

**Institute for Christian Teaching  
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**THE ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN AFRICA:  
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by  
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## **Introduction**

Francis Bacon's assertion that "Knowledge is power" is still as true today as when it was first made. God Himself says that "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject you..." Hosea4:6.

Information has always been important for development in all aspects of life. We are, no doubt, in the age of information explosion. Information gives knowledge. The user must, however, develop the ability to discern, analyse and distinguish this information to get the right and useful knowledge. Man, therefore is a processor of information. But it takes wisdom, which only God gives, to get genuine knowledge. Libraries have been known to house and provide information which in turn gives knowledge.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to look into the place and role of libraries in higher education in African development. The library has been described as the academic "heart" of a university, and one of the most essential academic units. (NUC, 1997:39). Secondly, to look into ways Babcock University Library, within the Seventh-day Adventist context, can make a positive difference in providing information resources, not only to the immediate university community - staff and students, but also to serve as information and research centre on Adventism for Nigeria and the rest of the West Africa sub-region. And lastly, that Babcock University can and should help build a Christian approach in all major issues facing our society because of our belief as a Christian university that God only is the answer to all human issues.

### **Emergence of African Universities**

University tradition in Africa dates back to 859 A.D. when the Qarawiyine University was founded in Fez, Morocco by a lady named Fatima Oumm El Bamine. (*Sasnett, M. and*

*Sepmeyer, I, 1966*). This was followed in 970 A.D. by Al.Azhar University in Cairo (*Directory of African Universities, 1974*). In 1581, the Mosque of Sankore became the seat of scholarship in Timbuctu - it was a kind of university where young men used to come from all parts of Africa to study, (*Dubois, 1945*). Modern universities did not begin in Africa until the early part of the nineteenth century. These were patterned after the educational systems of the European countries which had colonised these African countries. But as soon as each of these countries threw off the shackles of colonialism, it accelerated the pace of its university development. Within the last fifty years or so, the number of universities in East and West Africa has progressively risen from four in 1948, to six in 1951, eight in 1960, twenty-five in 1970, thirty-six in 1980 and forty-two in 1984. (*Ifidon, 1985:5*). Today, Nigeria alone has forty full-fledged universities and several degree granting colleges and polytechnics. The initiative for a university in Nigeria came in 1896 when some leading citizens of Lagos proposed the establishment of a kind of vocational university. But the idea did not materialise probably because of lack of funds and the lukewarmness of the colonial government. The idea resurfaced in 1930, and by 1934, the Yaba Higher College was formally established, (*Ifidon 1985:15*).

As a result of the Elliot Commission set up in 1943, the British Government established a university college at Ibadan in 1948 with an initial student population of 103 and 13 instructors (*Ibid* ).

### **Objectives and Functions of African Universities**

It is true that there are certain universal principles that obtain across the globe in higher education, - these are teaching, research, public services and the conservation of knowledge and ideas. However, there has been the need for a fundamentally different conceptualization of universities in Africa because of the issue of relevance to the African environment.

The higher education needs of African countries from the onset were (1) to meet the manpower needs of these countries - public and private sectors. (2) to offer courses in professional and subprofessional levels. (3) to organise programs for extra-mural - adult education.

Viewed against this background, the functions of African Universities were re-examined

and re-defined by the Association of African Universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s as follows:

“A truly African university ... must be one which while acknowledging the need to transform Africa into the twentieth century, must yet realise that it can best achieve this result by completely identifying itself with the realities of a predominantly ‘sixteenth century’ setting, and the aspirations of an unsophisticated, but highly expectant people. It follows that the emergent African university must henceforth be much more than an institution for teaching, research and dissemination of higher learning. It must be accountable to, and serve the vast majority of the people who live in rural areas. The African university must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernisation and the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite” (*Yesufu, T. M, 1973*).

