

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**FAITH AND LEARNING AT
BATTLE CREEK COLLEGE, 1874 - 1901**

by
Meredith Jones Gray
English Department
Andrews University

**374-99 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904**

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Introduction

In 1872 a discussion that had been brewing among the founders and leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church erupted in the pages of the denominational paper, the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald: the idea of starting an Adventist college. In a later account Ellen G. White recorded, "For years my husband and myself were greatly exercised in reference to establishing a school . . ."1 The first article to appear on the subject, in the April 16 issue of the Review and Herald, is entitled "A School in Battle Creek" and begins, "These are questions which have been agitating the minds of the brethren in this place more especially for a few weeks past. Shall we take hold, as a people, of the subject of education, and form an Educational Society? Shall we have a denominational school . . .?"2

Attempts had already been made to start a church school on the elementary level in Battle Creek; Robert Holland, Louise Morton, and John F. Byington were pioneers in this effort, according to W. C. White.³ Goodloe Harper Bell had already begun to teach the young people of Battle Creek, both in a church school run during the day and in night classes. Sometimes he was paid for his services and sometimes not. Unable to support a family in this uncertain situation, Bell gave up his educational endeavors to edit the Youth's Instructor.

But, as W.C. White recounts, "At this time, 1869 and 1870, there were a large number of young men and young women of superior ability employed in the publishing house and the health institution. They were constantly pleading for educational advantages. Early morning classes in penmanship, and evening grammar classes were eagerly attended, but the necessity for instruction in Bible doctrines, and the sciences, was urged upon the leaders in the cause" (27). At about the same time as the topic of a denominational college was being discussed in the pages of the Review, Bell was officially hired to teach the young people of Battle Creek. Classes started on June 3 of 1872, both during the day and at night. By July 16, the day school had doubled in size, and 40 to 50 students were taking the evening class.⁴ The school grew to 60 or 70 students by December and started the school year of 1873 with 80 scholars.

But James White had an even bigger vision for the school in Battle Creek, as he explained in his Review and Herald articles. The new school would not be just "a local affair, designed for the children of Sabbath-keepers" in Battle Creek. It would appeal also to "persons all through our ranks, who have come to years of maturity."⁵ On March 11, 1874, at 9:00 a.m., according to Uriah Smith, the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society was formed with the purpose of establishing a denominational college in Battle Creek.⁶ Supporters had already pledged a sum of \$54,000 to the enterprise. The college opened officially under the name Battle Creek College in the fall of 1874; during that year enrollment grew to 289.

As the founders of Battle Creek College, the first Adventist institution of higher education, proposed and discussed their educational venture, they began to articulate their reasons for desiring and creating an Adventist college. They began, in other words, their struggle to integrate faith and learning, to invent a distinctively Adventist brand of higher education.

As direct descendants of these pioneers in Adventist education, we have inherited the dilemmas and issues to which the founders addressed themselves. Late 20th-century discussions of how to integrate Adventist faith and learning are not new and thereby do not take place in an historical vacuum. This essay seeks, through a study of primary sources such as church periodicals, faculty minutes, and college catalogues, to recreate the process by which our predecessors attempted to forge

solutions to the challenge of how to coalesce Adventist faith with higher learning, thereby establishing an historical context for our current discussions of Adventist higher education. By examining the specific case of Battle Creek College during its first 25 years, perhaps we can better understand the roots of our current attitudes and practices, learn from the mistakes made, and benefit from the wisdom gained.

The Idea of an Adventist College

The founders of Adventist higher education vigorously presented to their fellow church members their case for a denominational college. As they laid out their ideas and plans, they stated and restated the purposes of their mission. As we attempt to reconstruct the spirit in which these early Adventist educators launched their educational endeavor, it is important to hear their dreams and ideas in their own words.

In the early literature, the most prevalent reasons stated for establishing an Adventist college were to protect the young people from the immoral influences of worldly schools, to prepare them for work in the Adventist cause of spreading the Gospel, and to teach them prophetic and biblical truth in addition to the subjects commonly taught. George I. Butler, who was president of the General Conference at the time, lays out these purposes in an article entitled "Our School at Battle Creek," which appeared in the Review and Herald in June of 1872:

We want a school to be controlled by our people where influences of a moral character may be thrown around the pupils which will tend to preserve them from those influences which are so common and injurious in the majority of the schools of the present day; and in this school we want a department in which those who would labor in the ministry, or in other public positions of usefulness, may receive that instruction which will qualify them for the duties of those positions.⁷

About a year later, Butler approached the subject again:

Our proposed school, in process of establishment, will also be founded in stability. Our main reason for its formation is that we may have a place where our young people may be taught with more thoroughness, and less of the artificial and showy, than in any place we can now find, and where those influences which poison the fountains of morality and religion may be counteracted. These reasons and the additional one of having a place where the important truths for this time may be taught are the great reasons we have for its establishment.⁸

Other spokespersons for the Adventist educational endeavor also defined the school's mission. In an open letter "To the Students at Battle Creek College" in the Review and Herald, Ellen White looked back on the founding of the school and described it in this way, as an unabashedly counter-cultural enterprise:

For years my husband and myself were greatly exercised in reference to establishing a school in which our youth and children should have advantages of a superior character to those found in the common public schools, or in the colleges of the world. The Lord plainly specified as to what should be the character of influence and instruction the school should maintain, in order that the important work might be accomplished for which the school was designed. As the knowledge and fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it was necessary that the study of the Bible should have a prominent place among the various branches of scientific education. . . . One reason why it was necessary to establish institutions of our own was the fact that parents were not able to counteract the influence of the teaching their children were receiving in the public schools, and the error there taught was leading the youth into false paths. . . . In our institutions there was to be exerted an influence that would counteract the influence of the world, and give no encouragement to indulgence in appetite, in selfish gratification of the

senses, in pride, ambition, love of dress and display, love of praise and flattery, and strife for high rewards and honors as a recompense for good scholarship. (17)

She ends her statement to the students saying, “For this reason our schools have been established, that youth and children may be so educated as to exert an influence for God in the world” (18).

