative biblicism ensured from the beginning that the leadership remained keenly aware of several issues. First, there was a need for a well-reasoned and persuasive Adventist apologetic. Simply stated, if a movement develops with strong elements that run counter to general practice in society, it must articulate good reasons for its stance if it wishes to maintain its identity, increase its adherents, and develop credibility within the culture to which it runs counter. Second, the leadership recognized the need to prepare informed, dedicated individuals to continue the task begun by the founders. And third, there was a need to provide “sanctuary” for church members and their children who often faced ridicule and even outright hostility in a world that has not always been appreciative of religious diversity. It did not take the leaders long to recognize that a parochial educational system could go a long way to help in meeting the challenges placed upon them by the concerns they faced.

When the basic tenets of Adventism had been explored and the church was officially organized, attention was turned to a number of issues that ultimately defined the character of the new denomination. Based on its theological underpinnings, the church focused on how it would continue to proclaim God’s kingdom and serve humanity. Among other initiatives, two distinguishing emphases developed. First, a theology that explained restoration as relating to the whole person demanded a focus on physical health, and so the Adventist health message was proclaimed as “the right arm of the gospel.” Adventists referred to their health message in this way because it was often possible to gain the attention of individuals averse to religion by approaching them on matters of health. This message resulted in the establishment of sanitariums (Spalding, 1961), which were the forerunners of a worldwide medical system (General Conference, 2001). In 2001, the SDA church operated

169 hospitals and 386 clinics worldwide, employing 88,500 individuals. The second emphasis, which took much longer to emerge as a distinctive characteristic of the Adventist movement, was education.

Early Adventist believers opened their first private school about 1853, before the church existed as an official entity. Early denominational publications, such as *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and *Youth's Instructor*, were filled with articles intended to inform and educate. The first official denominational elementary school opened in 1872, in Battle Creek, Michigan (Marroquin, 2001). Two years later Battle Creek College was founded, the first of many Adventist institutions of higher learning (Vande Vere, 1972).

The history of Battle Creek College is illustrative of the ideological struggles through which the denomination journeyed in seeking to articulate and implement its educational philosophy. The college was established in a rapidly changing educational climate. The Darwinian revolution begun in 1859 called into question the traditional theistic explanation of the origins of the universe, and the Morrill Act of 1862 (*Backgrounder*) opened the way for leadership in higher education to pass from the religious to the public sector. In the latter half of the 19th century, significant thought leaders were questioning the efficacy of the current systems of education. For example, in 1854 Herbert Spencer produced an essay entitled, *What Knowledge Is of Most Worth?* In this essay, Spencer argued that science was most valuable. In fact, he asserted that all things religious are in the realm of the unknowable and should therefore be excluded from the academic curriculum (Spencer, 1854). In contrast to Spencer, Noah Porter argued in the late 1860s in favor of the classical curriculum which had become the centerpiece of American education (Marsden, 1994). This classical curriculum was generally presented from a Christian perspective in the leading institutions of the land. Its focus, however, was on the Greek and Latin scholars of antiquity. Another perspective in education following the Civil War was the manual labor movement with its emphasis on the practical skills that would enable an expanding working class to earn a living in an increasingly industrialized and urban society. The educational landscape in which Battle Creek College was established was certainly a complex one, with a variety of emphases calling for the attention of administrators.

During this critical period, Ellen Gould White, a leading figure in the development of the Adventist church, published an article entitled "Proper Education" (White, 1948c). The article is an appeal to establish a system of education based on biblical principle. In her essay, White is in effect asking the question, "what knowledge is of most worth?" According to White, the essential elements of Christian education are that it should: (1) afford the student an opportunity to experience a relationship with Christ—"There are many young men whose services God would accept, if they would consecrate

themselves to Him unreservedly" (White, 1948c, p. 159); (2) educate students to "develop characters that God will approve" (p. 145); (3) encompass a broad view of learning including "physical, mental, moral, and religious education" (p. 132); (4) be academically sound and, at the same time, practical—for "many youth who have gone through a college have not obtained that true education that can be put to practical use" (p. 159); (5) be Bible-centered, so students may "learn more perfectly the truths of God's word" (p. 160); and (6) lead a life lived in service for God and humanity, so that "we may be useful in advancing the glory of God" (p. 160).

With these ideals to direct them, denominational leaders set about making plans for the opening of Battle Creek College. The governing body of the church, in its General Conference session of 1873, voted to "take immediate steps for the formation of an Educational Society, and establishment of a denominational school" (Butler, 1873, p. 108). The proposals and discussion about the new college clearly indicate that it was the purpose of the founding fathers to take seriously the principles of Christian education proposed by White (Marroquin, 2001).

Sidney Brownsberger, MA Classical Studies, was appointed the first president of Battle Creek College. He brought to his task "the impressions of education inculcated by my contact with the educational system then in vogue in the...colleges of the land" (Brownsberger, n.d.). The system "in vogue" was the classical curriculum championed by Noah Porter. Classes began at Battle Creek College in August 1874. The following month, White read "Proper Education" at a college board meeting for the edification of the board members. Brownsberger responded that he "would not know how to conduct...a school" based on White's educational principles (Brownsberger, 1924, p. 29). The first battle for a distinctive Adventist education was lost before it had begun. In later years Brownsberger reflected that White's counsel was "so far in advance of the ideas of education then universally...practiced that it was impossible for them [the faculty] to act immediately upon the light given" (Marroquin, 2001, p. 65).

