

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN TEACHING  
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TOWARDS A NEW MODEL FOR AN ADVENTIST SECONDARY  
SCHOOL:

THE CASE OF MARIENHOEHE (GERMANY)

by

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Once upon a time there was an Adventist School in Germany called Marienhoehe, that developed together with a Theological Seminary which came into existence in 1924. This school had to face manifold difficulties throughout the years, especially during the war. Many times it struggled for survival. But in the recent past tremendous changes have been going on, and this is what has been happening.

In 1989 the Berlin wall was pulled down and the reunification between Eastern and Western Germany began. This was a turning point not only for Germans but also for our Adventist school in Darmstadt. There had always been a close connection between our school, the Theological Seminary and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the years after the big change in Germany the Seminary was transferred to Friedensau in the former eastern part of the country and so a gap developed in this unit. It was the spiritual link between school and church which was missing from then on. The ministerial students from the seminary had always enriched school life through their spiritual influence. There was a good, long-lasting partnership and it was everybody's desire on the campus that Marienhoehe School should keep its good reputation of facing the needs and interests of students as well as parents.

In Germany most of the parents want their children to go through secondary education (about 30 per cent of German students attend a secondary school), so these schools are highly appreciated and crowded places.

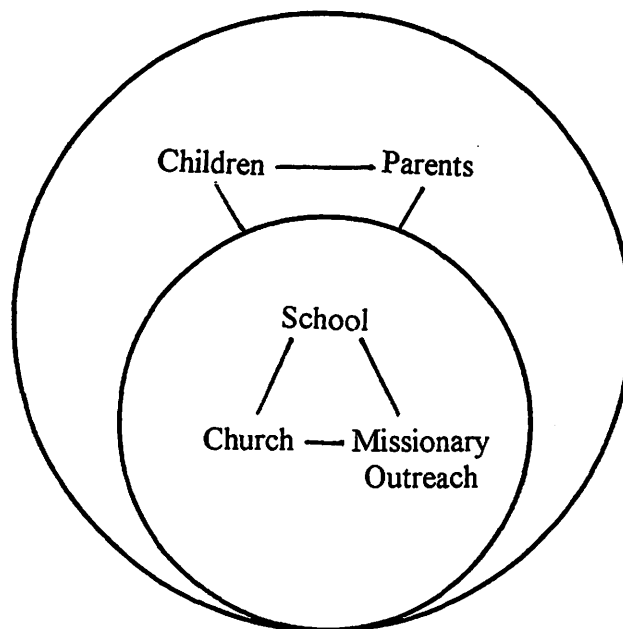
Because secondary education takes a long time (usually 9 years, between the ages of 11 to 19 inclusive), parents look for a good school with first-class education where the student can develop his individual talents and skills and which has a variety of extracurricular activities that help the student develop into a whole personality. To achieve that goal, parents are prepared to spend much money on children's educations. In addition, they want to protect them from changing conditions in a dangerous environment (smoking, drinking alcohol, taking drugs) by sending their children to a school isolated from the rush of contemporary life. Because state schools are often overcrowded, parents look for schools with small classes that are safe and friendly places which make learning as well as individual guidance possible. Each student should be treated with dignity and individual attention so that he can feel his personal value.

German children feel the pressure imposed by their parents. They notice that they are pushed forward not only in their homes but also by increasing demands of society. They try to retreat and often develop a reluctant attitude towards school. In many cases they cannot meet the expectations of their parents and the environment. Therefore, they often have behavioural problems at a very early stage of development. It does not take very long until they cannot cope any longer with the requirements of the state schools. This also applies to children who are dyslexic. These children also need a good school which cares for them and provides an education that gives them the opportunity to develop into a personality able to deal with the manifold demands of our modern world. Often the children have friends who already attend Marienhoehe School, and because of student witnessing their friends just follow them (peer pressure). Children attend Marienhoehe School for many different reasons, but one thing is certain: they all expect much more than is usually provided in state schools.