James White focused most often on Battle Creek College as preparation for men and women to contribute to the Adventist cause. He wrote in 1872,

We have long felt the want of a denominational school, for the especial benefit of those who feel it to be their duty to dedicate their lives to the cause of God as teachers of his word. One of the principal objects of such a school would be a thorough course of instruction in the fundamental principles of the faith and hope of Seventh-day Adventists.⁹

But even in his unwavering vision of this purpose for the new school, James White wrestled with a sense of urgency versus a desire for excellence in training workers for God. He addressed the General Conference session on March 11, 1873:

We want a denominational school, if you please; not, as I have said to give men and women a long course of thorough education. I do not know as we have time for this. But we want a school in which the languages, especially the spoken and written languages of the present day can be taught, and learned by young men and women to prepare them to become printers, editors, and teachers; and, if we can do no more, where our young men that are about entering the ministry, and women, too, who are to be laborers in this great work, can be instructed thoroughly in the common branches, where their minds can be disciplined to study, where, if it is not for more than three months, our young men may have the best instruction, and may, during that time, at least, learn how to study.¹⁰

Of all the statements of purpose concerning the proposed college, this last by James White most keenly reflects the tension between a commitment to the pressing cause of the faith and a dedication to the importance of clear thinking and critical study as fostered by learning. The tension is so great that he actually becomes entangled in seeming contradictions. He begins by saying that they do not want “a long course of thorough education” but ends by hoping that the students preparing for the ministry “can be instructed *thoroughly* [emphasis added] in the common branches,” if only for three months!

The authors may emphasize different aspects of the school’s mission, but the same three concepts emerge time and again: Battle Creek College as protection against worldly influences, both social and intellectual; Battle Creek College as training school for church workers; and Battle Creek College as purveyor of Adventist truth. How did the new college attempt to fulfill the ideals and visions of its originators? When it came to creating a social and intellectual atmosphere, running a school program, and designing a curriculum, how did the presidents and faculty seek to shape an educational institution that was distinctively Adventist? The school bulletins, faculty minutes, and other primary artifacts offer some answers.

“The High Moral Character”

The claims made by the “catalogues” or academic bulletins of Battle Creek College must have brought great comfort to the hearts of Christian parents who thought of sending their children to the new school:

THE PROTECTION Guaranteed students here from base influences that undermine the character in many institutions of learning, will warrant parents in intrusting their sons and daughters to the watchcare of the Institution. Those in charge feel that the hearts and lives of those they seek to educate, are in a peculiar sense consigned to their care. They recognize the responsibility thus devolving upon them. Students are not left to themselves without care or

sympathy; but a personal interest is taken in each one, and a strong moral and religious influence is thrown around each member of the school. They realize the necessity of constant vigilance over the character and general deportment of the youth, when all manner of inducements to worse than idle away their time are forced upon them. A wise and effective discipline is maintained; not tyrannical or exacting, but firm and parental.¹¹

At the same time, the authors of the catalogue do not claim that the morality of the school will be a peculiarly Adventist morality. Quite to the contrary, they draw their description of the school's moral atmosphere in rather broad terms:

THE HIGH MORAL CHARACTER Of the Institution is dearer to its founders than any other consideration, and the Trustees pledge you their honor to maintain and strengthen it at all hazards. To effect this, no other interest shall be regarded too great a sacrifice. For this they labor and are ever vigilant. They believe that the moral element is the principal one in education, and that it has its root in religion—not in a sectarian view, but in the great fundamentals of the Christian religion, conscientiously adhered to, and rigidly governing our lives. (7)

Although they acknowledge that the teaching of moral values is the most important part of education and that morality derives from religion, the school trustees explicitly shy away in this statement from labeling the education offered at Battle Creek College as Adventist education. However, it seems unlikely that the authors of the catalogue phrased their claims in this way because they generally resisted identifying the college with the Adventist church; they begin their historical statement on the opening page with “The pressing need of a College under the special control of S.D. Adventists was first recognized by Eld. James White and wife . . .” (5) Perhaps their reluctance to make a claim for sectarian morality reflects a sensitivity to their student constituency, a number of whom were not Adventists. No official counts have been discovered of how many of the students were actually church members. One rather typical student of the college, George Royal Avery, who arrived in Battle Creek to begin school in January of 1875, may provide us with some idea of the situation when he says that among the four roommates who set up housekeeping together, he and one other young man had “made a profession” of faith, while the other two had not.¹²

The high moral standard promised by the institution seems to have been associated primarily with the co-curricular aspects of Battle Creek College. When the official catalogues mention morality, it is linked to two main facets of college life: rules and regulations, and the boarding situation. Little is said in the catalogues about morality in relation to the curriculum. Faculty minutes but most particularly student accounts of life at the college also point to a third area that exerted a strong moral influence on the student community: chapels, Sabbath School, church services, and other religious meetings.

Rules and Regulations

Rules and regulations were certainly “thrown around” the students of Battle Creek College in an effort to establish and preserve a moral atmosphere. The First Annual Catalogue gives a list of nineteen “General Requirements and Regulations.” By the Third Annual Catalogue of 1876-77, the number of rules had grown to 32 and had been carefully categorized. Some of the regulations have to do with academic concerns but many prescribe behavior. Rule number ten from the first catalogue says, for instance:

Students are expected to be orderly and respectful to others; to refrain from all rough and boisterous play; to avoid all indecent, profane, or unbecoming language, either in writing or speaking; to go to their homes or boarding places immediately upon the closing of the session

unless detained by some necessary business; and they are not to go out evenings, nor go down to the business part of the city, without necessary business.¹³

Of all nineteen rules in the first college bulletin of Battle Creek College, only rule eleven reiterates and emphasizes the mission of the institution: "As thorough mental discipline and the acquirement of scientific and religious knowledge under favorable surrounding influences are the great causes why S. D. Adventists have established this College, the Trustees consider it necessary that everything like a spirit of courtship and flirtation should be frowned down, knowing that if permitted it will seriously interfere with its success" (28). Clearly the relationships between the sexes figured prominently in the creation of a moral environment: young men and women, said the rules further, would not visit each other's living quarters without permission, would not accompany each other to and from public meeting, and would comply with all this "cheerfully."