In 1881, President Brownsberger resigned and, in the turmoil which followed, the board voted to close the college in 1882 (Vande Vere, 1972). Late in 1881, White noted that the "object of God bringing the college into existence has been lost sight of" (White, 1948b, p. 33).

Battle Creek College reopened in 1883, and there were genuine attempts at curricular reform, but the struggle over the classical curriculum continued for some years (Knight, 1986). Clearly, Battle Creek College had become set in its classical ways and would not easily deviate from the curricular patterns established early in its existence.

In 1888, Adventism faced a major theological crisis. Some younger scholars called into question the legalistic approach to salvation preached by the older ministers. As a result of the vigorous debates and despite the casu-

alties along the way, the confrontation led to a biblically defensible approach to soteriology. The new theological definitions allowed for a much stronger emphasis on a Christ-centered, grace-oriented salvation, without casting aside the old "pillars of the faith" such as observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (Froom, 1971). This mid-course theological correction opened the way for a noteworthy spiritual revival within Adventism in the 1890s. Two denominational initiatives that were significant beneficiaries of this revival were foreign missions and Adventist schools (Knight, 1990).

At an educational convention in Harbor Springs, Michigan, in 1891, with the spiritual revival following the 1888 conferences in full swing, White focused her considerable influence among church leaders on the question of educational reform. George Knight has described her approach at these meetings and her subsequent educational agenda in this manner:

At this conference...Ellen White declared all-out war on the classical curriculum, a step she had not previously taken. Apparently she had become convinced that the Bible would never find its central place in the curriculum of Adventist colleges until the classics had been displaced. Throughout the 1890s she kept up a continual barrage of articles on the role of the Bible as the "foundation"...of Christian education. (Knight, 1986, p. 15)

It seems that White was not overly optimistic about reforms in Battle Creek or at the other new Adventist institutions in North America. She felt that even the new colleges had come under the shadow of Battle Creek, with its classical approach far removed from the ideals of "Proper Education." So it was that in 1891 White departed for Australia to assist in laying the foundation for the work of the SDA church in that country. In harmony with her understanding of the task of the church, one of the major ventures in which she became involved was the establishment and nurturing of Avondale College just north of Sydney (Hook, 1982).

A number of the "barrage of articles" to which Knight refers were published in 1900 (White, 1948a). These articles reflect the deep understanding White gained from her experience at Avondale College. In Australia, White did not take a passive role. In fact, Milton Hook refers to her as "the chief protagonist for the Avondale School" (1982, p. 42). She had watched with much regret as Battle Creek College followed a pathway she considered to be against the counsels of God for a Christian educational institution. She was determined that such a state of affairs should not recur, and she worked diligently to ensure that Avondale was founded upon solid Christian principles. Based on letters she wrote in 1894, Hook has encapsulated White's concerns for Avondale: "The site was to be away from the cities, suitable for agriculture, and for providing practical work in conjunction with formal school studies" (Hook, 1982, p. 36).

By 1900, when White returned to America, she felt that she could look back on a project successfully inaugurated. Hook summarizes:

Ellen White referred to the school site as "holy ground" and, from its inception, as an "experiment."... They [White and the administrators] had some broad long range goals and a working methodology. Their goals were to convert young people and train them to be effective missionaries.... To achieve these goals their methodology included Bible teaching and a Bible integrated curriculum, vegetarian diet, a ban on sports and courting, balance of mental and physical labor, fully converted teachers, and a philanthropic and evangelistic outreach into the community.... [White] brought to the venture a conception of Christian Education which was to some extent already fashioned in her thinking but was not adequately tested within the denomination.... With success evident at Avondale after five years of experimentation she could write in 1900, "The school in Avondale is to be a pattern for other schools which shall be established among our people." (1982, pp. 44-45)

White had taken the lead in demonstrating that it was possible to build a successful college based on the biblical principles of education which she had identified in 1872. She wanted to guard against any possibility that the debacle of Battle Creek should be exported to Avondale or any other colleges being set up in numerous countries around the world.

As a consequence of the Australian experience and the articles White wrote through the 1890s, Battle Creek at last awakened to its potential as a genuinely reformed institution. E. A. Sutherland, president from 1897-1901, presided over the transformation of the college and its relocation to farmland in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1901 (Vande Vere, 1972). Until 1904, Sutherland continued as president of what was now Emmanuel Missionary College, instituting a thorough reform patterned after the principles of education tested in Australia. Emmanuel Missionary College was the forerunner of Andrews University, one of 15 SDA higher educational institutions currently located in North America.