At this point the question should be raised: What is a good school? And what do we as Seventh-day Adventists have to offer in addition to that? Whereas the purpose of the school is to provide excellent education, its most important goal is the development of a whole student who is able to face the various requirements of a multicultural society. Therefore, parents and children are looking for a good school with a highly committed staff, excellent instruction and

education including a balanced curriculum, a special mission in a changing society and a healthy lifestyle which makes the development into a whole student possible, physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. The Adventist secondary school in Germany usually has to fulfil two tasks: It has to educate children from its own church and it has to provide education for those students who seek help and guidance because they often have problems of different kinds at state schools. Apart from the children of our church (31 per cent of the student body) who come to school in order to be close to a peer group that shares the same beliefs and attitudes, there are more and more students from the town and its vicinity who do not fully agree with the principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and only partly share their beliefs. The school does accept them as long as they are willing to integrate into the school community and do not hinder the process of integration of faith and learning. In the same way as the partnership between faith and learning is crucial in the classrooms, there should develop a spiritual partnership between Adventist and non-Adventist students on the campus. This interrelationship gives the school its mandate of being a mission school. The „best education can be attained where intellectual growth takes place within an environment of Christian faith and commitment. The creation of such an environment is the goal of Seventh-day Adventist higher education, in which spiritually-oriented concepts are central to the aims of education.“ (Madgwick 1994) If the school is to be a good one and not only an instrument of transferring knowledge there must be manifold and prosperous partnerships in which the members can rely on each other. It is not only the cooperation between parents, children and staff that makes the school function well, it is also the cooperation between school, church and a third support provided by our Theological Seminary in former times. By what can the Theological Seminary be replaced?

If we consider the parents' and children's expectations of school it becomes evident that this support can only be our *missionary outreach* which is expected of Adventist and non-Adventist students as a common action and which at the same time provides the link between them. This outreach gives the school the opportunity to shape students and to turn them into responsible persons coping with the various requirements and needs of the church-related and the secular world. The success of the educational process depends to the greatest possible extent on the successful cooperation between children, parents and the school community with its three parts: school, church and missionary outreach.



School and church are tied together by their missionary outreach which provides the spiritual factor in the process of Christian education. Therefore, this outreach must not only consist of social events similar to those offered by the various clubs and organizations in society in order to attract people. It is crucial that all the activities carried out at our school have a message which leads people to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, that he is with us in our personal involvement is even more important than the events themselves.

Marienhoehe School has developed a *new model* of education, taking into account the changing demands of society as well as the individual needs of every single person involved in the educational process. It offers an excellent academic education to all who want it. It provides help and guidance for those who need it. And it meets the expectations of all who come in order to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

The subsequent chapter is a translation available in Germany as a brochure, issued by our school, that introduces the main educational principles of the Schulzentrum Seminar Marienhoehe to the public.

## THE NEW MODEL OF THE SCHOOL

### I. Basic statements

Based on the Holy Bible, our belief is that God, Creator of the universe and the earth, has made us a unit: body, soul and spirit. He meets us as Creator, Partner, Companion and loving Father. His care culminates in our Redeemer, Jesus Christ at the cross, and makes the liberation, growth and development of mankind possible. Christian-Adventist education is determined by the biblical image of God, the world and mankind, and has to face a fast-changing world again and again. Therefore, the development of a human being should take place in four different areas, namely a personal relationship with God, a responsible relation to creation, a healthy attitude towards himself as well as a positive relation to his fellow man.

#### 1. Man and his relation to God

We believe in the existence of a personal and eternal God who is our almighty Creator. Sin has caused a separation from God which man cannot overcome by himself. God re-establishes the relationship with man by His love. Through Jesus Christ he offers his Redemption to all people, regardless of sex, origin or religion. He who has consciously made his decision for Jesus Christ may trust in God and his Redemption. He will experience God's love in his life. Out of gratitude he follows God's will with responsible actions.

#### 2. Man and his relation to creation

Mankind is called to preserve and enjoy creation out of deep reverence for God and life. Even after the estrangement of man from his Creator his task remains to protect the earth as the foundation of life. The promise of a renewed earth which will be created by God encourages us to treat creation responsibly.

#### 3. Man and his attitude towards himself

The relationship with our loving God changes the attitude of man towards himself and towards his neighbour. He understands his human existence as a whole, designated by God, which

comprises his body, soul, spirit, and environment. He is interested in developing his responsibility to God and his fellow men through being open and willing to learn and by developing his creativity.

#### 4. Man and his relation to his fellow man

Somebody who knows that he is accepted can also accept others. He recognizes their equality and respects them in their human dignity. Love for his neighbour causes him to share with them his knowledge of and experience with God through words and deeds.

## II. Educational objectives

Christian education with an Adventist emphasis at the Marienhoche Secondary School is intended to encourage the individual development of the human being in such a way that he can grow entirely into an independent personality.

