

HIGHER ADVENTISTS AND EDUCATION

Seventh-day Adventists are heavily involved in running educational institutions. Beginning with the first elementary school in Battle Creek in 1872, the church's educational system has expanded into a huge international network—4,583 elementary, 643 secondary, and 84 tertiary programs. The church employs more than 40,000 teachers in its system.

Adventists also own and operate universities. North America is home to the oldest—Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California. But in recent years, with the upsurge in church growth overseas, the church has established new centers for graduate-level education: Adventist University of Central Africa, Gisenyi, Rwanda; Adventist University of Central America, Alajuela, Costa Rica; Colombia-Venezuela University, Medellin, Colombia; Dominican Adventist University, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Inca Union University, Lima, Peru; Indonesia Union College, Bandung, Java, Indonesia; Korean Sahmyook University, Seoul, Korea; Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Mexico; Mount Klabat University, Manado, Indonesia; and the University of Eastern Africa, Eldoret, Kenya.

The church's involvement in higher education raises fundamental philosophical issues: Are the terms *university* and *Adventist* (or *Christian*) mutually exclusive? If an institution follows the system of open inquiry that characterizes a university, how can it be called Adventist? If it is committed to a Christian worldview, how can it be a university?

Other denominations, of course, have wrestled with these issues, and continue to explore them. Dr. Bert B. Beach, director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department and a member of the board of trustees of Andrews University, explains his answers in this issue's *AR* Seminar.

Can a University Be Christian?

A look at academic freedom on the Adventist campus

BY B. B. BEACH

On the face of it, the answer to the question "Can a university be Christian?" must be yes. Many universities in the world call themselves Christian. However, merely because an institution claims to be a "Christian university" does not prove that it is either a university in the accepted sense of the term or that it is really Christian. It could be one or the other, or even neither.

The Problem

Let us pose the problem as it confronts Seventh-day Adventist higher education in general and Adventist universities in particular: Those who claim that a university cannot be Christian say that the Christian university is too committed to religion to offer a truly scientific, liberal education; that the Christian scholar, in his search for truth, wears blinders; that therefore *university* and *Christian* are contradictory terms.

John Dewey, perhaps the leading philosophical influence in United States education during the first half of this century, claimed that faith in a personal God, in fixed revelation, dogma, and doctrine, is unacceptable intellectually for the cultivated Western mind. As a result of this thinking, Christian belief in the supernatural has waned, while the restrictive pessimism and exaggerated optimism regarding human nature have increased. (See Dewey, *A Common Faith*, pp. 38-47.)

Many secularists believe that Christianity amounts to fiction, superstition, or obscurantism; that it contradicts science. They feel that religion should not be a university subject, since the truths of religion are generally not reached through inductive reasoning. They would say that the Christian orientation of a university has a chilling, distorting effect on scholarship. They conveniently forget that Protestantism largely made possible the scientific movement. (See Arnold Nash, *The University and the Modern World*, pp. 62-78.)

The Purpose of a University

Benjamin Disraeli, Queen Victoria's favorite prime minister, once said that a uni-

versity should be a place of light, liberty, and learning. The Christian university must be such a place, for Christ is the universal light, the truth shall make men free, and the fear of God is the beginning of learning.

The purpose of a university, as I understand it, is to:

1. Transmit knowledge and values to the next generation.
2. Examine existing knowledge critically and plow new ground.
3. Offer professional career preparation.
4. Prepare students for life by making man whole, not provincial and fragmented.
5. Offer expert extended service to the community at large.

In my view, the Christian university does all this—and more. It must be a center shedding light, upholding liberty, and expanding and disseminating learning.

Presuppositions and Objectivity

Opponents of the Christian university affirm that higher education with a religious perspective lacks objectivity. Can we have objectivity in the search for knowledge within the framework of Christian commitment? Complete objectivity, no; for such does not exist, either in the Christian university or in the secular university.

Every scholar pursues his study and research within a certain worldview and with certain presuppositions. However, conducting all research and study on the basis of naturalistic presuppositions limits the attainment of knowledge. It presents a partial approach, both incomplete and biased.

One of the deceptive presuppositions of secular university education is that it has no presuppositions. The secular university, far from being objectively neutral, begins with several presuppositions, which I call the "four-self movement": (1) nature is self-originated, (2) history is self-operating, (3) man is self-sustaining, (4) nature is self-explanatory. A secular university has little room for the supernatural.

The scientific method and spirit may furnish a guide to knowledge but provide little meaning to life and human history. Secular

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impartiality claims to offer "value neutral education." We are told that facts are value-free. Actually this is a mirage. The language we use is loaded, as is the selection of material used and taught.