White's thoughts on education matured through the years. "Proper Education" identified major facets of what eventually became the pattern of SDA education, but the document is hardly a polished treatise. By 1900, White's educational theory had progressed into a balanced blend of philosophy and practice, with clearly defined objectives and tested guidelines for achieving these objectives. She argues, for example:

The education given must not be confined to a knowledge of textbooks merely.... The object of our schools is to provide places where the younger members of the Lord's family may be trained according to His plan of growth and development.... They [students] should be impressed with the thought that they are formed in the image of their Creator and that Christ is

the pattern after which they are to be fashioned. Most earnest attention must be given to the education which will impart a knowledge of salvation, and will conform the life and character to the divine similitude. (White, 1948a, pp. 126-127)

In 1903, White published her quintessential treatment of education, encompassing her understanding of God's plan of education from Eden, through the fall and restoration, into a heavenly eternity. In this book, entitled *Education*, White outlines with clarity the goals which have become the hallmark of Adventist educational philosophy. A statement penned by White in *Education* has become a standard definition among Adventists:

True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares students for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (White, 1903, p. 13)

These insights into the struggles through which the denomination went in arriving at an understanding of the purpose of education in the Adventist worldview take us back to the beginning of our journey in this article. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that every teacher and minister educated in an Adventist institution will at least be vaguely aware of this history and will most likely be fairly well versed in the educational philosophy which grew out of this history. Most SDA professionals will have read White's mature thoughts on education. Many will have taken a class in which the book *Education* is studied because, at least until recently, general education in the typical Adventist curriculum included a study of educational philosophy. Consequently, the phrases and sentences which undergird this Adventist educational philosophy fall familiarly on the ears of most teachers, ministers, and administrators: "In a knowledge of God, all true knowledge and real development have their source" (White, 1903, p. 14); "Love, the basis of creation and redemption, is the basis of true education" (p. 16); "The Holy Scriptures are the perfect standard of truth, and as such should be given the highest place in education" (p. 17); "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached" (p. 18); "The science of redemption is the science of all sciences" (p. 126).

As the reader contemplates the elements melded together in this Adventist educational philosophy, a striking concept begins to emerge. There appears to be little distinction between the biblical theology of salvation and the philosophical foundations of an Adventist understanding of education. In fact, White (1903) makes this intimate connection abundantly clear:

Through sin the divine likeness was marred, and well-nigh obliterated.... 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...—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life. (pp. 15-16)

“In the highest sense the work of redemption and the work of education are one” (White, 1903, p. 30). If this relationship between theology and education is taken seriously, it becomes obvious why Adventism must remain committed to higher education. Adventist education cannot rightly be separated from Adventist theology. And so it is that a foreigner may come to North America to teach at an SDA tertiary institution and immediately feel at home. He brings with him a deep understanding of and appreciation for the underlying purposes of his new institution. Moreover, he can immediately be called upon to help refine the institutional philosophy because, by the very nature of his being an Adventist, his theology and his philosophy of education are blended and constitute an essential element in the worldview which is the filter of all his ideas.

The spiritual revival and educational reformation forged in the 1890s into a distinctive understanding of what SDA education is all about have been instrumental not only in spawning a worldwide educational network, but also in focusing the minds of thousands of educators and administrators who have guided that system in its particular approach to Christian education.

THE MISSION AND COMMITMENT OF ADVENTISM TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE US

The SDA church has a baptized membership of about 13 million, of whom close to a million are residents of North America. The denomination practices baptism by personal confession of faith, which excludes infant baptism. A significant number of children are not reported in the statistics. The numbers given here are estimates based on figures reported in 2001 (12.4 million members). Although times have changed and the Adventist Church has grown into a denomination of considerable size and influence (General Conference, 2001), the need and desire for a strong educational system based on biblical principle has not diminished. The essentials of Adventist education in 1872 remain the essentials in 2003. The fundamental purpose of SDA schools and colleges is to restore in students the image of their maker in the fullest sense in which this restoration may be understood—physical, mental, spiritual, social, emotional. If the vision for this restoration is lost, the reason for maintaining an Adventist school ceases to exist.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN COMMITMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Adventists understand that this work of restoration—or education, if you will—is undertaken in the context of a cosmic battle between Christ and Satan for the allegiance of humanity. The SDA teacher therefore sees in each student a microcosm of the conflict between good and evil. Each student is recognized as one in whom the image of God is “marred, and well nigh obliterated” (White, 1903, p. 15), and at the same time as one who is “a candidate for immortal honors” (White, 1913, p. 229). In concert with the Holy Spirit, the task of the teacher—every teacher—is first and foremost to lead the student to an encounter with Christ. Ideally in an Adventist institution, each teacher is an ambassador of the Kingdom of God.

The second task of the Adventist teacher is to prepare students for joyful service to God and humanity. This preparation includes academic and professional courses with much the same content as might be encountered, for example, at a public institution. However, while this content should be considered in its own right, it will also be explored from the perspective of a Christian worldview. The ethos of a truly Adventist institution cannot be one in which education is separated from religion because, after all, redemption and education are one.

The introduction and mission statement in the *Andrews University Bulletin* are informative of how Adventist educational philosophy is applied in a modern context:

Andrews University is a Christian university in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. It encourages its students to study, practice, and develop an active religious experience. By corporate worship, community service, and a common concern for all, . . . students are led to develop a philosophy that makes them Christian not just in name, but in action. . . . Andrews University educates its students for generous service to the church and society in keeping with a faithful witness to Christ and to the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (Andrews University, 2002, p. 8)

An examination of these statements reveals that the close tie-in of education and religion remains a distinctive hallmark of Adventist education. The educational philosophy and mission which Andrews University espouses is by no means an ideology of the past. The genesis of these ideas is from biblical times, and the principles have been mediated through the history and experience of the SDA church in the 19th century. However, as Adventist educators envision the future, the ideologies which have guided them in the past remain as benchmarks in their strategic planning to meet the educational needs of modern society.

