

Institute for Christian Teaching  
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MINISTERIAL TRAINING:  
TOWARD AN INTEGRATED WHOLE**

by

Enrique Becerra

Education Department

General Conference

Silver Spring, Maryland

Prepared for the  
International Faith and Learning Seminar  
held at  
Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A.  
June 1993

<p><b>121-93</b> Institute for Christian Teaching 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## INTRODUCTION

The study of integration of faith and learning could appear necessary in almost every field of education with the exception of theology. Theology includes faith; theology analyzes and teaches faith. Why should we worry about integrating faith in theological education?

But Gaebelein says it well: "To declare allegiance to an educational point of view is one thing to integrate a school or college in all its parts... with that point of view is another thing."<sup>1</sup> Visiting Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities, we have found, in the ministerial training program, a frequent tension between a good academic level and the practical aspects of pastoral formation. Theological education needs both elements to accomplish its task. How to keep the balance? How to work in theological education on the 'whole person' that is being prepared for the 'whole ministry'? This is the problem we would like to address in this study.

This paper will deal first with the historical framework related to theological education in America. This context, we think, is a good help in understanding the Adventist background for the problem we face today. The second section deals with the concept of integrated theological education. We are looking to the seminary as the institution to train ministers, and we would oppose it to what we call 'the university model.' We refer by the latter to the school of religion or graduate theological university education, with different objectives from the training of ministers, particularly in the setting of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This study will end with a suggestive list of recommendations for the church and some specific leaders to implement, in the context or the circumstances and characteristics of the area of the world where they serve.

### I. A BRIEF HISTORY

Christian formal theological education began with the catechetical schools of Alexandria (late second century) and Antioch. These centers declined after the eastern Mediterranean area became part of Islamic culture, but by then theological enterprises had begun in Europe. First this happened in the monasteries (fifth century on) and then in schools connected with the large cathedrals (starting in the eighth century). These were succeeded by the universities, beginning with the Sorbonne in Paris in 1257, which offered the liberal arts and sciences in addition to biblical and theological studies.

In the American colonies, Harvard College was established in 1636 to help prepare a literate ministry. The chair of divinity there was established in 1721. Yale College followed in 1756. But it was in 1808 that the first residential theological seminary began offering an advanced three-year education program beyond college. We refer to Andover, followed by Princeton in 1812, Harvard Theological School in 1819, Yale in 1822, etc. At that time "evidence of conversion, high moral character and membership in a congregation were the requirements for admission... Great emphasis was placed on the way students reasoned and argued about the theological controversies that shaped the particular seminary. However, piety was always coordinated with learning, and the two were joined together so as to educate a minister who could command the respect of head and heart."<sup>12</sup>

In the nineteenth century, American theological education received a strong influence from German university schools of theology. Many gifted members of seminary faculties, visiting and working in schools like Halle and Berlin, saw that research rather than ministerial experience was emphasized in making faculty appointments. Another profound difference with American seminaries was the use of the method of 'higher criticism,' or the study of Scripture as a historical set of documents. The research ideal finally modified the earlier seminary ideal. "The university ideal divided the intellectual from the spiritual task and only took full responsibility for the former. This assumption was stated in a landmark conference of leaders convened by the Evangelical Alliance in 1893. Francis Brown of Union (N.Y.) said, 'The theological seminary is not a church, and was not intended for the spiritual training of future ministers, but for their intellectual training.' A century of seminary leaders, back to Andover, would have strongly disagreed."<sup>13</sup>

The Moody revival and the missionary movement of the late nineteenth century led to founding of missionary training schools, Bible colleges, and subsequently several seminaries that provided an evangelical alternative to the liberal seminaries that stressed higher criticism. We pass over the rich period of evaluation, debate, and ferment of American seminaries in the first half of the twentieth century, to take a look at what happened in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Starting about 1870, the leaders of the Adventist Church gave increased attention to the preparation of licensed ministers. At first the practice was to give them some formal instruction, then put the candidate to a test of working, especially in new fields, to grant him finally a license. At that time the instructional courses were mainly short intensive courses given in the local conferences. Uriah Smith was very often the principal instructor.

