
THE ADVENTIST SCHOOLS: DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES

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The Seventh-day Adventist denomination operates schools and colleges around the globe. Beginning in 1853 with a small home school, the church's system includes over 4,500 elementary and 1,100 secondary schools, as well as 95 colleges and universities. This article briefly presents the development of this system and the philosophy that undergirds the education offered by the schools. Maintaining the unique identity of the Adventist schools is a special challenge for the future. Other challenges faced by the schools are briefly discussed.

The Seventh-day Adventist church operates a network of schools that circles the globe. This system includes 4,598 elementary and 1,115 secondary schools, 95 colleges and universities, and 38 training institutes. These institutions serve over a million students (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 2001). The denomination that operates these schools has just over 11 million members in 204 of the 229 countries that are recognized by the United Nations. While the schools are international in scope, they are linked by a common philosophy, a common administrative structure, and a common heritage. An organization of institutions rather than a group of independent congregations has evolved from the hierarchical structure of the denomination. The schools, then, are interconnected in a system rather than freestanding entities.

The Adventist church arose out of the religious ferment of the mid-19th century (Spalding, 1961). When members of a number of denominations were expelled for their newfound belief in the literal coming of Christ, they had no intention of forming a new faith community. But Christ did not come as predicted, and those who stayed together after the Great Disappointment

found much in common as they continued to study the scriptures together. By 1863, the group embraced the belief that formal organization was a necessity (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 1995).

The fledgling denomination chose the name Seventh-day Adventist because of the two distinctive doctrines that were at the core of their belief. They accepted the literal interpretation of the fourth precept of the Decalogue as requiring a true believer to "keep" the seventh day of the week holy as the Sabbath. They also looked for the visible return of Jesus Christ to this earth, although they no longer believed that Bible prophecy identified the exact time of that return. During its formative years, the church developed three major institutions that marked its work not only in the United States but also throughout the world as its mission program advanced. Where the Adventist church is found there will be schools, health care institutions, and publishing houses. It is the denomination's schools—their development, philosophy, and challenges for the future—that form the purpose of this article.

Seventh-day Adventist education began in 1853 in a five-family school that met in a home in Bucks Bridge, New York (Cadwallader, 1958). Officially the first church-sponsored elementary school opened its doors in 1872 in Battle Creek, Michigan and a college was founded on the same site two years later (Vande Vere, 1972). The purpose of Battle Creek College was to provide training for ministers and other workers for the growing denomination. Such ministerial preparation was primary in the church's early schools. However, as membership grew so did the conflict the children of the church faced in public schools of the day. The strange new doctrines of the church, which may not be far from the mainstream in today's liberal society, evoked much public ridicule in the 19th century. Adventist youth found respite from derision for their faith only in the comfort of the church's schools. Thus, the system of schools came to augment the educational program offered by a growing number of colleges.

In 1874, the Adventists sent their first denominationally sponsored missionary from the shores of North America (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 1995). John N. Andrews and his two children left Boston for the European continent to spread the Adventist faith. While the church missionary program has never been very successful in Europe, it has had notable success in other parts of the world. By 1920, almost half of the 185,000 Adventists were outside the United States. By 1950, only a third of the members were in the United States. Today nearly 95% of the Adventist membership of nearly 12 million is found in other parts of the world (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 2001). While the Adventist schools and colleges are found around the globe, much of the focus of this article is on the schools in the United States and Canada.

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Adventist schools were at first quite small, not unlike many of the public schools in the 19th century. A teacher and a few students meeting sometimes in the home of a member or the basement of the church was common. And like the public schools, teachers in the Adventist schools were frequently lacking in special training for educational work. However, while professionalization of the teaching force soon came to public education, it was well past the midpoint of the 20th century before Adventists required their elementary and secondary teachers to have any special qualifications. Today it is uncommon for an Adventist teacher not to have a teaching certificate, and advanced education for the K-12 teacher is becoming the norm.