Even in the making of rules, however, the trustees took into account their diverse student population, making allowances for those who did not profess the Adventist faith: "It is expected by the Trustees that all students sent to the school by observers of the seventh day, and those who board with Sabbath-keepers shall not be strolling about in the city or country on that day, but shall keep the Sabbath and attend public worship" (28). Admittedly, probably not many of the students fell outside those two categories, but the careful wording suggests a surprising openness to those who were not Sabbath keepers.

As students and school administration took each other's measure and began to live together at the college, the rules became more specific. The list in the catalogue of 1876-77 is divided into sections: "Department on the Grounds," "Department in the Building," and "Department Outside of School Hours." Some regulations speak to decorum, such as "Students are required to abstain from communicating with one another by talking, whispering, writing, nudging, or other annoying gestures, in the building during school session, and they shall not speak above an undertone in the building during intermission" (19). Others address moral issues such as the use of alcohol and tobacco, the use of leisure time, and, of course, the relations between men and women. Gone, however, are any explicit connections between the moral purposes of the school and the policies outlined by the trustees for student behavior.

Private Boarding and Dormitories

In the first ten years of Battle Creek College the school did not offer dormitories for boarding. Limited resources of money and time prevented the founders from building more than the three-story classroom building that was completed by January of 1875. Students boarded in homes in the town. By the fourth year of the school's existence (1877-78), the school administration feels compelled to defend this situation, saying in the Fourth Annual Catalogue, "Battle Creek College has no general lodging house for students; they are provided with rooms for lodging and study in the private houses of the citizens. We think this far superior, as affecting the interests of the student, to the dormitory system."¹⁴ Two years later, the disclaimer is stated in moral terms: "Dormitories are considered unsafe for the healthful moral growth of students, and are, for that reason, not provided."¹⁵ The mere appearance of these denunciations in a situation in which no dormitories existed suggests that discussions raged behind the scenes. Certainly the Board of Trustees recognized that where the students lived did, indeed, have moral implications. Only three years into the history of the college (1876-77), they set up a "Committee for Locating Students," requiring students to consult the committee in the selection of places to rent rooms because "The student, being unacquainted, is not so well prepared to judge of the fitness of the many places offered for rent or boarding, and may be led to pay more for these necessities than is proper, and will also be liable to locate himself where he will be subjected to improper associations" (15). The catalogue also issues a message "To Those who

Rent Rooms to Students,” calling their positions as landlord and landladies a “sacred trust” and pointing out, “A better opportunity is given to you than to any others, of carefully noting and correcting any irregularities, or bad practices into which those under your immediate care may have fallen (21).

Battle Creek College, due to internal crisis, closed during the school year of 1882-83. As the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society discussed the terms of reopening the school, one condition they felt necessary to the renewed stability of the school was “a suitable boarding-house for the students.”¹⁶ Finances did not allow them to fulfill their vision immediately, but by the 1884-85 school year another three-story building, this time a dormitory for “lady students,” was added to the campus. Before the building was even finished, Ellen White spoke at the Tenth Annual Session of the SDA Educational Society, urging “the necessity of a ‘Home’ for our students and stated also that the present building erected was not one quarter as large as it should be.”¹⁷

W. W. Prescott, who became president of Battle Creek College in 1885, wholeheartedly undertook the development of a dormitory system, traveling extensively in the East to visit schools which provided student housing. At the cost of \$15,000 the College erected in 1887 a brick boarding hall which included a dining hall.¹⁸ The two new dormitories brought a significant number of the students under the control of the college administration and made it possible for them to better regulate students’ lives. New policies were instituted regarding the relations between the sexes, times to get up and times to go to bed, study hours, and morning and evening worships. Prescott also saw the “Homes” as an opportunity to teach manners and refine his students. He and his wife presided over meals in the dining hall, well-regulated affairs in which students sat at assigned tables and followed a carefully ordered system of serving and eating. On some occasions, President Prescott read to the assembled diners from his “Don’t Book” regarding proper etiquette and manners, both in the dining hall and out.¹⁹

Within the space of ten years Battle Creek College revised its stance on dormitories from stating they were not morally advisable to incorporating them as an important aspect of the school’s mission: to provide a strong moral influence. The *Annual Catalogue* for 1889-90, for example, states the case: “Past experience has demonstrated that the school can be more successfully carried on by having the students board and room in the college buildings, along with the members of the Faculty, thus constituting a large school-family. The young people should receive a much broader training than that which comes merely from the study of books. It is the best time for them to form habits of order, neatness, and Christian courtesy, and to obtain that general culture which come from daily and intimate association with educated Christian teachers.”²⁰

The Life of the Church

Aside from the statement mentioned above, which says that Sabbath-keeping students are expected to “keep the Sabbath and attend public worship,” the official publications of Battle Creek College say almost nothing about the life of the church in relation to the school. Perhaps they assumed the relationship so irrevocably that they felt it unnecessary to mention it explicitly. In any case, nothing appears in the bulletins about how the church and its activities will contribute to the moral atmosphere of the college until ten years or so into the history of the school. Under the heading “Religious Culture,” the bulletin simply announces that “Each morning the regular exercises of the day begin with religious services in the chapel. The college Sabbath-school meets every Sabbath morning, and a meeting for prayer and social worship is held every Sabbath afternoon.”²¹

Student letters, diaries, and reminiscences, on the other hand, demonstrate that the religious meetings and church services played a very important role in their student schedules and lives. The students’ school days started with chapel. George Avery, a student who attended the college off and

on beginning in 1875, recorded in his diary that Professor Brownsberger, the first principal of Battle Creek College, often kept the students long past the end of the chapel period to lecture and advise them.²² Sometimes a guest spoke. O. A. Johnson, another early student, records one such visit in his diary: "Elder S. N. Haskell visited the school. He was present at chapel exercises and remarked on the benefits derived from going to school. He also referred to the learning of the patriarchs and prophets."²³