The opening of Battle Creek College (1874), followed by the rest of American Adventist Colleges covering most of the North American Division territory, gave the church a period of time when efforts to prepare the needed ministers went from short intensive courses to a complete four-year postsecondary training leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. A General Conference action in September, 1918, shows the direction the church wanted the ministerial training to follow:

... the Committee wanted a ministerial course that was more distinctively practical, with emphasis on church administration and evangelism. This was to be accomplished by making a clearer distinction between the ministerial course and the rest of the colleges' undergraduate curricula. Ministerial education was to be "put on a strongly laboratory basis, so that students may have actual experiences in soul-winning during their course of preparation."<sup>4</sup>

The first real steps toward establishing a seminary program for the training of ministers were taken in the early 1930s. The Autumn Council of the General Conference in 1932 voted to establish a school of theology, but the action proved on further study to be premature. Later, in place of an expensive graduate school, a special committee proposed a series of summer schools to be rotated among the senior colleges. The first of the summer sessions, called The Advanced Bible School, was held at Pacific Union College in the summer of 1934. The rotation never happened and the School operated successfully for three summers at PUC, until the General Conference voted in 1936 to establish the seminary in a permanent location in Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.

The new Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary began its activities in the summer session of 1937 "in rooms prepared as classrooms and offices upstairs in the white frame building behind the Review and Herald, which by the next year housed its cafeteria on the first floor, a great convenience for seminary students and faculty. The G.C. chapel was used for seminary convocations, and the G.C. library, plus some purchased books, served as the library of the seminary."<sup>5</sup> The spirit among the leaders and the objectives for this institution can be appreciated in the following words of J. L. McElhany in 1938:

Of all the recent General Conference accomplishments none has given me more satisfaction than the development of our theological seminary. I have greatly rejoiced in the inception and in the development of this school, and that is because I have had a deep and firm conviction that its establishment comes about in answer to a long-felt need. Twenty-six years ago I first came to Washington, and back in those days I heard our leaders giving expression to their conviction that we needed a school of this type... This is a school that serves the whole world... My conception of the purpose of this school is not alone that it should be a place where teachers can do graduate study, but that it shall also give advanced training to ministers, Bible workers, and others who are already in the field of evangelism.<sup>6</sup>

It would be more than interesting to continue remembering the extraordinary history of the seminary, its administrators and faculty, its curriculum, etc. But that is not the purpose of this study. We end this section by underlining the objectives of the seminary work as stated in the Bulletin of Potomac University, 1957-58, presenting the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary as a division of said university:

To provide advanced education and training for those workers or prospective workers of the church whose service is to be primarily spiritual, such as pastors, evangelists, college teachers of religion, missionaries, chaplains, writers and editors of denominational books and periodicals, and Bible instructors;

To offer such courses in graduate study and research as shall contribute to the development in the worker of habits of sound scholarship in Biblical theology, and in cognate and supporting fields in harmony with the teachings, philosophy, and objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination;

To prepare the missionary and mission appointee for more competent service through courses designed to acquaint him with the characteristics and needs of the people among whom he is to labor, and also to acquaint him with the methods of working which have proved successful; and

To provide for the in-service development of denominational workers through short-term courses and workshops in pastoral and evangelistic activities, administrative principles and procedures, public relations, personnel management, institutional board responsibilities, and related fields.<sup>7</sup>

## II. INTEGRATED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

### 1. Concepts of Integration:

Aiming at excellence in SDA theological education could lead us to hear at least two voices. One side will stress academic excellence or a strong intellectual training of the future minister based on scholarly work under the guidance of the best professors, and this is evidently good. From the other side will come the voice of those who defend, with equal merit, the practical skills that a minister will need to face the challenges of his task in the church and in the world. Some will even question the dangers in the development as a Christian spiritual leader of the minister prepared under the first approach.

The tension between a good academic level and the practical aspects of pastoral formation appears to us as a compartmentalized way of looking at theological education. SDA seminaries should not view their task as a tension between theological academic requirements and applied theology. It is not a matter of either-or. Integrated theological education is academic, is practical, and is spiritual at the same time. If rightly applied, it will be simultaneously a learning by precepts and learning by experience. The student will be trained to be like Christ, while studying seriously the Word of God and learning how to do the work of the ministry.

## 2. The university model:

To avoid unbalance toward a scholarly study of religion in the seminary it is necessary to take a look at the university model or the academic study of religion. The historical background already presented showed us that American seminaries in the nineteenth century, received the influence of European universities with a different focus in theological education. "The tradition of theological education in Europe that is firmly maintained by some of the most vigorous schools here has as a central purpose continued research in and additions to the science of theology. In this respect theological education stands among the disciplines of the university pursuing its task of constantly validating and adding to its field of knowledge."<sup>8</sup>