Adventist education has a distinctive philosophy. While not antagonistic to national goals supported by public schools, Adventist schools have a religious agenda that must also be maintained. To this end, the church has attempted to provide basic teacher training to a cadre of personnel to fill the needs of the 1,000 elementary and 80 secondary schools in the United States and Canada. In all the church's liberal arts colleges and universities in those two countries, teacher education is a major department. In addition to the educational program required for state licensure, students are required to take several courses in religious studies (*Andrews University Bulletin*, 2000-2001). The purpose is to prepare them not only to teach, but to teach in an Adventist school. Such teachers, then, are familiar with the history and doctrines of the church as well as the distinct philosophy of Adventist education. Thus, the church is able to preserve and pass on its culture to the youth through the agency of the school.

This process of cultural transmission does not stop with K-12 schools, for the church operates several institutions of higher education in the United States and other countries. With the exception of Loma Linda University, which specializes in the medical arts, Adventist colleges are liberal arts institutions. Leading these is Andrews University, the descendent of Battle Creek College, with specialties in business, education, technology, and theology as well as the arts and sciences. All employees of these institutions must be members of the Adventist church in good standing (*Andrews University Working Policy*, 1996), which again ensures that the culture of Adventism is maintained.

Maintaining a qualified faculty and staff for several colleges and universities has been a challenge, yet the church has been true to its philosophy in doing so. Rarely is a person not of the faith employed, and then only for special circumstances. One cannot integrate faith with learning while being an unbeliever. During the early years of Adventist history, this was a particular challenge as the number of members with scholarly credentials was quite limited; but in more recent years the church has been notably successful in main-

taining a high quality teaching faculty at its institutions of higher education. Thus the faith is perpetuated for Adventist youth.

K-12 SCHOOLS

Because the population of church members in America has never been large, the Adventist schools have typically been quite small with a large percentage of those in this country being one-room schools. While there has been concern expressed among some members regarding the efficacy of such an educational environment, children who attend the small schools with multi-grade classrooms have over the years scored well on tests of academic achievement. Teachers get special training at the Adventist colleges for teaching in small schools, as curriculum is modified to accommodate such a setting (Plemons, 2000).

The secondary schools have also been quite small. In the 19th century with the membership numbering just a few thousand and geographically scattered, the boarding high school became a necessity. At first the youth lived with families in the community, but eventually dormitories were built on the school campus with one faculty member living in each building. The schools were coeducational, which meant a strict control of social activities was necessary to maintain the standards of Christian conduct espoused by the church. Dating was carefully regulated and public display of affection was forbidden. Maintaining such a regimen has been problematic in more recent years.

Nineteenth-century Adventists were primarily farmers or from the working class. Not many people of means were attracted to the church. Families found it very difficult to afford the financial constraints of a private education, especially at a boarding school. To address this financial situation, the secondary schools developed work-study programs through which a student could earn a portion of the cost of attendance. Since the agrarian economy was dominant at the time, it was natural that school farms should be a popular source of employment. Wages earned went to pay tuition while any profits earned supported the operating expenses of the school. Other industries such as print shops, bakeries, and broom-making factories were developed as part of the school operation. In the 1950s the denomination acquired the Harris Pine furniture-making operation and developed satellite factories at several Adventist schools (Utt, 1967), which provided employment opportunities for Adventist students for 30 years.

The pragmatics of work were not enough for Adventist leaders. Very early they developed a philosophy that valued the dignity of work (E. G. White, 1948b), and manual labor became almost a part of the religion at both the secondary schools and colleges. In many Adventist schools it was mandatory to hold a part-time job, even for students who had no financial need to do so. Most of the secondary boarding schools still have a work program and

arrange the class schedule to accommodate part-time employment. However, with the growth of day schools, the philosophy of work seems to be fading away. The work programs are also diminished on the college campus. The prevalence of grants and student loans has lessened the need for students to be employed to pay their school costs. One might also suspect that labor no longer carries the aura of dignity it once did for either society at large or Adventist believers.