But the centerpiece of the week came on the Sabbath, a day filled with meetings from morning until night. In Sabbath School, at 8:45, Goodloe Harper Bell, professor of English, brought his learning and pedagogical methods to bear on the study of the faith; he organized the Sabbath scholars into classes and divisions and ran Sabbath School as rigorously as he did his weekday classroom. Drury Reavis, a student at the college, remembers, ". . . in Sabbath school every member had to be able to give a detailed synopsis, not only of the lesson of the day, but of every lesson studied from the beginning of the book (all Sabbath school lessons were then in graded book form, and were written by Professor Bell himself), and do it promptly and vigorously, whenever called upon in class or in general review."²⁴ Bell's demanding program and high standards did not keep the students away. O. A. Johnson, for instance, reports an attendance on Sabbath, January 6, 1877, of 213 scholars in 22 classes. And this attendance appears to have been voluntary, at least in the early history of the school. The students who keep diaries mention skipping Sabbath services from time to time and seem not to fear any consequences; they attend, or not, at their discretion.

At 10:50 the main church service followed Sabbath School. The students heard Uriah Smith, James White, Stephen Haskell, and Ellen White among many others. The journal keepers almost always note who the church speaker was, often what the main text was, and sometimes how they felt about the message. Drury Reavis, who attended in the 1870s, says that "As a general thing, all students attended all meetings in the church" (90). Later, when many of the students lived in campus residence halls, the policies for church attendance became more formalized. Hjalmar Holand, a student who never accepted the Adventist message, gives this account, "All the students residing in the college Dormitory were supposed to go to Sabbath School and church every Saturday. Those that neglected to do so were prayed with on bended knees. As this was a most unpleasant experience, the church attendance was almost perfect."²⁵ Clearly, however, many of the young people went to church from conviction. Many attended Battle Creek College precisely because of the Sabbath-keeping community and church.

Around 2:30 in the afternoon the young people gathered again for their "social meeting," a time to pray, testify, and listen to inspirational speakers. Sarah Melissa Skinner often comments in her diary, "In the afternoon we enjoyed unusual freedom in social meeting," referring to a freedom in expressing themselves about the Lord and their own spiritual experiences.²⁶ One young woman, Sibyl Macomber, wrote her reactions to an afternoon speaker in a letter to her cousin in 1887: "Our students meeting [sic] are full of life and earnestness. . . . The first one we had Sister White spoke to us. Whenever I hear her talk I get discouraged and think there is no hopes of myself. She seems as near perfect as mortal can be."²⁷ Sometimes the diarists also refer in their writing to their personal spiritual states. Although the evidence is individual and anecdotal, it suggests that, for these young believers, the life of the church played an integral part in their college experience and had a strong influence on their spiritual lives.

These aspects of college life outside the classroom and curriculum at Battle Creek College most directly fulfill the stated goal of the college founders to create a moral atmosphere in harmony with the church and its teachings.

The Battle Creek College Curriculum

In addition to the purpose of providing moral protection for Adventist youth, Battle Creek College was established, according to its founders, to train workers for the church and to teach religious truth. Both these goals involve issues of the curriculum as it was designed and practiced at the college.

“Laborers in this Great Work”

The SDA Educational Society, the governing board for Battle Creek College, committed themselves to the educational enterprise in large part because they felt keenly the need for more and better trained workers to spread the Gospel. They signaled their commitment to this purpose in more ways than the establishment of the school. For instance, in their fourth annual session, held on October 7 of 1878, the members resolved to ask the Michigan Conference Committee to select fifty young men who “should become students at the Battle Creek College to prepare for the ministry . . .” so that the Society could sponsor them. A similar resolution was proposed and adopted to the effect that fifty young women “who may desire to attend school a year or more to fit themselves to engage more efficiently in the missionary work” would also be sponsored. The members present, Ellen White among them, pledged a total of \$888 to this effort to train workers.²⁸

What, in fact, did the school offer prospective workers in the cause? The Third Annual Catalogue of 1876-77 offers a representative look at the Battle Creek College curriculum of the 1870s. The three “Departments of Instruction” in which students could enroll were the Collegiate, the Normal, and the Biblical. The Collegiate Department consisted of two branches, the Classical Course and the English Course. The Classical Course, the most prestigious course offered at the college, lasted six years all together and included fourteen terms of Latin and twelve of Greek, as well as classes in history, algebra, botany, physiology, English rhetoric, geometry, natural philosophy, chemistry, astronomy, trigonometry, and geology (37-39). The English course was “designed for those who do not desire to devote so much time to the study of language, or who, for other reasons, cannot do so” and was thus clearly considered the lesser of the two programs (39). In their “Remarks on [the] Classical Course,” the authors of the catalogue state, “The claims of these studies, in a liberal system of education, are recognized in all our High Schools and Colleges. To those who design to occupy leading positions as teachers in our schools, a thorough knowledge of these branches of study is indispensable” (37). When the statement says “our schools,” it refers to public education, for no system of Seventh-day Adventist education existed at the time. In a broad sense these programs of study might be seen as preparation for missionaries who wished to further the Adventist cause through work in the established educational system, but by and large, these were not the types of “workers” the founders envisioned who would go out and actively preach the gospel from community to community.