Of course, the Christian university has presuppositions. Here are some of the most important:

1. God is the source of truth.
2. "The Holy Scriptures are the perfect standard of truth" (*Education*, p. 17). They are not all the truth, nor the only truth, but they should "be given the highest place in education" (*ibid.*). Not the *only* place, but "the highest."
3. There exists a coherent unity of truth, with a common focus in Jesus Christ.
4. Truth is found in revelation and disciplined intellectual inquiry, observation, and study.
5. "Both man and the world of nature are best understood as creatures of the Divine Mind who is accurately revealed in Jesus Christ" (Elton Trueblood, *The Idea of a College*, p. 24).

Authentic Christian faith does not limit knowledge, neither is it a source of academic knowledge. It does not preclude thinking about what we think we know and about what we don't know. It is really a sort of spiritual master key that opens doors rather than shuts them. Faith supports the search for truth and the examination of evidence. In this sense "faith liberates rather than enslaves the mind" (Arthur Holms, *The Christian College*, p. 63). Elton Trueblood believes that a Christian will potentially be a better scholar than a non-Christian. Christianity, at its authentic best, is the "sworn enemy of all intellectual dishonesty and shoddiness" (Trueblood, p. 19).

Ellen White contends that Christian education should produce powerful thinkers, strong-minded masters of destiny, and action-oriented individuals: "It is the work of true education to develop [the power to think and do], to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought" (*Education*, p. 17). Adventist institutions of learning are to "send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions" (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Historical Background

At the time the Seventh-day Adventist Church began, the question Can a university be Christian? would have been consid-

ered the wrong question. People would have been more likely to ask "Is this university Christian?" or "Can a true university be non-Christian?" Most universities had Christian origins and ties. The universities of modern times stand in a direct line with the Roman imperial schools, but they developed from the European universities of the Middle Ages. As institutions, their machinery and terminology are of Christian origin and are traceable to the activities of clergy during centuries past.

University comes from the Latin *universitas*—"the whole." A university should cover a broad spectrum of knowledge. However, in practice, few universities, including Andrews and Loma Linda, teach all branches of human knowledge.

Beginning in the twelfth century, European universities developed from the cathedral and monastery schools. The first institution in Europe to fully merit the name university was the University of Paris (Sorbonne), the mother of northern universities. Ecclesiastical in its origin (originally a house for poor theology students and named after churchman Robert de Sorbon), it took the lead in ending the Great Schism of the Catholic Church and starting the Conciliar movement. No other university had such prestige during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There was a saying: "The Italians have the pope, the Germans the emperor, the French have learning." The university began under the control of the bishop, but after a struggle became an autonomous body. Most university students outside Italy had taken the tonsure (shaving the crown of the head) and were classified as ecclesiastics, subject to church rather than secular courts. However, the universities constantly tried to free themselves from the control of both the state and the church.

We mention all this to show the close original link between Christianity and the universities. In America higher education was nurtured in the cradle of Christian churches. It began with an eye to the propagation of religion, morality, and learning and the training of ministers. Harvard started out as a Christian college of theology—a sort of seminary—before it moved toward liberal arts. Other institutions felt the same need for education to go beyond the more narrow needs of the churches, as in the state universities. Professional and research interests have gradually come to dominate all other aspects of advanced education.

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The Christian roots of the American university are clear, though in many instances they have been cut off. On its seal, Harvard's motto, "*Christo et Ecclesiae*" ("Christ and Church"), surrounds the word *veritas* ("truth"). Today this is only an echo from a distant past, though recently the president of Harvard, Derek Bok, has advocated ethical standards and behavior on American campuses.

Christian University and Academic Freedom

Academic freedom constitutes a litmus test for an American or Western democratic university. It forms part of the debate regarding the nature of a university, especially when church-controlled or -affiliated.

Academic freedom safeguards exploration of the unknown, which presses back the frontiers of knowledge. The professor has an obligation to search for truth, and academic freedom protects him in this quest. Equally, the student's freedom as a scholar seeking knowledge must be respected.

Theologically, we need academic freedom because men are free moral agents. We need freedom for self-scrutiny, improvement, revival, reformation. Freedom of conscience forms part of the Reformation heritage, though often abused and ignored. To deny academic freedom is to commit intellectual suicide. Such a denial will normally not strengthen orthodoxy, but on the contrary, make it suspect to onlookers and inquiring students.