Early Adventist schools were frequently operated by a group of families or the local congregation. As the denomination grew in membership a more formal organization developed. Several congregations were organized into a conference, usually within a geographical region such as a state. Several conferences formed a union and, in turn, several unions formed a division. The North American Division is comprised of nine unions in the United States and Canada. The schools are organized along the same lines as the churches. Currently they have a dual governance system being operated jointly by the local congregation and the conference of which that congregation is a part. The local church or churches that operate the school are responsible for finances and daily operating policy. The conference employs the teachers and is responsible for educational policy. The Union typically develops employment and educational policy, which is accepted by the conference administrators, while the outline of curriculum for all Adventist schools is formed at the division level. While such a structure might seem overly complex, it has allowed for a great deal of local control for school operations while ensuring stability in personnel matters and continuity in curriculum.

Secondary schools also have a similar system of governance. The boarding schools are operated by the conference while day schools are usually under the control of a congregation or more often a group of congregations that have a cooperative agreement to run the school. These are usually K-12 in scope. The conference director of education (superintendent) provides administrative support while exercising a minimum of line authority. Personnel policy as well as curriculum is under the same system as that of the elementary schools. As with the elementary schools, the structure has resulted in a great deal of flexibility while maintaining the advantages of a systems approach to school governance.

PHILOSOPHY OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION

Adventist schools are supported by a unique philosophy. Philosophy can be defined as the love of wisdom (Ozmon & Craver, 1999). And wisdom is summed up in answering the questions: What is real? What is true? What is good? For the Christian, the knowledge of God is the source of such wisdom. Only as one comes to know God as revealed in scripture and the testimony of His Son Jesus Christ can one achieve a meaningful sense of what is true and

what is good. Education in its finest form comes through an understanding of God's plan for this world and the place of humankind in it. For the Christian this is the ultimate reality (Knight, 1998).

Adventist education in a search for a coherent philosophy is driven by a study of the scripture and especially the life of Christ. Any statement must of necessity be Christ-centered and practice must be consistent with the witness of His life. This is a large order because while Christians are not of this world they do live in this world. And as such, things of the world do play a large part in their lives. They cannot become so otherworldly that they are not cognizant of the things around them. Thus, an interaction with secular wisdom must be accomplished in the Christian school. One view is that all knowledge comes from God and therefore there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular (Knight, 1985). Thus, every subject of study in the Christian school is taught from a God-centered perspective. This is or should be the distinctive feature of the Christian school.

THE INFLUENCE OF ELLEN WHITE

Early in Adventist history, believers came to accept the counsels of one young member as having divine origins. The "testimonies" of Ellen White guided the young church in its early formation and organization. While depending entirely on the Bible in the development of church doctrine, leaders of the fledgling denomination gained great insight into both the scriptures and organizational matters by conversing with Ellen White. While some called her a prophet, she never took the title herself. Through intense study of the scripture and much prayer she came to know God in a special way and appears to have been graced with insights into the divine. Although not blessed with much formal education (A. L. White, 1985), she read widely and favored the Adventist church with much counsel. Her writings on education have come to form the basis for an Adventist philosophy of education (E. G. White, 1903, 1913, 1923).

So, where is the place of scripture in the development of philosophy if the writings of Ellen White are so central to that effort? Ellen White gave strong counsel that her works should in no way supplant the Bible. Rather, they should lead one back to a study of the Bible, as she often stated (E. G. White 1980). She practiced what she preached by infusing her written work with statements from scripture and making Bible study a major part of her life. Unfortunately, not all her followers imitated her example. Even to this day some quote her works as if they were scripture. This was never her intent and is certainly not accepted by church leaders today. Nevertheless, the books and numerous other manuscripts dealing with education written by Ellen White have been a major source in the development of an Adventist philosophy of education and remain so today (Douglas, 2001).

A major focus of White's philosophy of education was the integration of faith and learning. The study of the scriptures should be at the heart of all learning, for a knowledge of God is the foundation of all knowledge (E. G. White, 1903). All studies should be infused with such knowledge. Further, the work of educating is a matter of redemption. Humans were created perfect; but, with the introduction of sin, they are now in an imperfect state. They can gain salvation from the destructive forces of sin and be brought back to the original state by coming to know God. This must be the primary focus of the school. In E. G. White's (1903) view, education and redemption are one and the same. Adventist schools then, focus on their spiritual mission as well as the temporal one.