In the light of these requirements, the functions of African Universities have been categorised thus:

1. **Pursuit, Promotion and Dissemination of Knowledge:** The concept is that African universities must both pursue liberal arts education as well as for practical or utilitarian purposes.
2. **Research:** African universities must promote research and scholarship to keep abreast of current development and specialization with emphasis on such things as production of greater quantity and better quality of local staple food such as gari, palm oil, cocoa, groundnut etc; rural health care delivery; literacy and adult education; and unemployment.
3. **Provision of Intellectual Leadership.**
4. **Manpower Development\_-** This is one of the major reasons for higher education. The universities are seen as the chief sources of supply of man-power needs in skilled occupations and intellectualism, hence several courses are offered at various levels.
5. **Promotion of social and economic modernisation .**
6. **Promoting Intercontinental Unity and International Understanding.** This has been pursued through such organ as Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now metamorphosing into African Union(AU) . The founding of the Association of African Universities (AAU) in 1967, and the establishment of the standing conference of African university Libraries are further proof of this. (*Ifidon, 1985*)

### **Objectives and Functions of University Libraries.**

It is generally accepted that the library is the nerve-centre of educational institutions, especially the universities. As an American author, Shelby Foote, (quoted in American Libraries, 1994) put it; “a university is a group of buildings gathered round a library”. The quality of the educational programme of a university is measured by its library.

The term **academic library** is used for libraries in institutions of higher learning. Academic libraries differ from each other in many respects, but they all have the same basic function, and that is to aid the parent institution in carrying out its objectives. The basic functions of a university library, therefore, include the following:

1. To select and acquire materials - book and non-book materials for use by the academic community - staff and students.
2. To prepare these materials for use. This involves cataloging, classification and processing.
3. To make materials available through loans, and easy access to open shelves.
5. To provide instruction to library users - (this is becoming more and more popular in higher institutions). At Babcock University, the course - “Use of Library” is compulsory for all fresh students.
4. To conduct research with the view of adding to human knowledge and finding ways to improve its services.

### **Overview of Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education :**

The Seventh-day Adventist church is by no means one of the largest religious denominations in the world. But by all means, it ranks among the world largest in the education enterprise. The church pays a high premium on education. We believe that like in many other areas, there is a divine guidance in this respect. Without any doubt, Ellen G. White has been used by God to guide the church. Her inspired counsels and instructions on the church’s affairs, including education, have had a great influence on the establishment and growth of the church’s remarkable education system at all levels, promoting and upholding the Christian world view. The church believes in the education of the total being - holistic education. Ellen. G. White defines education this way:

“True education means more than the pursual of certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world, and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.” (Education, p.13)

The Seventh-day Adventist education is what Roger Coon (*JAE, 1997*) calls authentic Christian education that should meet these three criteria:

1. The educational goal and objectives of making a good citizen fitted for the future immortal life as well as the present earthly existence.
2. An educational philosophy that rejects the foundational underpinnings of public education Humanism, Naturalism, and Relativism .
3. An educational methodology that, first of all, focuses upon the transformation of sinful human character.

### **Babcock University**

Babcock University belongs to a family of about a hundred Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities across the world. As a college, it was established in 1959 at Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria as Adventist college of West Africa (ACWA), changing its name to Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) in 1975. In April, 1999, it received the Federal Government of Nigeria charter as a private university with the name Babcock University after David Babcock who was the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Nigeria in 1914. It was one of the three so granted. As expected the mission, philosophy, goals and objectives of Babcock University would fall in line with those of the Seventh-day Adventist church as it has been the case since 1959. To ensure this continuity, the International Board of Education (IBE) has visited twice - 1999 and 2001. The Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) has planned an accreditation visit for 2003.

In its 1999/2001 bulletin, Babcock University states its mission thus:

“Babcock University is established as a tower of truth and knowledge, to offer high quality professional, pre-professional, general and vocational education to prepare men and women for

responsible, dedicated and committed service for God and humanity". It lists its specific goals and objectives as follows.