In addition to the considerations already touched upon, there is another

important theological tie-in that is central to an Adventist identity. As their name implies, Seventh-day Adventists look forward to the second coming of Jesus and take seriously his admonition to proclaim the gospel because it “must be preached in all the world” as a prerequisite to Christ’s return (Matt 28:19-20; 24:14). Bringing students to a knowledge of Jesus and preparing them to bring others to that knowledge is central to the existence of the Adventist university. From this perspective, the work of the church and the work of the university may be seen to be the same.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN COMMITMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

That SDA education focuses on redemption does not obviate the place of academics in the curriculum. Adventist tertiary institutions are not glorified Bible colleges. In spite of the anti-intellectualism which was often a feature of popular religious movements in the 19th century, intellectual development was not neglected within Adventism. Early Adventist leaders did not view ignorance or blind acceptance of the views of others as desirable, responsible, or spiritually wise. God-given rational abilities were to be actively cultivated because

every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think 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 thought. (White, 1903, p. 17)

Between 1910 and the 1930s the Adventist educational system struggled with issues of academic accreditation. There was a genuine fear that accreditation would return Adventist colleges to domination by the curricula in vogue at other popular institutions, in much the same way that Battle Creek College had been dominated by the classics. By the late 1930s the debates had taken place, and the actions had been voted (though in some circles the arguments have not yet ended). There was a general recognition that, if graduates from Adventist institutions were to make professional contributions “in joyful service to God and humanity”—for example, as teachers or medical doctors—then accreditation was a necessity. The presidents of the colleges in North America bravely and actively pursued accreditation, some at first without board approval. In the last 60 years, however, there has been no serious attempt by denominational or institutional leaders to turn aside from accreditation. To the contrary, there has been a push for high academic standards at all levels of Adventist education, along with a full range of accredited course offerings in the church’s tertiary institutions. The model followed is that of the Christian liberal arts institution. This model allows for a general educa-

tion curriculum focused on holistic personal development, with a particular emphasis on the purposes and concerns of Adventist education. The model also easily accommodates the professional courses needed to prepare for "service in this world," without of course neglecting a preparation for the "higher joy of wider service in the world to come."

COMMITMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN SERVICE TO A WORLD CHURCH

In the space of just over a century and a quarter since the first official Adventist school was opened, the denomination has developed an international educational network of over 6,000 institutions, 100 of which operate at the tertiary level (General Conference, 2001). In 2001, the Adventist church operated 99 colleges and universities around the world, with 75,000 students and over 8,000 employees. The totals for elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels combined are 6,300 institutions, with 1.2 million students and 77,000 employees. The stimulus for the development of this international network of schools, colleges, and universities has historically been centered in the US. While the truest model may have been an Australian "experiment," the examples of the American colleges, as well as the personnel and finances to establish overseas schools, have often come from the US. In addition to local approval wherever possible, accreditation and quality control of the overseas institutions of higher education have been through the Adventist Accrediting Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at the church headquarters located in the US.

In recent years it has become possible in many countries to obtain government accreditation for SDA educational institutions. In instances where the governmental demands of foreign countries have been contrary to the mission of the church or in situations where no government recognition of private institutions is yet allowed, the North American universities have continued to support their overseas sister institutions. Affiliations with North American institutions have at times been the only avenue of providing students with recognized degrees. The commitment to quality education at home and abroad is affirmed by the work of these North American institutions. The Adventist Accrediting Association and a number of the US-based higher educational institutions invest a significant proportion of their human and financial resources in developing, maintaining, and implementing an educational vision in support of overseas schools. In addition to the affiliation programs already noted, there is collaboration in offering extension schools, consultants from North America advise administrators on fledgling overseas campuses, students in North American colleges are encouraged to offer a year of volunteer service to overseas institutions, deserving students are sponsored to complete advanced degrees and return to leadership positions in their home

countries, and a host of other initiatives too numerous to mention are implemented on an ongoing basis. The North American colleges and universities have established their own "mission field" abroad.

NORTH AMERICAN SDA HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTED TO A CAUSE

Before turning attention to the issue of maintaining Adventist distinctives, a brief description of Adventist higher education in North America appears to be in order. Generally, a Christian liberal arts and science curriculum is followed at the undergraduate level. There are, however, a number of professional programs as well. Pre-medical and pre-law courses are common, and there are numerous professional business and nursing programs as well as some engineering and physical therapy courses. At the graduate level, depending on the institution, there are both masters and doctoral programs. Graduate programs are focused largely on theological studies, professional education and the related field of psychology, and health and medicine. In keeping with the original purposes of the denomination, several of these focus areas prepare graduates who are able to serve in denominational leadership roles.