In 1940 the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) produced a classic statement regarding academic freedom, which balances freedom with responsibility. The university teacher should realize that "his special position in the community imposes special obligations." He needs to "exercise appropriate restraint." "Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institutions should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment." Christian universities and colleges have often quoted these words approvingly. They at times overlook, however, that in 1969 the AAUP issued an interpretive statement indicating that "most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 statement, and we do not now endorse such a departure."

The reason many church-related universities and colleges no longer feel a need for

this religious safeguard is that they have moved into the mainstream of secular education. Furthermore, these institutions wish to demonstrate their eligibility for federal and state funding, which requires that schools not be "narrowly sectarian."

In October 1984 the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee upheld the concept of academic freedom in SDA higher education. In 1987 this statement became a General Conference position paper. (See the *1987 Annual Council General Actions*, pp. 17-19.) The church acknowledges academic freedom "to pursue knowledge and truth," freedom that is "essential to the well-being of the church itself." "The dynamic development of the church depends on the continuing study of dedicated scholars" in an atmosphere of cordiality, without feeling threatened when their findings differ somewhat from traditional views. As did the 1940 AAUP statement, the church's statement balances freedom with responsibility. The Adventist professor has a triple responsibility: (1) as a self-disciplined scholar without restraints, (2) for the character and aims of the institution in which he teaches, (3) for the spiritual and intellectual needs of the students (*ibid.*, p. 17).

The statement goes on to affirm: "SDA colleges and universities, therefore, subscribe to principles of academic freedom generally held important in higher education. . . . Freedoms are never absolute and . . . imply commensurate responsibilities" (*ibid.*).

The statement underlines the importance of collegiality, counseling together with peers and administrators. It also makes clear the duty of president, board of trustees, and general church leaders to "protect the scholar" (*ibid.*, p. 18). This is a most important and positive concept.

Academic freedom in Adventist schools has one clear limitation: teachers may not teach anything contrary to the 27 fundamental beliefs of the church. This would seem a necessary limitation on the university professor in his otherwise unlimited exploration of universal knowledge. Each institution ought to establish clear procedures to deal with grievances regarding academic freedom.

A parallel document voted by the same Annual Council (1984), dealing with theological freedom and accountability of workers in general, states that the church reserves the right to employ only those who believe in and are committed to the 27 fundamental beliefs (pp. 32-35). Dealing with

workers who do not believe in their church's fundamental beliefs does not violate their freedom, we are told, but protects the corporate rights, integrity, and identity of the church, which also has freedoms.

Earlier we mentioned the rights of the students as a part of academic freedom. Immature students at a university present a problem. Some, unfortunately, have been raised on credulity; they never have been taught to think. Therefore, their view of the Christian faith may be somewhat primitive, for they have never been exposed, or very minimally so, to other ideas. When questions come up in or outside of class, they become troubled and confused, and write home. Their parents panic and write to the conference president, who then feels called upon to straighten out the situation.

Teachers in their classes need to "deal gently" with these intellectual Absaloms. Academic freedom does not give teachers a license to shock the simple or naive, nor to shackle the arrogant challengers, nor to shatter the opposition, nor to shame the ignorant, but to dispense balanced information, truth, and wisdom to all. Good pedagogy "takes into account the nature of the receiver" (Alice Gallin, "Academic Freedom and the Catholic College/University," *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 8, No. 1 [1987]:32). Freedom is never unlimited, but is correlative with duty.

Does Christian commitment restrict intellectual endeavor? It can, but it should not and need not. Rather it should inspire the search for truth and learning; it should liberate and enlarge horizons, and expose new and exciting expanses of inquiry. Academic freedom is a fragile gift. Let the church and university uphold it. Aggressive secularism poses a threat to academic freedom (as the question Can a university be Christian? indicates). Russell Kirk, in his book *Academic Freedom*, may be right when he claims that "educational institutions influenced strongly by religious dogmas often are most friendly to originality of thought and most mindful of the dignity of the scholar" (p. 41). This should hold true in the Adventist university.

The Christian University

The Christian university in America is the linear descendant of the medieval university, in which the life and thought of the academic community were informed by religion and theology. This remains true for the SDA university, which is strongly linked to and supported by the church.

(Actually, most Catholic colleges in the U.S. are not controlled or supported by the institutional Catholic Church.)

In 1956 the Annual Council of the General Conference voted to develop a university, and the next year Potomac University began operation with a graduate school and a seminary that eventually became Andrews University. Andrews University is, of course, both a university and Adventist. It must be free to be both. A Catholic speaker recently attempted to resolve the problem by declaring: "The Catholic Church is infallible, while the Catholic university is necessarily fallible." We cannot use this approach.