**1. Intellectual**

- (a) Provide its students a high quality education in the arts, sciences, as well as certain professional and pre-professional programs for students who want to study in an atmosphere of learning governed by mental, physical, social and spiritual excellence which is the balanced development of the whole person;
- (b) Create a milieu that attracts students and faculty who are of high quality and who can study together to understand and appreciate the knowledge and culture that have been passed down from earlier generations, while seeking new knowledge and understanding from ongoing research;
- (c) Foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity and self-expression, while striving to apply the wisdom of the past and the discoveries of today to the challenges of a rapidly changing world;

**2. Occupational**

- (a) Prepare leadership for the church in the fulfillment of its divinely inspired global mission.
- (b) dispense quality preparation for students to assume careers in the professions, in industry, in public service, in business, in the arts, in various trades, etcetera
- (c) provide opportunities for the practice of certain vocational skills as part of the educative process and as income earner to help the student defray a large share of educational expenses
- (d) help the student develop manual skills as an avenue for recreation and profitable use of time, as a means of better understanding the dignity of labour, and as contributory toward economic security.

**3. Aesthetic**

- (a) to teach the student an appreciation of natural beauty as a portrayal of God's activity in the world.
- (b) help the student develop a healthy acquaintance with the fine arts and encourage him to enlarge his capacity to enjoy and to create works of artistic value.
- (c) impress upon the student, the cardinal importance for man's survival on the earth, of a healthy respect for nature, the environment and the habitat.

**4. Physical**

- (a) encourage students to know themselves and to consider their relationship to their Creator.
- (b) promote in students an awareness of their physical needs and encourage them to maintain a balance between their academic pursuits and the cultivation of their physical well-being;

- (c) sensitize students as to the importance of care of personal appearance and grooming with emphasis on natural rather than artificial beauty, simplicity and modesty in dress and diet.
- (d) stimulate the student to appreciate the value and dignity of manual as well as other types of honest labour.

#### **5. Social**

- (a) help students learn effective communication and human-relations skills that cross the boundaries of discipline, cultures and personal philosophies;
- (b) help students develop into people who can be effective members of social institutions, such as community, church, and family, and who will take an active role in contemporary society, seeking to solve its problems and to improve the quality of life for all people.
- (c) impress upon the students sense of good citizenship, patriotism and loyalty to the nation and every legitimate action of government which is scripturally regarded as a divinely approved means for the maintenance of order and for the protection of persons and property.
- (d) inculcate in the student a high sense of justice that becomes indignant at inequity and prompts a willingness to sacrifice self in order to bring about rectification.

#### **6. Spiritual**

- (a) To develop genuine Christian character motivated by love and controlled by steadfast principle ,thus preparing the individual for self-government and self -discipline.
- (b) To nurture spiritual sensitivity and awareness .
- (c) To teach and encourage internalization of Christian doctrine and practice as believed and taught by the Seventh- day Adventists .
- (d) To foster understanding and respect for those of other religious and intellectual persuasions.
- (e) To make religion - worship , faith and participation -an integrating and unifying force in learning .
- (f) To provide an environment in which students are exposed to Seventh -day Adventist standards of modesty and moral behavior by precept and example.
- (g) To inspire commitment to the global mission of human salvation.

From the above, Babcock University would be seen to uphold the purpose of Adventist education as described by Ellen G. White:

“To restore in man the image of his maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized - this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life”. (Education, Pp. 15-16)

#### **The Role of the University Library**

As stated earlier the major role of the library is to support the goals and objectives of the

parent institution. Thus, the mission of Babcock University Library is to uphold the mission of the university by maintaining a high standard of service, acquiring and organising materials that promote the Christian world view of the institution; with focus on integration of faith and learning, believing that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”. (Prov. 1:6)

In his article “The Library of Faith”, Keith Clouten (1992) summarised the seven roles of the library in the Adventist college or university to include the following:

1. The library should not only contain a broad and balanced collection of learning resources, but provide access to the world of information.
2. The library’s collection and organization should reflect a Seventh-day Adventist Christian perspective or world-view.
3. The library’s collections should represent a diversity of ideas and viewpoints on topics of study and interest.
4. The library’s materials selection policy should reflect the unique mission of the institution, which in turn should reflect the mission of the church and education philosophy.
5. The library should conduct a strong program of bibliographic instruction.
6. The library should welcome opportunities to provide meaningful student employment wherever feasible.
7. The library may explore creative ways of serving its community.