The objectives of these religious studies and the ministerial training in seminaries are different. The problem arises when these objectives get mixed, especially in the seminary setting. Talking about the identity of religious studies, Claude Welch states that historically these studies have been bound up with the propagation of faith and apologetics.<sup>9</sup> "Increasingly, however, except in the religiously conservative institutions, such purposes are being rapidly abandoned in favor of quite different understandings of the role of religious studies.... Confessional claims on either faculty or students have been more and more abandoned."<sup>10</sup>

Of course, studies of religion have their place in the universities. For many, religion is a sociological phenomenon rooted in humanity's need to explain its own existence. It cannot be ignored in human studies. Welch says that, since World War II, "religion has emerged vigorously as a field of studies distinct from theological training in a seminary or divinity school"<sup>11</sup> The problem arises when a seminary or some faculty meld this graduate education with the professional education in their mind. They are two kinds of education with different objectives. "... a professional school that is a graduate school is always being tempted into the pursuit of scholarship to the neglect of the practical needs of the profession it was established to serve; and it rationalizes the neglect by insisting that the profession it serves must be a learned profession. So a question remains as to the proper nature of a graduate professional school, that widely admired and needed hybrid which is required to be two things at once and is continuously in danger of being neither."<sup>12</sup>

But our study focuses on Adventist theological education. Do we face the danger just expressed? It seems so, and actions have been taken not only in the Adventist Theological Seminary located in Berrien Springs, but in other Adventist colleges and universities around the world as well. This is how a critic of these efforts sees them: "In August 1986 the Board of Trustees of Andrews University set up a seminary executive board. That action culminated a series of distinct changes in faculty and curriculum that has profoundly transformed the SDA Theological Seminary from an academic to a professional school. Instead of a community of exploration it has become an instrument of conservation."<sup>13</sup> It is evident that the Board was making clear that the church wanted to have a professional school in the Seminary. The author just quoted states it well when he

later says: "The seminary faculty has the primary responsibility of educating ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Although most of the faculty are trained as scholars in such fields as languages, Biblical studies, and theology, church leaders have increasingly sought to make the seminary more practical and less theoretical. As a result, the seminary has experienced throughout its recent history a tension between academic and professional concerns."<sup>14</sup> We think that this tension is not necessary, if we advance toward an integrated whole in SDA theological education.

### **3. An integrated whole:**

A holistic integrated approach to theological education will show a concern not only for the academic, but also for the spiritual and practical aspects of ministry and leadership training. Dealing with Adventist ministerial training, excellence in this education will mean the development of the whole person into being a servant to his church and his community. This student will be trained to be like Christ, to know the Word of God and to do the work of the ministry. The seminary devoted to this task should be different from schools of religious studies patterned after the university model.

Theological education should aim at training students to become servants of the Lord in His Church and equipping them to serve effectively in the Church. As it involves both 'being' and 'doing' aspects, theological training should be people-centered and task-oriented.

Excellence in theological training should be measured in terms of the servanthood quality which the student possesses and the effectiveness of the ministry which he performs.<sup>15</sup>

The leaders of the SDA Church are right when they struggle to have a professional school to prepare the future ministers in the seminary. All other Boards around the world should do the same in their colleges and universities. But this effort must be accompanied by a clear idea of what integrated theological education should be.

### **4. The whole person:**

The whole person needs to be trained and developed. The mind should be thoroughly nurtured with the best intellectual education. The spirit also must be deeply nourished and the spirituality or relationship with Jesus Christ considered a priority in this training. The body will also be cared for, developing the skills to use it at its best in support of the ministry. This development will avoid unnecessary compartmentalization. Integration is not an attempt to maintain a balance between the academic, the spiritual and the practical as separated aspects. Integration means bringing them together into a whole, and doing them at the same time. The presence of one aspect never implies the absence of the other. Integrated theological education is academic, is spiritual, and is practical. Each aspect necessarily presupposes, implies, or contains the others.

This holistic development gives the future minister a balanced training that will include a well desired capacity. As Ellen White puts it: "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."<sup>16</sup> Frequently the institutions trying to prepare a 'learned professional' transmit to him much knowledge with little challenge to the student to develop his own resources and to become an independent, lifelong inquirer, growing constantly while he is engaged in the work of the ministry. Pusey points to the results of a good training, saying, "Long after graduation, when the minister looks back to his alma mater in grateful remembrance, the teachers whom he values most highly are not the men who supplied him with some pat answers to difficult theological questions. They are the men who taught him to think."<sup>17</sup>

This is the concept of an integrated theological education we need for the training of ministers today. To reach this integrated whole it will require, not only church leaders with a clear vision but also a faculty committed to this task.