### 1. Conveying of values (no list can be comprehensive)

#### 1.1. Values in relation to God:

development of conscience  
 trust  
 love  
 responsibility  
 faithfulness  
 understanding

#### 1.2. Values in relation to creation

love of nature  
 environmental responsibility  
 respect for life

#### 1.3. Values in relation to himself

patience  
 self-control  
 independence  
 good judgement  
 joy, humour  
 health  
 self-esteem  
 liberty  
 willingness to perform  
 order  
 reliability  
 neatness

#### 1.4. Values in relation to the fellow man and society

responsible actions  
 non-violence  
 consideration  
 truthfulness  
 ability to establish good relationships  
 solidarity  
 social ethics  
 civic responsibility  
 respect for the dignity and uniqueness of the fellow man  
 belief in the equality of men and women, old and young people

#### 2. Personality development

Following the biblical principle of wholeness, Christian-Adventist education aims at the harmonious development on a physical, psychological, mental, spiritual and social level. We are convinced that the human being can best be prepared for this in two ways:

- a) By assuming responsibility in the family, church, job and society. These areas represent the wholeness of human existence in everyday life.
- b) By looking at life in the future Heavenly Kingdom instead of dealing only with the present. This part of educational efforts is crucial, equal to all other aspects combined, and makes the development of the personality complete.

This development takes place in precise educational approaches.

### III. Educational approaches

#### 1. Cooperation between school, dormitory, home and Marienhoehe Church

Special attention is paid to the directed cooperation between students, parents, fellow workers and Marienhoehe School and Church. By tackling problems together and maintaining an open atmosphere of trust, conflicts shall be avoided and willingness to perform increased. At the same time social fellowship is practised.

In practice this means that as many common activities as possible are carried out in order to involve the various groups.

All our efforts aim at a whole education. This means the educational aims do not only concern rational and emotional levels but extend to all areas mentioned in section II. The realization of all these educational aims requires that the teachers' and deans' jobs at school and in the dormitory are not only restricted to lessons and supervision but include much more than that. The student shall also receive guidance according to biblical Christian principles in coping with private difficulties. He shall develop an awareness of his gifts from God and learn to use them responsibly.

## 2. Possibilities of development

### 2.1. Physical development

- through manual activities, e.g. needlework, handicrafts (furniture for school, repairs etc.), pottery, photography and design;
- through gardening, e.g. the setting-up and care of an organic garden with vegetable and fruit growing, ecological pond, greenhouse and improvement of the campus by landscaping;
- through sports activities, e.g. games, hiking, gymnastics, etc.;
- through a healthy way of life, cooking courses and nutrition seminars as well as a balanced attitude towards work, spare time and rest, through strict abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and drugs;
- through a creative organization of spare time with optional competitions in the arts (music, media, theatre, arts and crafts);

### 2.2. Psychological development

- Through conversational groups and seminars as well as social contact in everyday life young people can get the opportunity to recognize and accept the specific emotions of their own sex.
- Through a wide availability of musical and artistic activities (e.g. pottery, silk painting, various choirs), imagination, creativity and the appreciation of aesthetics shall be developed.
- Through guidance and responsibility on different levels every individual shall recognize his talents and develop his personality. Guidance in all these tasks makes it easier to deal with personal possibilities and limits. This happens, for instance, when special events are planned and carried out at school, in the dormitories and through interaction with adults in such activities as pathfinders.
- Through personal talks, individual and group work on a pastoral-therapeutic level, the individual will become better equipped to deal with everyday problems and conflicts. At the same time, he is able to understand the peculiarities of his individual, age-specific development, can cope with them and can find his psychological balance. The student is provided with special opportunities, e.g. in the „Lernboerse“ (an educational programme outside of school hours, developed by our school, which includes both students and members of the community) and in individual talks with the staff who have a background in psychology.

### 2.3. Mental development

- Education towards thinking internationally. This means: good relationships with the foreigners who live with us, exchange visits of students and teachers, application of

ecological principles, discovery learning and opening of the school to the inhabitants of the city.

- Independent thinking in analyzation of the state curriculum.
- Acquisition of special knowledge for everyday life (including technical studies and basic technology).
- Critical analysis of one's own culture and understanding for other cultures.
- Realization of the manifold interconnections of all ways of life.
- Dealing with the meaning and search for truth with the help of analysis and comparison of temporal trends and ideologies, e.g. in the various subjects/topics of lessons or in worship.
- Reflection on all mentioned areas from a biblical-Christian view of life.