In White's day public education, especially at the tertiary level, focused on classical studies, and little of practical use was included in the curriculum. Somewhat ahead of her time, White suggested that education should be focused on useful knowledge rather than the merely esoteric. And since America was primarily an agrarian society at the time of her early writings, she suggested that agriculture was the ABCs of education (E. G. White, 1948a). Keeping true to the philosophy, early Adventist schools developed school farms that not only provided work opportunities and food for the cafeteria, but also an acquaintance with matters of the soil. This closeness to farm and garden prevailed in Adventist schools far into the 20th century. Eventually church leaders realized the declining utility of farming in an industrialized society, and, confronted with the failing economics of small farming operations, admitted that a focus on agriculture was possibly not consistent with the original emphasis on practicality in White's writings.

TOWARD A FORMAL STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

A major focus of the denomination from its inception has been the gospel commission found in the words of Jesus to his disciples at the end of his ministry: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15 NKJ). Adventists take this charge as their reason to be on this earth (Kibuuka, 2001/2002). The major focus of the organization is to evangelize the world. A focus of the schools is to assist in this work by directly teaching the doctrines of the church and by preparing students for the work of ministry either as professionals or as lay people.

Just after the beginning of this millennium, the Adventist church convened an assembly of educators and other church leaders to revisit a formal statement of philosophy (Rasi, 2001). Presented with a preliminary draft, the 250 delegates assembled from around the world worked on developing a document that would provide guidance to educators as the church's schools faced the realities of a post-modern society. The document, *A Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Educational Philosophy*, (2001) identifies the aim and mission

of Adventist schools in one succinct sentence: "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" (p. 349).

These aims are supported by the following statement of philosophy:

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in nature, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate norm for human conduct and His grace as the means of restoration.

Adventists recognize, however, that human motives, thinking, and behavior have fallen short of God's ideal. Education in its broadest sense is a means of restoring human beings to their original relationship with God. Working together, homes, schools, and churches cooperate with divine agencies in preparing learners for responsible citizenship in this world and in the world to come.

Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. Its time dimensions span eternity. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful. (p. 348)

Writing a coherent statement of philosophy that can be accepted around the world by Adventist educators is a difficult process; however, implementing philosophical thoughts into everyday life is much more difficult. And while Adventist schools have had notable failures in the attempt to keep true to their mission, they have also had notable successes. The University of Montemorelos in Mexico is an example of the intentional application of philosophy to the development of curriculum at an Adventist tertiary institution (Castillo & Korniejczuk, 2001). Results of a recent survey of the K-12 schools in North America indicated that the Christ-centered focus is being emphasized in the physical environment of Adventist schools (Denig & Furst, 2001).

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Adventist schools face a number of challenges in the new millennium. A non-scientific survey I recently conducted among a number of Adventist leaders identified several of these, the most problematic of which is the challenge to maintain the distinct Adventist identity.

Maintaining the Adventist identity in Adventist schools has never been an easy task (Furst & Anderson, 1999). There has always been a dynamic tension between the peculiar mission of the church as it influences the operation of its schools and the influence of popular culture. It takes constant vigilance to be "in" the world without being "of" the world. The schools are pressured both by conservatives who want to preserve the doctrinal purity of the church's founders and by more liberal adherents who want the schools to change with the times. Conservatives in the church frequently equate cultural variations of the last part of the 20th century with doctrinal apostasy and demand that the schools hold firm to the behavioral traditions of the church's founders. Finding the appropriate ground on which to stand as these lifestyle issues are confronted will take a great deal of wisdom on the part of educational leaders (Hernandez, 2001).