The Normal Department included the Minim Course (or elementary school), a Teachers’ Course, and a Special Course. The Teachers’ Course, which lasted four years, was “designed especially for teachers in our District and Grammar Schools.” In the “Remarks on [the] Special Course,” a two-year program, we begin to find vestiges of the rhetoric first heard in the mission statements of the college founders:

It [the Special Course] has been arranged with special reference to the necessities of those who ought to spend some time in study before entering a field of missionary labor, and yet, from urgent circumstances, are not permitted to pursue an extended course for mental culture but must be content with what the practical necessities of their labor would demand. The experience of all who have been called to labor in such capacity has led them to prize more highly than ever before a thoroughness in English Grammar, History, and Elocution; in short, a

complete mastery of the English language. It would be folly to attempt to realize a complete mastery of all these branches in so short a time, but *thoroughness* in the general and practical principle of the same, may be acquired in a more limited period. We would, therefore, *urge* this Course upon any one who would enter the missionary work, and who deems it impracticable to take a more extended one. (46)

Here again we find a sense of urgency combined with a desire to prepare workers well for their mission. The Special Course included classes in basic arithmetic, English grammar, reading, spelling, penmanship, history, and elocution, as well as biblical lectures (46). In other words, the Special Course was a course in literacy which attempted to equip workers to meet their public without embarrassment about their speaking and writing skills and general knowledge. The expectations are minimal.

The Biblical Department, at the end of the list, apparently has the purpose of offering the lectures mentioned in the Special Course. Uriah Smith is the supervisor and lecturer for the Biblical Department. Its offerings encompass only Winter and part of Spring term. Topics such as “The Prophetic Word, the Law of God, the Gospel of Christ, Man’s Nature and Destiny, the Second Advent, and the Resurrection” constitute the course material. The brief description of the Biblical Department ends with this assurance, “The lectures will be given at an hour to cause no interference with other departments” (48).

A summary of students from the same catalogue shows where the students’ interests lay. A total of nine were enrolled in the preparatory for the classical course and the classical course. Sixteen took the English preparatory and English course. The Normal Department boasted the largest number of 130 students. The Special Course attracted 80 students. Fifty-five of the students enrolled in the various programs and courses were attending the Biblical lectures (35). This breakdown suggests that, although the classical and English programs of the Collegiate Department may have been given prestige by the way in which they are treated in the college bulletin, the students flocked to the more practical training opportunities offered by Battle Creek College. The Teachers’ Course in particular, a four-year program to train elementary teachers, drew the most students. It is possible that the students regarded the teaching profession as a good field for missionary work, but one also suspects they saw it as a way of getting a good job upon finishing the program. The Special Course, especially billed by the catalogue itself as the best training for missionary work, has a respectable showing with its 80 students. A number of students seem to have been committed to the Adventist cause and eager to prepare themselves to work for the church.

The school year of 1879-80 brought new developments; a three-year theology course (expanded to a four-year course the following year) replaced the Special Course. As described in 1880, it included biblical lectures “plus four terms of introductory Greek, three of Greek New Testament, four of church history, one of natural theology, two of biblical geography and antiquities, and four of Hebrew study in both grammar and the Old Testament.”²⁹ The first year the new program was offered, 62 students enrolled in the Biblical Course and Biblical Preparatory. By 1880-81, the number had dropped to 39 for reasons that it is difficult to determine.³⁰ The ensuing trend cannot be tracked because no catalogue is available for 1881-82, and the school closed for one year in 1882-83. After the school reopened, the catalogues no longer gave a breakdown of the programs in which the students enrolled.

The rhetoric of the bulletins, however, and the curricular changes that came in the wake of the school’s closing show increasingly overt attention to the original goal of preparing workers. The first Annual Announcement to appear after the interruption, in 1883-84, states explicitly, “Our College is a denominational institution, designed especially to prepare young people for usefulness in the cause of

God”³¹ The College continues to offer the “Special Course,” saying, “One of the chief objects of the College is to present the most favorable opportunities to those who are laboring in the case of God, or are preparing themselves for that work. In order to impart that instruction which such persons most need, this course of two years has been prepared. . . . The instruction is adapted to the wants of the students, and aims at present practical results rather than astute scholarship” (30).

By the following school year of 1884-85, the bulletin refers to the Special Course also as the Missionary Department³² In addition to training in the “common branches” or basic subjects, as before, the Missionary Department offers instruction in:

1. The ordinary Tract and Missionary work, as carried on by the denomination.
2. The best methods of conducting the colporteur and canvassing work.
3. The manner of keeping the books employed by the various Tract and Missionary officers, from those of the church Librarians to those of the officers of the State societies.
4. The duties of the church Librarians, District and State Secretaries, District Directors, and, in short, of all the officers of the Tract and Missionary societies from the lowest to the highest. (8-9)

For the first time in the history of Battle Creek College, exactly ten years into its history, the curriculum includes specific training in the work of the church.

By 1895, under President George W. Caviness, Battle Creek College had caught the vision of a worldwide mission for the relatively young denomination, “The crying need of the world at the present time is the missionary, not only in foreign and unenlightened lands, but in every civilized land, and especially in the great cities and certain sections of our own country. Recognizing this fact, the managers of the Battle Creek College have determined to introduce a new course of instruction to be termed, “A School for Christian Workers,” the purpose of which will be to afford special facilities for the training and education of those who desire to fit themselves in the shortest possible time for active usefulness in various lines of Christian and philanthropic work”³³

In addition to instruction in “the ordinary branches of knowledge,” the new program would emphasize most strongly “a careful and thorough study of the Gospels” and instruction in the “History of Home and Foreign Missionary work, Missionary Aims and Methods, Missionaries’ Biographies, City Missionary Work, Christian Help Work, Gospel Work, Children’s Meetings, Mothers’ Meetings, Missionary Sabbath-schools, etc.” According to the announcement in the bulletin, the managers of the College intended to make “the School for Christian Workers the most prominent feature of the educational work of the Battle Creek College . . .” (10). This did not mean that the College discontinued its other programs; it still offered a vigorous Greek and Latin program, a natural science program, English language and literature, and a Philosophical Department.