In the US and Canada, there are 15 tertiary level institutions approved and accredited by the Adventist Accrediting Association. These institutions are also accredited by their appropriate regional accrediting bodies. The enrollment of these colleges and universities was reported in 2001 to be 20,489. Faculty members and staff number 1,573. Though each institution is autonomous, there is considerable collaboration, including meetings of senior administrators; shared academic programs, information technology, and on-line curriculum initiatives; and shared professional gatherings.

Adventist tertiary institutions in the US invest heavily in their faculty and plants, and the distinct impression one gains is that, while times may be hard, Adventist educational administrators are planning an extended and productive future.

MAINTAINING A DISTINCTIVE ADVENTIST SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

It is both wise and humbling to remember the words of Solomon when he said that "there is nothing new under the sun." To claim that Adventist education is unique may be presumptuous. As a denomination, Adventists have learned a great deal about education from others. Some might even consider Adventist education to be a primary example of eclecticism. However, the interchange has not been one-sided, for Adventism has given as well as taken. If the elements of the system are not unique, SDA education is at least dis-

tinctive in how it has synthesized these elements in its educational approach.

A temptation that comes when success is achieved is to bask in its glory and become complacent about putting forth the effort to continue in the path of distinctive excellence. SDA tertiary institutions currently find themselves at a crossroads that demands a decision. Failure to make a decisive choice will mean taking the path of least resistance which has been clearly documented in the pages of educational history. The almost universal pattern is for religious institutions to follow a steady shift toward secularism which ultimately negates the purpose for their existence as parochial entities (Knight, 1990; Marsden, 1994). There are but a small number of exceptions to this rule, and the challenge for Adventist educational leaders is clear.

DISTINCTIVENESS THROUGH FACULTY COMMITMENT

In addition to the Adventist claim to uniqueness in education, there is another matter in which SDA educators appear to have been presumptuous. This is in delineating the purpose of Adventist education in the context of the claim that "education and...redemption are one" (White, 1903, p. 30). The School of Education at Andrews University, a leading Adventist institution, has as its theme statement, "To educate is to redeem." This assertion comes close to suggesting that Adventist educators are redeemers, which is of course a blasphemous concept. In reality, the claim is neither a presumption nor a blasphemy, but a stupendous challenge for teachers to be laborers together with God. In this sense the teacher is an ambassador for God through whom God may choose to work his redemption. The mission and purpose of Adventist education is therefore a challenge to all Adventist teachers to become so committed to the service of God that, through their influence and under the guidance of his Spirit, the work of education and redemption will be united.

It becomes obvious that Adventist education is an ideal to be approached rather than a reality already achieved. Ideals can be mere castles in the air, or the source of dynamic, motivating forces that spur humans on to achieve superhuman results. To a large degree, this moving power is a personal one arising out of an individual's relationship with God. But God seems also to work in and through communities, and the Adventist church as a community of believers has developed some corporate strategies supporting the effort to reach the ideal.

DISTINCTIVENESS FACILITATED THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

Adventist educational leaders are committed to a system that is both centralized and decentralized. This paradox makes possible the local control of day-to-day operations, which allows for ownership by on-site personnel, cultural contextualization, and the energizing influence of the Holy Spirit (who

appears to like decency and order but seems stifled by layers of bureaucracy inhibiting his activity among individual teachers and administrators).

A centralized department of education helps maintain philosophical integrity and academic excellence through its accreditation processes. The department also fosters a sense of institutional collegiality and a common identity which is so important in the extended network of institutions that the SDA educational system has become. The leadership of the Department of Education at the world headquarters is focused on maintaining this commitment to an Adventist educational enterprise.

DISTINCTIVENESS FOSTERED BY ORGANIZATIONAL INITIATIVES

In order to foster its distinctive educational program and to encourage the commitment of its teachers, the church works through the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on a number of programs to foster the maintenance of an integrated and unified system of education. The following are examples of current initiatives:

1. In 1987, the Institute for Christian Teaching was established to promote excellence in education. This institute has sponsored faith and learning seminars for leading educators and outstanding teachers around the world. Seminar participants explore the interrelationship between faith and reason within a world-view framework that accepts God as Creator and therefore sees all of creation as a proclamation of his truth. Seminar participants are required to submit a significant piece of research related to the integration of faith and learning. These papers and reports are collected and published in a series entitled *Christ in the Classroom*, of which there are now more than 20 volumes (Institute for Christian Teaching, 1987). The dream is that the distinctive doctrines of the Bible as understood by the Adventist church, the belief that "all truth is God's truth" (Holmes, 1977, p. 8), and the challenge of complete personal commitment, will lead to the fulfillment of the ideals of Adventist education in the classrooms and lecture halls of SDA institutions in North America and around the globe.
2. Starting in 1996, the Department of Education of the General Conference actively promoted the ideas set forth in an extended document challenging the church to Total Commitment. A section of this document relates specifically to higher education, and meetings have been called for college and university presidents, academic vice-presidents, and student services directors to participate in intensive planning on how to achieve the "total commitment" of their institutions in accomplishing the mission and purpose of Adventist education. The aim has been to encourage each institution to develop a spiritual master plan with the objective of reducing "dissonance" in the messages students receive in their campus experiences. If a student hears in the classroom day after day that high academic achievement means high earning power and that this is the pathway to happiness; and if the entertainment the student enjoys

on campus teaches her that indulging in activities not sanctioned by God's law is fun and brings happiness; and then for one hour a week in church that same student hears a sermon telling her that self-sacrifice and moral living bring happiness, to which message will she most likely listen? The fact is that a Christian institution must be a vibrant living-learning center, where the educational message is packaged in a challenging, all-pervasive, Christian approach. *A Guidebook for Creating and Implementing a Spiritual Master Plan on Seventh-day Adventist Campuses of Higher Education* was completed in 1999.