### 5. A whole ministry:

We need to insist on the idea of a balanced training for the future ministers of the church. Ellen White presents the three aspects we are analyzing:

With the great work before us of enlightening the world, we who believe the truth should feel the necessity of thorough education in the practical branches of knowledge, and especially our need of an education in the truths of the Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

The words of the living God are the highest of all education. Those who minister to the people need to eat the bread of life. This will give them spiritual strength; then they will be prepared to minister to all classes of people.<sup>19</sup>

An integrated ministry requires from the minister an excellent preparation in the "practical branches of knowledge," a thorough study of the "words of the living God," and as a result of all this training, the possession of "spiritual strength." We are not dealing here with the idea of putting the academic aspect of the work in the seminary behind the practical and spiritual aspects. We agree wholeheartedly with Feilding when he comments:

I have asked many graduates where in the seminary they learned most about the work of the ministry. Their answers are various, but a surprising number look back to a professor on the academic side as the important image in the development of their own practice.... The present system of teaching theory and practice is often haphazard. There is a wide-spread tendency for academic departments (of Bible, history, or theology) to talk about books,

doctrines, movements and characters of the past, and for practical departments to talk about books, doctrines, movements and people of today, adding, perhaps, the sciences which help us to understand them...<sup>20</sup>

An academic subject, taught by an academic professor who understands integrated theological education, will be useful for the minister in the practice of his profession. As one student told us recently: "I would like to study Old Testament Prophets not for the sake of themselves, but to understand the Old Testament message and to preach it faithfully."

What every theology professor should avoid by any means is what was happening to Wellhausen while serving as Professor of Theology in Greifswald (1872-1882). We even admire the courage of the man who made such an impact on higher criticism, for presenting his resignation with the following declaration:

I became a theologian, because I was interested in the scientific treatment of the Bible. It only gradually dawned on me that a Professor of Theology has also the practical responsibility to prepare his students for service in the evangelical church. I, however, am not qualified for this task, because I have made my students unfit for their service, in spite of all restraint which I have exercised.<sup>21</sup>

Seventh-day Adventist theological education has the principal objective of preparing pastors to work as ministers, leaders, and even as religion teachers. In this work, under the seminary model, everyone involved should do all possible to avoid compartmentalization. The academic task must be done in the best possible way, to be helpful for the practice of ministry, building at the same time a strong spiritual life in the student. The applied theological studies should be offered based in good research and study of the theological concepts involved. And every subject and activity of the ministerial training program should develop the faith and the personal relationship of the student with God. Only in this way will the ministerial training of our future pastors be a complete success and the mission of the church be fulfilled.

### **III. Some General Recommendations:**

The purpose of this study would not be accomplished only by stating what integrated SDA theological education should be. It is necessary to look at the natural implications of this integration. We consider this paper a first step in further study necessary to see a basic program developed to serve the world church. Much study needs to be done especially on the profile of the Adventist pastor and on the appropriate curriculum to train that minister, including a complete program of field work. We include here a list of items that should be studied and developed by the church as a whole, or at least by every institution having a ministerial training program:

**Recommendations to the College or University Board:**

1. Develop, with the help of an ad hoc committee, a profile of the minister, and other related professionals, as the church needs today for the specific task in the area of influence of that college or university. This ad hoc committee should have a strong representation of the church at all levels, including the local congregation and the lay persons who are served by the ministers to be prepared.
2. Establish appropriate general objectives for the seminary on the training of ministers.
3. Select carefully the Theology Department Chairman and the professors from among successful ministers with appropriate theological training. A regular recycling of the ministerial experience of these professors should be practiced, to keep them upl to-date in the theory and practice of ministry.

**Recommendations to the Ministerial Training Committee:**

(A permanent committee at the Division or Union level to look for the ministerial training in all its territory)

1. Develop a balanced curriculum built on the base of the profile, to reach every general objective established by the Board and the specific objectives given by the church as a whole, comprised of the Administration of the church, the Ministerial Association, active lay leaders, and professors of theology.

**Recommendations to the Seminary:**

1. Develop a complete program for the ministerial training, working on the curriculum already mentioned, adding all the necessary activities and complementary requisites to produce a balanced, well prepared professional to serve the church and the community.
2. Outline and implement a complete program of guidance and spiritual counseling for ministerial students.
3. Develop a complete program of field work with activities helping the student to practice every aspect of the work in his future profession. This program will be prepared by the area of the church involved and the teachers of the seminary. The implementation of the program will be accompanied, supervised, and evaluated by the professors and the church pastors of the area.

4. Evaluate regularly the complete ministerial training program with participation of faculty, students, academic administration, administration of the church, and lay persons, to make any needed adjustment or change.

