

Whither Adventist Higher Education?

CHARLES B. HIRSCH

25

Since the end of World War Two, Seventh-day Adventist higher education has been moving in many directions. The war veteran with his GI education benefits gave the colleges a new lease on life. The ex-serviceman brought with him a mature outlook, an appreciation of his faith and belief in God, and a seriousness that was a welcome challenge to the teachers. Equally as important (if not more so to the administrator) were the financial benefits this student brought with him. The cash flow to Adventist colleges reached new proportions!

Most of the campuses greeted their returned war heroes with facilities that were outmoded, obsolete, and often condemned as firetraps. Oddly enough, although many of these buildings have suffered the blows of the wrecking ball and hammer since then and have served for the fire exercises of the local fire departments, some are still not only in existence but in actual use today — perhaps as reminders of the good old days!

Yet the physical conditions of the campus plant were not a serious deterrent to the Adventist student. He came with a purpose and a desire for a Christian education that he knew could be obtained from a dedicated and committed Christian faculty — not from bricks and mortar. The loyalty of Adventist youth to the educational program of the church is evidenced by the continuous upward movement of the enrollment thermometer.

Our statistical report for 1967 indicates that 13,979 students were enrolled in Adventist colleges and universities in North America. Of these, 1,493 earned baccalaureate degrees and 484 graduates went into church employment. Ten years earlier, in 1957, 7,888 students attended, 769 were

graduated, and 284 went into church employment. The past decade shows a tremendous jump in comparison with the preceding decade. In 1947 there were 7,824 students enrolled, 634 graduated, and 311 taken into church employment.

Projections for the nation indicate that higher education will feel the greatest pressure it has had, with enrollments increasing forty percent by 1975. This is particularly due to the fact that there will be an increase of thirty-seven percent in the population of college age — ages twenty to twenty-four.

If the past decade is any criterion, church-related schools will share in this pressure, though perhaps not to the extent that may be experienced by the public schools. Seventh-day Adventist young people in general will continue to be loyal to the church. But because they and their parents are becoming more conscious of the need for quality education, they will be seeking out the colleges with the best qualified and most dedicated faculty, adequate laboratories, adequate libraries, and adequate physical plants.

College trustees and conference administrators have been making budgetary provisions for new buildings and facilities, but not until the past decade have ten-year master campus plans become the *modus operandi* of most colleges. Lack of planning in the past has resulted in a hodgepodge of buildings, poor architecture, and, in some instances, inability to project proper and sensible expansion. Some colleges are trying to cope with this past lack of foresight, but the remedy is not inexpensive. In most cases, present building programs are meeting the immediate needs of the institutions, but the indebtedness involved makes building for the future difficult.

There has been increasing realization that the church is facing a crisis in the financing of Christian education. One contributing factor in the United States is our traditional stand against the acceptance of government aid for education. Certainly, federal funds should not be considered a panacea for our financial problems. At best, such aid would only *help* to shoulder the economic burden under which our schools find themselves; the real support must come from ourselves.

Tuition and fees, a chief source of income, must reach certain limits, however. It is true that more scholarships, loan funds, and grants are available for the student than ever before in history. On the other hand, many students still must earn a good part of their way through college. Whereas thirty years ago a student could earn his entire tuition and fees by working 706 hours, that same student would have to work 944 hours today to take care of similar expenses. Hence, increases in costs must definitely keep this

group in mind, especially in view of the increasing availability of community and state colleges, where charges are comparatively negligible.

Although tuition and fees may appear to be high, we should remind ourselves that each student's education is being made possible by a generous annual operating subsidy provided by the Adventist church conferences. On the undergraduate level this amounts to from \$150 to \$200 per student. In specialized and professional areas, the subsidy per student is considerably higher. In medicine it is \$4,620; in dentistry, \$1,106; and in college nursing, \$843.

27

A second source of income comes in the form of operating and capital subsidies from the local, union, and national church conference organizations. These have been and are the mainstay of financial support, some conferences giving as much as twenty percent, or more, of their annual operating budget for education. It is here that a limit has been reached. When we add capital and special subsidies to subsidies for operating, we find that several colleges are averaging over a half million dollars per year in overall subsidies from the conferences. Use of additional conference funds for education would mean a diversion of monies from evangelistic and overseas responsibilities. Certainly, the evangelistic thrust of the church cannot be diminished, for this is the reason for our existence.

A third source includes gifts from alumni, individuals, churches, foundations, and others. The contributions from this source are relatively small. One of our perhaps more prestigious colleges, reporting on their alumni solicitation program for a recent year, noted that the total income from their former students averaged seventeen cents per person! This third source is one that could be further developed and nurtured.

As additional teachers, equipment, facilities, and campus space become necessary because of steady increase in enrollment, the strain on the available financial resources will become more critical. In 1957, the faculty and staff for our colleges numbered 932; and of this number, 106 had doctoral degrees. In 1967, there were 2,793 on faculty and staff payrolls. Of these, 305 had their doctorates. This threefold increase in doctoral degrees during the past decade is significant in itself.

During this same period, salaries, allowances, and perquisites for college personnel have made tremendous advances. More money has been invested in persons sent for advanced work and doctoral studies. The basic salaries for teachers, regardless of sex or marital status, have been equalized. In the area of allowances, too, the gap between single and married personnel has narrowed. These changes add up to more expenditures for the colleges. If

these increases, which have been long overdue, continue and if the number of personnel increases proportionately during this next decade, the frustrations of administrators attempting to operate on balanced budgets will reach new proportions.