3. Assessment of the master plan demands assessment of how well the mission of Adventist education has been accomplished in the lives of students who attend Adventist tertiary institutions. Research conducted at Andrews University has pioneered the way in this very challenging work of spiritual assessment. Some argue that spirituality cannot be assessed, and it is acknowledged that only God reads the heart. But the Bible does suggest that a follower of Christ may be known by the fruits he or she produces. The strategy is therefore not to measure the heart, but to measure the fruits, and in this way to judge the effectiveness of the process of education. These assessment initiatives are all contributing to the development of a focused, intentional Adventist system of higher education in which distinctiveness and commitment are harnessed in a strategic plan aimed at an ideal in which education and redemption may become one.
4. From April 7-9, 2001, an International Conference on the Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education was hosted by the Department of Education of the SDA church. In addition to papers being read, there was a focus on refining a "Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy" (Department of Education, 2001). The statement was developed over a period of several months with participation by some of the denomination's leading ideologues in educational philosophy. At the conference the statement was discussed and refined. After input has been processed from all interested parties, the intention is to vote this statement as an official document of the SDA church. The statement consists of five pages of intensive reading. It includes basic theological assumptions, a clearly theistic statement of educational philosophy, and a description of the various agencies of education in the church—only one of which is the system of formal education. Focusing on this formal system, the key components and outcomes are delineated for each level of schooling, including higher education. The "Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy" is intended as a resource and guide for Adventist educational institutions as they enter the new century. The purpose of remaining relevant as an educational system is, in this statement, related directly to reaffirming the principles that have been a hallmark of Adventist education in the past. SDA education is by no means buried in the past, but its objectives remain true to the principles that have guided it since its inception. The aim and mission outlined in the new philosophy statement, though presented in modern language, remain true to established ideals: "Adventist education prepares students for a useful and joy-filled life, fostering friendship with God, whole-person development, Bible-based values, and

selfless service in accordance with the Seventh-day Adventist mission to the world" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 2). One of the "key components" in the philosophy statement is curriculum. Again, the concepts accord with principles that have distinguished Adventist education through the years:

The curriculum will promote academic excellence and will include a core of general studies needed for responsible citizenship in a given culture along with spiritual insights that inform Christian living and build community. Such citizenship includes appreciation for the Christian heritage, concern for social justice, and stewardship of the environment. A balanced curriculum will address the major developmental needs in the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and vocational realms. All areas of study will be examined from the perspective of the biblical worldview, within the context of the Great Controversy [cosmic conflict] theme, as it promotes the integration of faith and learning. (Department of Education, 2001, p. 3)

The *Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy* is evidence of the commitment of the SDA church to remaining a player in the field of higher education in the future.

5. The *Journal of Adventist Education* is an award-winning professional publication of the SDA church. The journal does not focus on North America or higher education in particular, but frequently deals with pertinent issues. In its 65th volume in 2003, with five issues per year, the journal boasts a long record of commitment to excellence. Educators at all levels receive copies of this journal, and its arrival on a regular basis provides timely reminders of what the denomination is trying to achieve through its educational program. The journal is in fact a valuable resource for the continuing professional development of Adventist teachers. Continued investments by denominational headquarters in projects like the journal are further confirmation of commitment to the Adventist educational endeavor.

DISTINCTIVE GRADUATES IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

The initiatives undertaken by the leadership of the SDA educational system presuppose a purposeful strategy of positioning Adventist education, including higher education, to meet the needs of the future. These needs may be more broadly defined than in the past. There is certainly a desire to be of greater service to the community at large. But the overarching mission of SDA education remains the same. Adventist colleges look to a bright future in preparing graduates who are first and foremost committed Christians. These graduates will ideally see every person in need as a neighbor and as an embodiment of Christ, the suffering servant. It was Christ who said "Whatever you do to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done to me" (Matt 25:40), and Adventist higher education seeks to instill in the heart and mind of each of its graduates that the whole world is full of brothers and

sisters. In addition to an attitude of service, each graduate will ideally be a scholar informed by faith and a trustworthy professional in his or her field of endeavor. Finally, each graduate will ideally live a life of moral integrity in which the distinctiveness of Seventh-day Adventism is clearly manifest.