A Christian university must stand for (1) divine creation; (2) revelation; (3) reason; (4) human rights, because man was created in God's image; (5) essence, not merely existence; and (6) a unified worldview and moral order.

Andrews University has defined itself as a community of scholars cosmopolitan in outlook, joint pursuit, discovery, exploration, evaluation, organization, and dissemination of knowledge and the application of value judgments to human thought and behavior. For its methodology it uses the systems of evidence of education and science in search of truth. It has given itself at least 10 specific objectives:

1. Provide high-quality education in various branches for SDAs and others who qualify.
2. Develop good citizenship.
3. Graduate community-minded students.
4. Serve humanity.
5. Provide a favorable spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical environment for student development.
6. Inculcate Christian (SDA) faith through religious education.
7. Prepare workers and leaders for the church.
8. Guide in the formation of integrity, self-discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and loyalty to God, nation, and mankind.
9. Develop critical thinking and good taste.
10. Provide integration of learning with faith.

These are goals worthy of a university. The last point, regarding integration of faith and learning, is a vital dimension. Often we find interaction between the two, but how often do we actually achieve integration of faith and learning? This is a great goal and ideal that has never been fully reached. Like

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Paul, the faculty at a Seventh-day Adventist university must say, "We count ourselves not to have apprehended, but we press toward the mark of the high calling."

Pitfalls of the Christian University

Among pitfalls for the Christian university to avoid, we might mention the following:

1. The danger of simple indoctrination instead of education. It is not the task of a Christian university to blindfold students to what civilization and culture can offer, but rather to open their eyes to reality.

2. A defensive mentality: offering ready-made answers to prepackaged questions. This leads to a ghetto or fortress mentality that seeks to keep the student "20 miles from the nearest sin." However, we know that sin and heresy come from the mind, rather than geographical location.

3. A polemical or negative attitude toward scholarly learning, science, culture, and the arts.

4. The conjunction of Adventist Christianity and learning rather than their integration.

5. The danger of viewing *thinking* as an "impious spectator sport" (as Arthur Holmes puts it). We need logical vigor and self-critical honesty.

In meeting problems faced by the Christian university, we may follow at least three possible paths.

Accept the growing secularization process and join the long procession of colleges and universities that have given up their Christian vocation and point of reference to become like state universities and colleges.

Pull up the intellectual drawbridges, opt out of society (like the Amish), and disappear into the safety of the fortress, becoming little more than a Bible college (which at times are hardly colleges and in which they seem to love the Bible without really understanding it).

Pursue excellence in all branches of learning, keeping them closely connected to the roots of ultimate reality in a personal Creator and soon-coming God. To teach branches without roots is to teach deadwood!

Conclusion

The secular university seeks to compartmentalize religion, and thus fragments life. Or it substitutes for Christianity such quasi-religions as humanism, Marxism, and existentialism. Compartmentalization and fragmentation go against the nature of the "*universitas*." Faith and learning go

together because man is essentially a religious being. Only the wholistic approach of Christianity is fully universal, as it preserves both freedom and reason. Freedom is a reality only because there is a God. Other philosophies lead usually to heteronomy—the imposed, external rule of the strong over the weak.

John Henry Newman, in his classic *The Idea of a University*, saw the danger of a higher education that is not related to the church: students grow in knowledge, but not in religion, and science becomes in danger of running "wild, like a planet loose from its celestial system" (1959 ed., p. 463). Mutilation of the divine breaks up into fragments the whole circle of secular knowledge, for there can be no *universal* knowledge without theology. Cutting out religion and traditional morality from the university causes a deadly wound, for the "fountain of learning, and of liberty, is religion" (Kirk, p. 31).

Speaking of the scientific approach to learning, Francis Bacon once said, "We need fear no lion in the path, nor set any limit to our journey" (quoted in Charles E. Raven, *Natural Religion and Christian Theology*, p. 101). Ellen G. White uses similar language regarding the approach to learning found in Christian education: "Before the student there is opened a path of continual progress. . . . He will advance as fast and as far as possible in every branch of true knowledge" (*Education*, p. 18).

The absolute universality of Christianity, which, of course, must be reflected in the Christian university, is seen in the fact that it reaches right into eternity (or what Ellen White calls the "school of the hereafter"): "There every power will be developed, every capability increased. . . . The loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend. . . . And . . . more glorious revelations" as the years of eternity roll down the corridors of endless ages (*ibid.*, p. 307). □