The church also must address changing demographics as it considers the future of its schools. Church growth in the United States is primarily among the non-White segment of the population. Attracting these students into an expensive system of private schooling is difficult. Further, while the church has for many years made admirable strides in providing a culturally sensitive curriculum, it has not been successful in staffing the schools with an ethnically diverse teaching force. Another issue is how to deal with the increasing number of children with special needs who ask to be admitted to the Adventist schools (Tucker, 2001).

Additional challenges are found in the declining enrollment faced by many Adventist schools. While Adventist parents place a great value on spiritual matters in education, large numbers of these parents still choose public education for their children because of financial constraints (Mainda, 2001). There is no easy answer to this situation as church resources are already stretched thin and many schools are underfinanced. The church has chosen to maintain a competitive salary scale for its employees, which puts considerable strain on the finances of the school. The primary hope for the future might be to find outside sources of funding to relieve the pressure on tuition payments. One concern, however, is that if the church seeks government financial support, it may be confronted with a regulatory situation that adversely affects its ability to carry out its spiritual mission through the schools. Increasing enrollment through marketing the schools to nonmembers may seriously hamper attempts to maintain the Adventist identity of the schools (Furst, 2000).

Adventist colleges and universities face additional concerns (Matthews & Furst, 2000). Financial constraints are brought about by the desire to stay current in course offerings that require expensive equipment in such fields as science and technology. Adventist philosophy requires its institutions to strive for excellence and the cost of achieving that goal is frequently expensive. An additional challenge is maintaining a high-quality faculty in a wide-open labor market. Over time the compensation package for church employees, including college professors, has moved from the pioneer days' "sacrificial wage" to the "living wage" of the last half of this century. More recently, Adventist institutions, especially at the university level, have felt the need to move toward a competitive wage.

The pressure for increased faculty salaries has a number of consequences. A search for funding outside the coffers of the official church may result in a sense of freedom from the dictates of church administrators.

As the Adventist college or university moves beyond its central mission, it is possible it will have no reason to exist. During the 125 years of their existence, Adventist colleges have maintained a central function in the mission of the church by preserving and passing on to a younger generation both the doctrinal beliefs and the unique lifestyle of the denomination. It will take vigilance to maintain that historic commitment to the work of the church on the part of Adventist higher education.

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 especially effective at the university level. While at one time the student body was almost entirely Adventist, a growing number of students not of the faith have been attracted to Adventist colleges. Sophisticated recruiting, availability of student financial aid, and well-publicized programs of high academic quality are some of the reasons for this change. For much of Adventist history, the influence of "outsiders" on the campus would have caused alarm among administrators. Now there is a growing acceptance that this is a necessary price to pay for the financial stability that results from increased enrollment.

To maintain an Adventist identity in institutions of higher education, administrators, faculty, and staff must keep in mind the reason such institutions exist. They were not formed just to provide an alternative venue for the children of an upwardly mobile middle class. Adventist colleges were and are operated with the specific mission of redemption in all its broader applications. Everything that happens on an Adventist campus, every class that is taught, every devotional service, every social activity, every meal that is served, and every happening in the dormitory or apartment complex must be intentional to that purpose. Otherwise, Adventist colleges and universities will fade into the mists of secularism as have so many other religious institutions in America (Dosen, 2001).

CONCLUSION

Through their short history, Adventist schools have maintained their unique identity in service to the Adventist church. While demographics and popular culture have changed the face of the schools, the heart has never missed a beat. Since the Value Genesis study there has been a renewed emphasis on the part of church leaders to get back to the basics of Adventist education. The redemptive force of education is front and center in all educational circles within the church. Adventist educators remain committed to maintaining the Adventist identity in their schools. The recent update of a philosophy statement by church leaders should give good assistance to that effort.

It is easy for any religious movement to lose its initial fervor after a hundred years of existence. Yet a look at the past should convince even the cynics in the church that the schools have had more than a little divine guidance. They have grown and expanded beyond all expectations. The current financial challenge of the Adventist system is not unique in its history. The church has always reached beyond its means in the establishment and operation of its schools. The same force that assisted the schools in the past will provide help in future times of need. The only fear for the future is as Adventist leaders and members alike forget how God has led them in the past (E. G. White, 1915).

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