## CONCLUSION

There is no need for tension between a good academic level and the practical aspects of SDA theological education. There is need of a clear understanding of what constitutes integration of academic theological studies, applied theological studies, and the spiritual formation of a minister. The integrated whole will have every element included. The right curriculum will reflect this integration, and a good faculty will be indispensable. "The best ministerial talent should be employed in teaching the Bible in our schools. Those selected for this work need to be thorough Bible students, and to have a deep Christian experience..."<sup>122</sup> When these elements are present, many ministerial students will say, as did one student at the seminary in Takoma Park: "I came here after a better knowledge... and for better methods... but I have found that the Lord is after a better man.... I have heard the voice of God through the brethren here in this seminary."<sup>123</sup>

Every participant with a direct or indirect responsibility in the ministerial training of workers will have an important roll in the preparation and implementation of the right curriculum. The administration of the church, the administration of the seminary, the faculty, and the students should work together toward the integrated education of the 'whole person' for the 'whole ministry.'

## NOTES

1. Frank E. Gaebelin, The Pattern of God's Truth, pp. ix-x.
2. John C. Fletcher, The Futures of Protestant Seminaries, p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Gerald Winslow, "Educating Adventist Ministers: History and Hope," p. 5.
5. Leona G. Running and Mary J. Mitchell, "From All the World, Into All the World," p. 10.
6. Ibid., p. 12.
7. Bulletin, Potomac University, Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., 1957-58, p. 53.
8. K. B. Cully, ed. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Education, p. 663.
9. Claude Welch, Graduate Education in Religion, p. 13.
10. Ibid., p. 14.
11. Ibid., p. vii.
12. Nathan M. Pusey, Ministry for Tomorrow, p. 119.
13. Gary Land, "The SDA Theological Seminary: Heading Toward Isolation?," Spectrum, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 38.
14. Ibid., p. 40.
15. Wilson W. Chow, "An Integrated Approach to Theological Education," p. 50.
16. Ellen G. White, Education, p. 17.
17. Pusey, pp. 123-24.
18. Ellen G. White, Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 202, (emphasis supplied).
19. Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 381, (emphasis supplied).
20. Charles R. Feilding, Education for Ministry, p. 13.
21. Taken from Alfred Jepsen, Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament, Berlin, 1958, p. 7. The complete letter is in the chapter, "Wellhausen in Greifswald," in Festschrift der Universitat Greifswald, 1956, vol. 2, pp. 47 ff.
22. Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, vol. 6, pp. 134-35.
23. Running and Mitchell, p. 8.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Association of Theological Schools (The). Theological Education in the 1970's. Dayton, Ohio, 1968.
- Bulletin, Potomac University, Takoma Park, Washington, DC, 1957-58.
- Chow, Wilson W. "An Integrated Approach to Theological Education," in Evangelical Theological Education Today. Paul Bowers, ed., Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1982.
- Cully, I. V., and K. B. Cully, eds. Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990. Articles: "Theological Education" and "Theology and Education".
- De Jong, Arthur J. Reclaiming a Mission: New Direction for the Church-related College. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Farley, Edward. The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- Feilding, Charles R. Education for Ministry. Dayton, Ohio: American Association of Theological Schools, 1966.
- Fletcher, John C. The Futures of Protestant Seminaries. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. The Pattern of God's Truth. Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1968.
- Gangel, Kenneth O., ed. Toward a Harmony of Faith and Learning. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Tyndale College Press, 1983.
- Hough, Joseph and Barbara Wheeler. Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education. Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1988.
- Land, Gary. "The SDA Theological Seminary: Heading Toward Isolation?" in Spectrum, vol. 18, no. 1 (October 1987).
- Pusey, Natham M. Ministry for Tomorrow. New York: Seabury Press, 1967.
- Running, Leona G. and Mary J. Mitchell. "From All the World, Into All the World," Andrews University Focus, vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 1984).

Vyhmeister, Nancy. "Theological Education in the Writings of Ellen G. White,"  
Unpublished paper, School of Graduate Studies, Andrews University,  
February 1978.

White, Ellen G. Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students. Mountain View, California:  
Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1943.

\_\_\_\_\_. Education, Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn.,  
1903.

\_\_\_\_\_. Fundamentals of Christian Education, Nashville, Tennessee: Southern  
Publishing Assn., 1923.

Winslow, Gerald. "Educating Adventist Ministers: History and Hope," unpublished  
paper presented at the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, New Orleans,  
November 16, 1990.

Wood, Charles M. Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study.  
Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1985.