The university library should be a research centre. In a paper presented at the 2000 Academic Congregation colloquium, the author of this paper tried to sensitise the idea that there are two powerful research facilities at Babcock university which are not fully utilised among our people as research centres - The university library and the E. G. White Research Centre. This is as a result of inadequate awareness. There should be a concerted effort to let our people and even the non-members of the church to know of the resources available at Babcock by creating awareness through publicity. The resources of the library should be such as to enable it to support the Christian world view programme of the university. The acquisition policy should aim at a well-balanced collection which cannot be built on haphazard book gifts. Only materials that contribute to the goals of the institution should belong to the library. The library should make it a matter of policy to acquire materials (1) on Adventism and (2) by Adventist authors on various expert fields. This will reflect and ensure Adventist view in these fields. Formation of a Christian mind requires regular reading of books and other materials written from Christian perspectives. (3) In a new world order of information technology, the world has become a global village. For any library to be relevant, it must be Internet connected. This creates libraries without walls. Babcock University

is seriously working towards achieving this goal as soon as possible.

### **Training in Librarianship**

Babcock university offers a degree in Library and Information Science. As far as the writer of this paper knows, this makes Babcock University probably the first and only Seventh-day Adventist institution offering a full degree in Library Science. It means that before now, all Adventist Librarians have been trained in non-Adventist universities. The availability of a degree course at Babcock will make it possible for Librarians to be trained for our schools and colleges in the West Africa subregion, and possibly beyond.

### **Integration of Christian values and learning**

The library is an informal classroom. It should be the duty of a librarian to reflect Christ in the library as a teacher would do in a classroom. The librarian should live by example. Integration of faith and learning is possible in the library through:

1. **Basic Attitudes:-** The way of life of the librarian and other library workers should reflect Christ. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven."(Math 5:16).
2. **Selection/Acquisition policy.** As stated above, only materials that contribute to the goals of the institution should find their way to the library.
3. **Mode of service -** Librarianship is synonymous with service. If this service is provided with a Christian attitude, it could be winsome. Service with humility should be our watch word.
4. **Dress:** The way a person dresses tells a lot about that person's personality. The library staff, like the teacher, should be exemplary.

### **Other Christian values that can be imparted in the library include:**

1. **Orderliness.** The importance of orderliness in any organisation cannot be over emphasised . Order is said to be the first law in heaven. Apostle Paul admonishes in I Corinthians 14:40, " let all things be done decently and in order." This should be the guiding principle for all library staff and users. For easy access to information sources, the library must be well organised.. Particularly,

there is a need for maintaining order at the Circulation Desk and other service points.

2. **Time consciousness** - The library teaches this virtue by setting and enforcing very strictly dates due on materials loaned to library users. Fines are imposed on defaulters after due notices have been served. This serves as a deterrent and helps to teach the value of time.
3. **Courtesy** - The golden rule says, "Do to others as you would want them to do to you". Matt. 7:12. There should be mutual respect for the right of others. The library encourages the spirit of give and take - live and let live.
4. **Reverence** - In addition to treating others fairly, our reverence is due to our God, the almighty. The atmosphere of solemnity that prevails in and around the library should aid the users in developing a sense of reverence.

### **Conclusion**

African universities were developed to fulfill the need for local manpower while meeting the need for research and other traditions of a university. Babcock University as the only Christian University in Nigeria for now, faces several challenges as it is expected to serve as a model to others. There is a need to meet these challenges. The library is an important unit in the development of Christian mind and world view. The library through its collection policy can help to build an Adventist world view. The university through its library can and should be a centre of excellence. The library should include well selected and well organised materials, written from all major world view perspectives. The university should be seen as a unifying point of a university. It is the only place in a university where divergent views come together. The library is like a hub tying together all disciplines.

Finally, as Apostle Peter puts it in second Peter 3:11,

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved,  
what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy  
conversation and godliness."

In the same vein, if what is done in the library affects the world view, what manner of library ought we to have? Only the best is good enough for a Seventh-day Adventist university.

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