Under Edward A. Sutherland, however, Battle Creek College gradually became exclusively “A Training School for Christian Workers” and was billed as such on the title page of the Twenty-fourth Annual Calendar in 1899. In Sutherland’s first year as president, 1897-98, the Departments of Instruction are laid out in the bulletin according to various tasks of church workers: Ministerial Department, General Missionary Department, Teachers’ Department, Canvassers’ Department. Ministers were expected to be trained in a number of areas, each with a practical purpose:

No one will be graduated from this department [ministerial] who cannot pass a satisfactory examination on the following subjects: The fundamental doctrines of the plan of salvation; prophetic history, the leading and essential points in the history of the church, such as will enable the student to comprehend and explain events now transpiring, in both church and state; English language embracing composition, letter-writing, and short articles for the press; elementary and advanced physiology, anatomy and Bible hygiene—embracing the elements of physics, botany, and chemistry. Sufficient knowledge of mathematics to do the work of the

department will be required, together with some study in the keeping of simple accounts and the transacting of ordinary business.³⁴

At the end of the list of church-related positions, the College adds, "In addition to the above-mentioned departments, we offer the more extended lines of collegiate work. The advanced departments are designed for such persons as have the time and means at their disposal to enable them to pursue an extended course of study with profit" (20). But clearly a reversal has taken place. The purely academic pursuits are no longer favored as they once were or even considered on a par with training for mission work as quickly as possible.

Sutherland and his College issued an even more explicit manifesto in the academic calendar the following year, 1898-99. The bulletin says that "It is because of the crying need for missionaries that the Battle Creek College has been turned into a Training-School for Christian workers."³⁵ The bulletin suggests that "This will in no wise interfere with the giving of a liberal education to those who are able to spend the time to take it" but goes on to say in the next breath that "In the future, the entire strength of the Faculty will be used in training those who enter the school, to become proficient in the lines of work which they have chosen," that is, missionary work. The College further changed its approach to education by abandoning the idea of courses [programs] with specific requirements and ceasing to grant degrees or diplomas (88).

Battle Creek College, in its early years, experienced a discrepancy between the founders' goals of training Christian workers and its actual curricular offerings. By 1900, just over a quarter of a century old and poised on the verge of its move to Berrien Springs, the College existed solely for the purpose of training Christian workers. But Sutherland and his colleagues seem, at the same time, to have dispensed with balance and a true integration of faith with academic pursuits. As George R. Knight says in his own analysis of academic development at Battle Creek College from 1891-97, "It may be postulated, if this study was to be extended into the first decade of the 1900s, that the curriculum at early Emmanuel Missionary College [BCC's successor] could be characterized as a period of error in the opposite extreme [from the beginnings of Battle Creek College] and as a period in which Sutherland and his cohorts were to stretch the reformed curriculum too far."³⁶ S. P. S. Edwards, professor of science at Battle Creek College and then Emmanuel Missionary College, believed that under Sutherland, even in the 1890s in Battle Creek, "the real college rating gradually disappeared"³⁷

So the era of Battle Creek College ends with certain goals having been achieved, but at the expense of other ideals.

"The Truths of God's Word"

The curricular commitment to the study of the Bible and the "principles of the faith and hope of Seventh-day Adventists" at Battle Creek College, as already seen in part above, lagged far behind the original intentions of the school's founders. In the school's official publications, in fact, the Trustees seem tentative about the issue of biblical study, saying in the first academic bulletin, "When classes that desire Bible Instruction are sufficiently large to render it advisable, daily lectures will be delivered by Eld. U. Smith upon the most important doctrines of the Bible" (24). As mentioned earlier, although Bible lectures were announced with more certainty in the catalogues which followed in the next few years, the announcements were accompanied by assurances that the Bible lectures would not interfere with the regular curriculum. Throughout the 1870s, Bible study remained on the periphery of the main courses of study, or, as Knight puts it, "in the curricular boondocks" (10).

Furthermore, statements in the school catalogues avoid putting the stamp of Adventism on the curriculum. One such statement, in the Third Annual Catalogue, declares, "There is nothing in the regular courses of study, or in the rules and practice of discipline, that is in the least denominational or

sectarian. The Biblical lectures are before a class of only those who attend them from choice” (Part I, 10).

This was the state of affairs to which Ellen White spoke in an address to General Conference delegates, Review and Herald workers, sanitarium employees, and college faculty, delivered in the college chapel in December of 1881. She said, “There is danger that our college will be turned away from its original design. God’s purpose has been made known, that our people should have an opportunity to study the sciences and at the same time to learn the requirements of His word. . . . The study of Scripture should have the first place in our system of education.”³⁸ The response from the college trustees came swiftly. On December 27 they moved “that the Bible study be incorporated into the regular exercise of the College, and that the recitations be held the first hour in the afternoon, beginning at 1:30 p.m.”³⁹ The loss of the 1881-82 bulletin (if one ever existed) prevents us from knowing whether the college followed through on this motion the following school year. And, in the following year, Battle Creek College closed.

But in 1883-84 the school opened with the full intention of featuring Bible study. The bulletin states: “There will be Bible lessons or lectures in all the courses.” The administration still shies away, however, from a sectarian approach: “While the managers of this college have no disposition to force upon students denominational view, they aim to inculcate in the minds of all the students the practical lesson of ‘seeking first the kingdom of God,’ as the best means of gaining true wisdom and ultimate success. They do not hesitate to emphasize this fact in all their associations with the students.” They go on to say, concerning the Bible lessons, “These will be adapted to the age of the student, and with the exception of advanced classes, will be historical and practical rather than doctrinal” (10). The curricular courses laid out in that year’s bulletin show, in fact, Bible study included in the Primary Course (or elementary school) and the Grammar Course, but not in the English or Scientific Course, the more advanced programs. A separate “Biblical Course” aims “to lead the student to a familiarity with the Bible before all other writings, making use of the latter only as they may serve as helps to an understanding of the former” (27). The Biblical Course includes distinctively Adventist topics such as the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, the Signs of the Times, and the Origin and History of the Sabbath and Sunday-keeping (27-28).

In the 1883-84 Catalogue, the “Classical Course” takes the marginalized position previously held by Bible studies with this very brief announcement: “Though the Classical course is not represented in this Announcement, yet classes in the branches usually taught in this course will be organized whenever the number of students desiring it is sufficiently large to warrant the formation of such classes” (30).