In a postmodern world where the only absolute tolerated is that there are no absolutes, the Adventist educational system still looks to the future with a firm belief that God is in charge and that he has given us instructions according to which it is wise for us to live. The church remains committed to the transmission of its religious heritage to future generations, for the biblical imperative is to teach "you, your children, and their children after them" (Deut 6:2, NIV). This understanding places upon the church, its members, and its educational system, the duty and privilege of touching the lives of students so they may understand that, in this life, true happiness will only be found in commitment to the Christ who offers his salvation through faith alone. Christ, having saved, exhorts his followers: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15, KJV), which commandments, he avers "are not burdensome" (I John 5:3, NIV). These commandments, according to Adventist interpretation, encompass observance of God's law including the seventh-day Sabbath in a manner that brings honor to the Creator; healthful living (hence no alcohol, no smoking, restrained use of drugs for medicinal purpose only, and a wholesome and scrumptious vegetarian diet); and a life planned with much to be accomplished in the years ahead but lived as though Jesus might return today. What may appear at first to be a narrow, stifling approach to life becomes, through education and by experience, a beautiful flight into the realms of the divine. Perchance these realms may be the only place where true freedom can be enjoyed. By personal experience, the graduate will discover that the process of education and the process of redemption have indeed become one.

Adventism is committed to the joy of opening up to the students in its schools the possibility of such an experience. It is also committed to preparing professionals who can pass on a heritage of academic and faith-oriented learning to our children and their children after them. Adventist higher education is an integral part of the strategy to accomplish this goal. The high honor of being involved in this work of education and redemption is such that it will ensure the commitment of the Seventh-day Adventist church to higher education "until the Lord comes."

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Maintaining the Adventist identity in SDA higher education has never been an easy task. There has always been a dynamic tension between the peculiar mission of the church as it administers its colleges and the influence of popular culture. Adventist colleges and universities are pressured on the one hand

by conservative forces seeking to uphold the “purity of the faith,” and on the other hand by an inclination to liberalize and change with the times. The dilemma is to know whether a fundamental principle is at stake or whether the innovation is merely a matter of modern preference which poses no threat to theological and philosophical integrity.

THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING RESOURCES

The first concern of most administrators is the “bottom line.” Financial challenges are brought about by the desire to remain current in a variety of curricula, some of which require expensive technologies. SDA educational philosophy demands excellence, which may be a costly goal. An additional financial challenge is maintaining a dedicated, quality faculty in an open labor market. Over time the compensation package for college professors has moved from the “sacrificial wage” of the pioneers to the “living wage” of the latter half of the 20th century. Recently there has been a need to move toward a competitive wage, and naturally this places severe demands on limited budgets.

Financial pressures force administrators to look for options. Some options may be harbingers of grave danger for institutional identity. A search for funding outside the coffers of the church may open a door to financial freedom, which will strike joy to the heart of any college president. But there is always the danger that such freedom will loosen ties with the historic purpose of an institution. SDA college administrators in North America will face some tough decisions and may be called on to demonstrate considerable “holy wisdom” and restraint.

As a further consequence of the financial pressures faced by college administrators, there has been a concerted move to market Adventist higher education to a constituency beyond the membership of the church. This has been effective especially at the university level. For much of Adventist history, “outsiders” on the campus would have caused alarm among administrators. Now there is a growing acceptance that this is a necessary and beneficial development. It is encouraging to observe this “coming of age” of Adventist institutions of higher learning in the US, but the growing-up process is not without its dangers, as has been documented by the history of many other formerly religious institutions (Marsden, 1994).

THE CHALLENGE OF ADAPTING TO A POSTMODERN WORLD

The challenge of operating a conservative Christian institution in a postmodern society may also be identified as an opportunity. Throughout the time Adventists have been involved in education, in the halls of the academy a theistic worldview has been marginalized in favor of a naturalistic understand-

ing. Postmodern attitudes have not significantly changed the naturalistic assumptions of present-day philosophy. However, postmodernism has called into question the metanarratives of every philosophical approach, including the naturalistic assumptions of the modern, scientific world in which academia reveled for much of the 20th century. The postmodern view is that there is no absolute, not even a scientific one. As a consequence, there are no unmovable anchors to be relied upon, and the most practical solution is to hail the best “storyteller” as guru. Postmodernism has not made great inroads into the leading minds of the scientific academy, but it is the worldview of many students, even on a conservative, Christian campus. The opportunity provided by this new philosophical milieu is that it opens to the Christian campus the opportunity of telling the best story. If Christianity can be communicated as joyful, authentic, and fulfilling—even if at first its message is seen as just one more story—it is possible for the Christian college to make a significant impact on the students who frequent its hallowed halls. It may take humility to be a storyteller among storytellers rather than the channel of absolute truth, but humility becomes the Christian. The important point is this: Whether it be the “story” or “truth” of redemption, the Adventist institution must proclaim its message clearly and well to remain true to its ideals.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