#### 2.4. Spiritual development

- Encouragement to search for God and meet Him

Apart from the various opportunities provided by the church which also meet the needs of young people (in particular baptism and communion services, nights of prayer, varied services), the school also provides Bible and study groups at home, youth meetings and devotions, „Einkehrwochen“ (week of spiritual emphasis), weeks of prayer for young people, youth outreach programmes and church and youth evangelisations. Religious education also addresses this issue as do lessons in general, and above all talks with the dormitory deans, teachers and pastors. Regular devotional series give the opportunity for intensive debate on specific topics. Short devotionals at the beginning of the lessons shall encourage students to practise personal worship, prayer and Bible study.

- Encouragement to a Christian lifestyle

Stimulation through lessons, sermons and seminars. Models and examples set by staff members. Special projects shall encourage the practice of an environmental, non-violent, health-conscious, hopeful and relationship-oriented lifestyle.

- Encouragement to social welfare and missionary work

In youth teams, implementation of youth meetings and times of prayer, pathfinder work, musical groups, neighbourly help; visits in hospitals, old peoples' homes and prisons, help in the dormitories, social service, participation in projects in and for the Third World, street and youth evangelism, leadership in Bible study groups as well as arrangement of devotion and service, help with establishing new churches.



## 2.5. Social development

- The way man sees himself as a social being

The natural longing of young people for friendship and partnership prompts the readiness for social cooperation and provides room for social learning. The social responsibility towards one's fellow men can be seen in the realization of social projects, e.g. private tutoring (students helping students), the work of tutors (older students assisting new students and those attending lower courses), neighbourly help, collections and support for ADRA (Adventist Disaster and Relief Association).

- Respect for the dignity and uniqueness of one's fellow man

The close social life in dormitories and school and the wide variety of people living in Germany, both native and foreign, requires and furthers the social abilities of every single person.

- A responsible attitude towards sexuality shall be encouraged through seminars and personal talks.

The fostering of acceptable language usage is a must in everyday life. An adequate language level is a reflection of culture and a precise way of expressing oneself contributes to clear thinking. This does not only mean that students with an unacceptable language are asked to change it but it also implies that the school offers courses in which the proper use of language is cultivated (lyric seminars, communication training etc.)

- Encouragement towards flexibility and peacefulness

Conflicts shall be solved by tolerance and non-violence. For this reason the school has employed social education workers and established an advice centre where specialists care for those with emotional problems (stress, tensions) and needs.

- Support of self-assertion and adaptability

Marienhoehe School encourages responsibility for oneself and for others. The cultivation of relations together with the readiness to deal with conflicts leads to a well-balanced social cooperation.

- Development of integration into society and the church community

A conscious development of personality is reflected in an active involvement in social life. Among other things students at Marienhoehe arrange youth weeks, talent nights and formal evenings. They organize and carry out concerts, visit political information meetings together and shape the life of a Christian school.

- The development of ecological consciousness and actions

The responsibility of the community can also be seen in the careful treatment of nature. The location and surroundings of Marienhoehe stimulate an ecological consciousness. At Marienhoehe there are pathfinder clubs in which nature discovery is a group activity where hiking, games and overnight stays in the open air are organized. Biology teachers practise discovery learning (partly in the organic garden and in the greenhouse).

- Encouraging cooperation with responsible persons

The responsible persons on our campus consider it their task to cooperate with the students at school and in free-time activities. This correlation (e.g. in students' administration, in common projects, in leisure-time activities and in help for the Third World) provides a special atmosphere among students and responsible persons and leads to a joint solution to all the planned tasks.

- Encouragement of group responsibility for order and cleanliness in the school, dormitory and administration buildings as well as the campus

For example, each student is assigned an area where he is responsible for cleanliness and order. Apart from that there is the option to work on campus by caring for the premises and doing minor repairs in the buildings. By doing that he has the opportunity to earn some money.

## Conclusion

Today a new challenge faces Marienhoehe School. It has been recently rearranged. Most of the missionary outreach which was in former times carried out by the Theological Seminary is nowadays done by the students and the staff as a joint action. The school has done its best to grow with the challenge. New ways have been found so that the seeming obstacle some years ago could be seen as turning into an enrichment for school and campus life as well as the individual development of students. This is just a beginning and much is left to be done which makes everybody's dedication to this cause necessary. The new model of the school that is focused on our missionary outreach needs all of us and with our personal involvement we can contribute to the development of our Adventist Secondary School in Germany with its long-standing tradition.

**References**

- (1) Appendix 3 in Gordon Madgwick, *Distinctiveness of S.D.A. Higher Educacion*, Newbold College, June 1994, Appendices 1-8
- (2) *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Revised Edition) volume 10, Review and Herold Publishing Association 1976, p. 1314
- (3) Schulzentrum Seminar Marienhoehe, *Schulprofil*, Darmstadt (own translation)