When W. W. Prescott became president of Battle Creek College in 1885-86, the Classical Course was reinstated as part of the regular program. At the same time, however, more religion courses pervade the college curriculum than ever before in the history of the school. Bible lessons continue to be taught on the elementary and secondary level, while, in addition, the seniors in the Classical, Scientific, and English programs study texts such as Evidences in Christianity, Moral Science, and Natural Theology (Thirteenth Calendar, 19-22). Furthermore, Prescott and his faculty effect a subtle but important shift by combining the goals and topics of the previous Missionary Department, or Special Course, with the Biblical Course, thus creating a Theological Department with a four-year program and making a statement that practical missionary training and a thorough foundation in the Bible truths cannot be separated.⁴⁰

By 1887-88, under Prescott’s administration, the bulletin carries explicit statements of integration: “The systematic study of the Bible is made a part of each course [program]. It is believed that the time thus spent will yield rich returns, both in point of mental discipline and the definite

knowledge gained” (19). Even more pointed, under the heading “Biblical Course,” this statement appears, “It will be noticed that all those studies which have heretofore been found in the Biblical Course alone are now given a place in all the courses, so that the necessity of preparing a separate Biblical Course no longer exists. As a result of this change it is hoped that a larger number than ever will be found pursuing the systematic study of the Bible” (24). Battle Creek College had, at last, achieved the integration aspired to from the inception of the school.

Over the next decade the Biblical Course was reinstated, but as a special program of study rather than an addendum to the other academic programs. Bible study remained an integrated part of the academic curriculum, and the College began to emphasize that aspect as a distinguishing mark of Adventist education at Battle Creek College: “A special feature of the work at this College is the systematic study of the English Bible, the full course covering a period of four years in addition to the work done in the Preparatory Department.”⁴¹

In the first year of George W. Caviness’s presidency, 1894-95, the first statement in the bulletin under “Departments of Instruction” leaves no doubt about the character or practice of the institution: “There need be no apology offered for making the careful and continued study of the Holy Scriptures a prominent feature in all the courses of study in an institution established for the express purpose of affording an opportunity to secure a Christian education.”⁴² To Prescott and Caviness this meant that Bible study held a firm and prominent place in each academic program, not that it replaced standard academic pursuits or became the primary material in each subject area or class. “Course” is used to mean program, not class, by these educators of the nineteenth century. But certainly in rhetoric, in physical placement in the academic bulletin, in the academic curriculum, the study of the Bible had achieved full status by 1901.

“Our Schools”

Our ancestors in Adventist education at Battle Creek College did not use the phrase “integration of faith and learning” in their discussions about their goals for the first denominational college. But how conscious were they of wrestling with precisely such issues, with issues of offering a substantive education that could contend with the best available in the public arena and that would also carry an Adventist identity?

Many of the statements that have been examined in this essay, particularly from the academic catalogues, suggest the awareness of the college trustees and faculty concerning the issues inherent in integrating faith and learning. Even the disclaimers about Bible study and sectarianism, although they may be disappointing, reveal the struggle to bring into being an educational philosophy that will be acceptable in their historical context and fulfill the mission of the church. By the mid 1890s, under the direction of George W. Caviness, the College becomes more articulate, in its Annual Calendar, about how each subject area relates to the Christian philosophy of the school. Under history, for instance, the bulletin description reads,

“The ultimate design of this course is to show that the principles of God’s dealings with men and nations are ever the same; that the events in the annals of the human race, are not mere accidents, but that they are all the inevitable results of specific causes” (Twentieth Calendar 15).

Also during the 1890s, the College tries to articulate its unique Christian identity in positive terms, as in the 1894-95 bulletin, with Caviness (himself a former student of the College) as president:

SOME DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE COLLEGE.

A Christian Home for non-resident students.

Special attention paid to hygiene and physical culture.

An extended course of study in the English Bible.

Free instruction for young ladies in cooking and sewing.

A strong religious influence pervading all the work.

A sentiment which permits older students to pursue elementary branches without embarrassment.

Necessary expenses low. Economy and plainness in dress encouraged.

Science work upon a basis which strengthens faith in God's word.

An exceptionally strong course in history in which the philosophy of history and the fulfillment of prophecy are made prominent.

Regular class and chorus drill in vocal music under a competent director, without additional charge. (37)

The early administration and faculty of Battle Creek College were also aware of integration issues because they had the conceivers, founders, and supporters of their school—Ellen White chief among them—right there in Battle Creek to keep them thinking about these concerns, sometimes in very forceful ways!

But the faculty themselves also gave serious consideration to their mission at the college.

Perhaps the most impressive example of a deliberate discussion about the direction of the school took place in 1897, under the presidency of Caviness. At the end of faculty meeting on January 10, 1897, one of the professors issued the following announcement:

In the interests of our school and of those directly or indirectly connected with it, it has been thought best to hold an Institute of the college Faculty and those interested in the work of the school, before the meeting of the General Conference.

The objects briefly stated are these:

A paper, either on a general topic of some particular department of the school, read and freely discussed at each meeting, will bring before us,—1st, the consideration of that form of organization and of those methods that will be productive of the greatest good; 2d, what our schools are doing and what they should do in view of their importance; 3d, the relative importance of each of the departments of the school; 4th, the relation of the departments to each other and to the school in general; 5th, the scope of the work which should be done in each of the departments and the best means of its accomplishment.

It is thought desirable that no paper occupy more than forty five minutes in the reading, and that it be followed by a free discussion.⁴³

The second object of the institute, “what our schools are doing and what they should do in view of their importance,” probably comes the closest to reflecting on issues of integrating faith and learning.