During the past few years, those in responsible positions have become more cognizant of, and at the same time more perturbed about, the rising costs of church education in North America. Local and regional church conferences for the most part, have been permitted to develop their educational programs on the basis of local needs and availability of financial support. The result has been the movement of educational programs in "many directions," as I mentioned earlier.

Vertically, we are attempting to educate from the preschool level to the doctoral level. We are operating graduate schools, a theological seminary, a school of medicine, a school of dentistry, schools of nursing, plus others, while concurrently we have pressures to start schools of law, optometry, religion, and even another school of dentistry! The same is true horizontally. We are endeavoring to offer everything from anthropology to zoology. Meanwhile, administrators are having a difficult time trying to find qualified personnel to fill existing vacancies on their faculties.

This striving to be everything to everybody has thinned out our talents as well as our resources. Viewed from an educational as well as a financial base, the proliferation of courses and majors and institutions is almost scandalous. Even the greatest educational institutions in our country regardless of how rich they are in resources, cannot afford to do everything or to be everything. There must be an order of priorities. Our administrators and trustees must not go on the assumption that anything done in the name of higher education must necessarily be worthwhile!

One of the most crucial issues facing education on the national scene has to do with the search for proper direction. Can this be any less an issue on the parochial level? Seventh-day Adventist higher education is in desperate need for a direction. We may *seek* answers to the question *Where is Adventist education going?* But it is more imperative that we *find* the answers to the question *Where SHOULD Adventist education go?*

Arriving at the correct and proper answers will not be an easy task. What is necessary is assessment of the educational program on a national basis. Our thinking and planning should no longer be confined to local, parochial, and provincial lines. There must be a broader and more cooperative outlook on the planning of Adventist schools. An assessment, study, survey, or census, such as would be essential to the gathering of the necessary in-

formation, would probably take the better part of three years, would require properly qualified personnel, and would need an adequate budget.

At first consideration, such a survey might be regarded as too expensive; but if it would give the essential data, it could save the church many times that amount in future plans and projections. At the present time, a committee named by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is giving study to the possibility of underwriting such a survey.

Another essential need is for better communicating to administrators the availability of qualified personnel. The establishment of an Adventist registry on a computer basis would do this. In time, such a registry would have the basic information about all Adventist educators, church-employed or not, and, on a moment's notice, would produce a list of teachers with the qualifications necessary for specific openings. It could also make known to teachers the openings at various institutions both in the United States and abroad. An annual operating budget would have to be provided before this program could be implemented.

As I indicated earlier, there has been a lack of central direction and guidance as to the expectations of the church from its education system and the limits we should set in providing for the education of our youth. Definitely there has been a lack of control. By this I mean not control as sheer power without purpose, but control with purpose — the purpose of defending our particular faith and of implementing the goals and objectives of the church. A pragmatic approach to a coordinated education system would be to stipulate that the local conference have jurisdiction over all education on the elementary and intermediate levels, the regional conference over secondary education, and the national division over higher education. Overall coordination should be the responsibility of the North American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The colleges and universities of the church will have real strength and support only if they combine their resources in the pursuit of the goals and aims for which they have been established. To go in separate directions means ultimate disconnection from the church and joining of the group of once-church-related colleges.

Even now, in some quarters there is serious question as to whether or not the church-related college will be able to survive in the future. At a recent annual meeting, the Association of American Colleges approved a plan, recommended by its Commission on Religion in Higher Education, for a conference on the theme, "Is it either useful or desirable for colleges to maintain church relationships?" The commission concluded that the

time is ripe for investigation of the fundamental question as to whether or not denominational relationships are of value to academic institutions now and in the future! Could this conclusion be another portent of the times?

Adventist institutions of higher education and some of their supporting bodies should be stirred from their obsolete and complacent notion of self-sufficiency. The past two decades have witnessed gigantic strides in the advance of our church system of education. But it is quite possible that some individual institutions have forged ahead without the proper logistical support. Sometimes what has been done not only has been more than we can encompass but has been approached with inadequate study and consideration for the overall needs of North America. Some programs attempted by individual colleges would have had a better chance of survival had they been developed through the mutual efforts and cooperation of the several institutions.

30

The need for interinstitutional cooperation has been voiced for some time by administrators, churchmen, and, especially, faculties, whose members are more knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of their programs because they are "where the action is!" In spite of the millions of dollars invested annually by the conferences, the manpower needs of the church education program are far from met. There are not physicians to fill the long list of calls waiting at the national headquarters. There are not nurses to fill the posts in our hospitals, many of which have less than fifty percent of qualified nurses on their staffs. There is a desperate need for teachers who are properly qualified and certificated, for many conferences still have to staff the classrooms with teachers who have less than four years of college work.

The colleges are involved in research of various sorts. How much of this has been geared to assist the church program? How much study has been given to finding ways to improve the work in the mission fields? The challenge before us is tremendous. The total Christian community in India is only two percent of the population, in Nigeria only three percent, and in Japan only one percent. When we think of these facts, we must ask, How much have we actually accomplished? How much thought has been given to the preparation of the ministry for the needs of urban life — for the inner cities? Should not our knowledge and research abilities be harnessed to meet the aims and objectives of the church?

It is only through acting in concert that our colleges and universities can make their greatest impact on the world in which we live. Much could be accomplished through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Coopera-

tion and interaction mean give and take. Future policies and operational procedures should be thought out intelligently, with serious consideration of short-range as well as the long-range implications. Such consideration could mean the retracting of certain existing programs and the strengthening of others.

When the church is ready to give positive direction and guidance in its educational pursuits, and when the colleges are ready to accept this direction through further interaction, cooperation, and a desire to meet the national rather than the local needs, then we will know better whither we are going!

If each college persists in going its own way, it is not too difficult to predict that Adventist higher education could easily wither away.