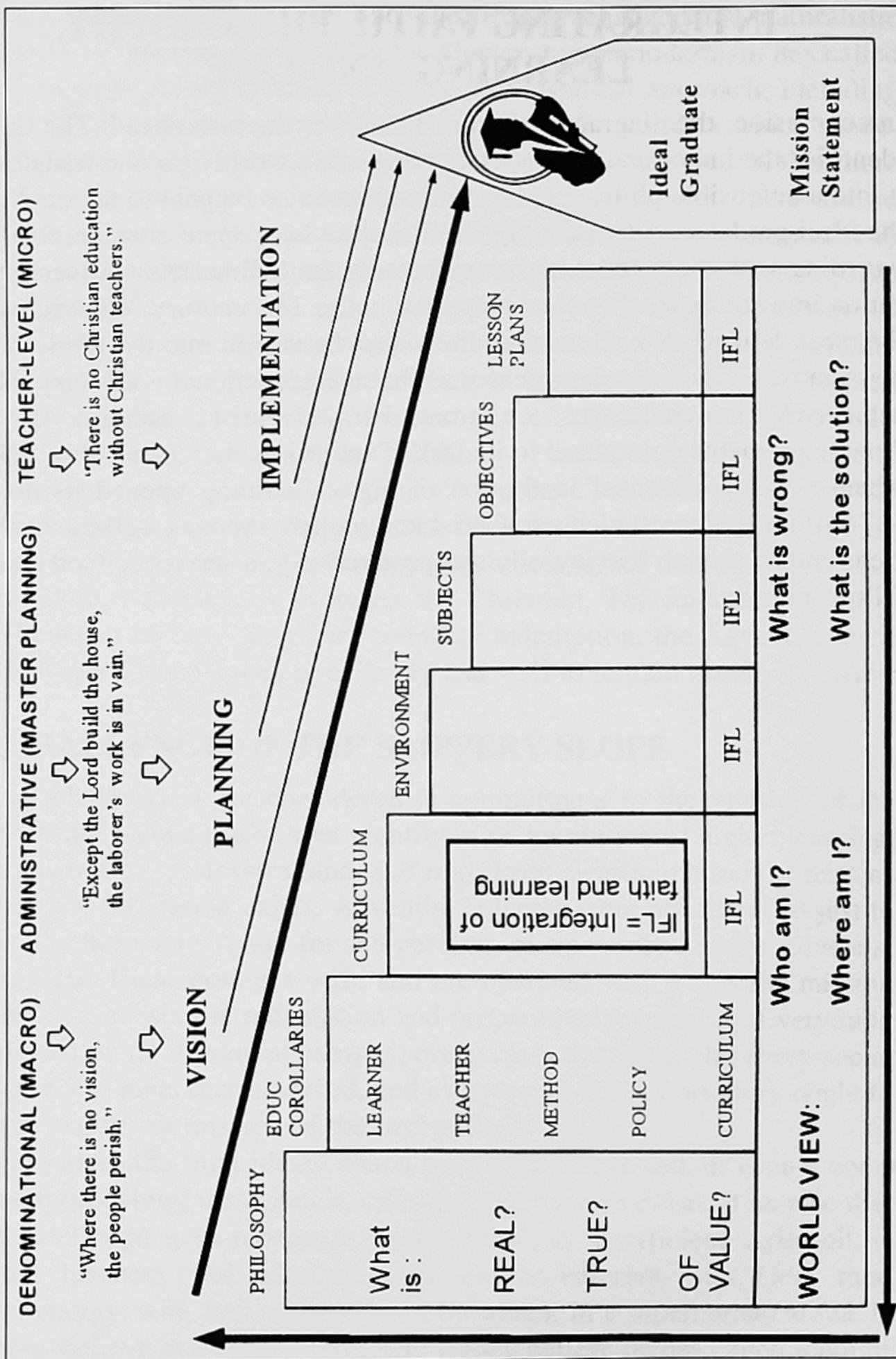
The final challenge to be considered is commitment to the mission of the church. To maintain an Adventist identity in an institution of higher learning, the administrators, professors, and staff must keep clearly in mind the reasons for which the institution exists. Adventist colleges were not intended just to provide an alternative venue for the children of upwardly mobile Adventist professionals. These colleges were and are operated with a specific mission in mind. That mission is redemption and preparation for service. Everything that happens on an Adventist campus, every class that is taught, every social program, every meal that is served, and every event in the dormitory ought to be intentional to the mission of the institution.

To maintain the high ideals which have been suggested, or even a commitment approaching these ideals, calls for superhuman effort. It may be that the real challenge is to recognize human effort as insufficient. After all, if Adventist teachers and administrators are co-laborers with God, then strength, energy, will, and purpose must be sought in a superhuman arena. If Adventists believe that God is God, and if they believe he has called them to special service in preparation for Christ’s return (as they do), then they are also called to an exercise of great faith. They must believe God is willing and able to do all he has promised and that, though there may be setbacks, his plans will ultimately succeed. With this faith in God and the future, Adventists look to maintain and develop their institutions of higher learning.

INTEGRATING FAITH, PHILOSOPHY, LEARNING, AND LIFE

In conclusion, the diagram in Figure 1 outlines the task ahead. The diagram identifies the importance of understanding one's worldview and transforming it into a defensible philosophy. Attention must also be paid to the qualities of the ideal graduate. Adventist higher educators have spent considerable effort wrestling with these ideas and transforming the hallmarks of Adventist education into strategies that can be applied in the 21st century. What remains is the most delicate task. How shall the vision be woven into the fabric of each class and activity by each professor so that the educational goals may truly be achieved? The challenges are great, but Adventist education in North America remains committed to its task. That task is the same today as it was when the first Adventist institution of higher learning opened its doors in 1874—to introduce students to Christ and prepare them as well-educated citizens empowered to live joyfully and productively in service to God and their fellow humans.

Figure 1
The Task Ahead for Adventist Higher Education



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