The announcement also proposed the following program or list of paper topics:

“Organization and Management of our Denominational Schools” by W. W. Prescott; “Purpose of the Schools” by George W. Caviness; “Problems of Bible Teaching” by E. J. Hibbard; “The Practical Value of Higher Mathematics” by W. E. A. Aul; “Science Work—What Shall It Be, and How Shall It Be Taught” by A. W. Kelly; “Training of Teachers” by Frederick Griggs; “Importance to our Students of a Practical Knowledge of Music” by Edwin Barnes; “Extent and Means of Instruction in the Ancient Languages” by E. D. Kirby; “History—Its Place and Purpose in the School” by P. T. Magan; and “What Are the Chief Values to Be Derived From the Study of English and How Shall They Be Obtained” by J. E. Tenney. (Prescott, it should be noted, had to decline the invitation to speak as he had to be away.) Some of the titles alone suggest that the faculty recognized integration issues and were attempting to address them.

Full texts of the papers no longer exist, but in the faculty minutes secretary Percy Magan tries to summarize the main point of each as well as the “free discussion” which followed. Some excerpts of those minutes from the first presentation at the institute, that of Professor Caviness, give a sense of

the issues the faculty were tackling (55-56). Caviness made the following points, according to Magan: "that the salvation of souls is the primary object for which the schools were established; independence of thought and action in the student must be cultivated; something more must be given than what the world understands by a practical education; we must seek to give the student the highest possible development." Caviness followed these points with a reading from the testimonies. According to Magan, the selections the president chose emphasized "giving free scope to the powers of the mind of the youth, stating that we can not [sic] choose what different ones should do. This is God's work rather than ours, and for us to fit them for one thing, and for one thing only, is to narrow them for their life work."

The comments which follow show a keen awareness of faith-and-learning concerns. Elder Tenney wanted to emphasize the word "our" and the phrase "our schools," stressing the "peculiar differences which must exist between our schools and other schools." Magan adds, seemingly without sarcasm, "The statements were not quite clear in all respects what these differences should be. . . ."

Elder Hibbard discussed the issue of whether what "we" considered "highest possible development" would be considered as the best education by the world and concluded, "It is therefore apparent that we will lay stress upon subjects that the world does not consider of vital importance." Magan reports, "In his opinion the Bible should have a wider scope."

Professor Kirby had the last word, according to Magan's account. He spoke "of the necessity of a liberal education" and said, "Mental and moral education are not always obtained together but we must seek to combine the two if possible. Deep piety must be combined with a broad and liberal education."

The discussion, rich with comments about the intersection of faith and learning, fully aware of the implications of trying to meld education and religious belief, continues through a total of nine faculty sessions. Faculty contributions range widely over many aspects of the faith- and-learning question, as well as digressing on wild tangents and pet peeves or hobby horses. But the same questions appear again and again: What is the purpose of what we do? What importance does it have in the spiritual realm? How does it relate to Bible truth? How well are we teaching the subject? How well are we teaching the subject as a reflection of God? At Battle Creek College, in 1897, the topic of faith and learning was alive and vigorous.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the beginnings of education at Battle Creek College with special attention to how the founders, administrators, faculty, and students of the school addressed issues of faith and learning and how they inform each other. Recognizing that the historical record is incomplete, it still looks at the primary documents available and tries to analyze the ways in which our Adventist educational forebears spoke about their educational philosophy and incorporated their ideas into the school program.

What can we learn from this historical journey to the first denominational school in the late 19th century? First of all, we can disabuse ourselves of the idea that Adventist education came into being in some perfect and pure form, simply because it was the product of the pioneer era of Adventism. Adventist education did not start out as a flawless system which became more and more corrupted by the world as time went on. Too often, I believe, Adventist educators labor under a sense of guilt that they have slid down a slippery slope from some distant historic ideal into the less-than-perfect, current state of Adventist education. The historical record, as we have seen here, simply does not bear out such an account. Perhaps if we can clear away our guilt, we can look more clearly at the other implications of an historical examination.

We learn, in looking at our educational ancestors, that we have inherited a serious concern for the issues of faith and learning in an Adventist setting. Although we may sometimes feel that we have come late to the 20th-century discussion, we find that the Adventist discussion began, in fact, at the founding of the first Adventist institution of higher learning. The scholarly community at Battle Creek talked about how to offer fine education in the context of their contemporary educational community; they sought to teach values in and out of the classroom; and they wrestled with how best to bring the Bible and Adventist principles to their students. We come from a long-standing tradition of committed Christian educators confronted by the challenge of how to integrate faith and learning. This heritage may be able to give us confidence for the ongoing discussion.

Our investigation of how Battle Creek College dealt philosophically and practically with an Adventist approach to teaching also shows us that the integration of faith and learning is a process, sometimes a messy one. The Adventist educators at Battle Creek, most of them devout church members devoted to the cause, did not always “get it right.” In fact, they often got it very wrong. In just the first 25 years of the institution, as we have seen, they changed their language, changed their curriculum, changed their ideas over and over again, always coming back to the touchstones of their mission, the Bible, and the guidance they had received from God. And this is not the end of the story; the process goes on, of course, as the college moves to Berrien Springs, becoming Emmanuel Missionary College and then Andrews University. A process model for integrating faith and learning can give us courage for our own messy, imperfect process of grappling with these concepts and their practice.

Part of the process for the Battle Creek College community and for us involves a response to historical context. In looking at the history of our first college, we see that its proponents tried to respond intelligently and as committed Christians to their contemporary situation. Their example encourages us to ask the question, “How can we shape Adventist education to respond in God-directed ways to the culture of the late 20th or even the 21st century?”

Finally, in the story of faith and learning at Battle Creek College, we find the roots of the tensions in Adventist education which still exist today and which may never be resolved: the tension between a passion for excellence and a sense of urgency to get out and preach the Gospel; a tension between the broad study of the liberal arts and the focused study of particular Bible truths; a tension between openness to our fellow human beings and the need to protect certain moral values. As Professor Kirby said, “. . . we must seek to combine the two if possible. Deep piety must be combined with a broad and liberal education.” Or, as Ellen White wrote in “Proper Education,” her first extensive counsel to the proposed Battle Creek College in 1872: “Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently. The great object of education is to enable us to use the powers which God has given us in such a manner as will best represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.”⁴⁴

Notes

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