

Should Adventists Take Federal Aid For Their Schools?

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The issue of federal aid for education, and more particularly for Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions, is being debated these days all the way from Takoma Park straight across the nation in every conference. The Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists appears to be adamant against the more essential phases of federal aid. The Department of Education of the General Conference, on the other hand, is in advocacy of accepting much more such aid than we are now doing. Many church members have decided views.

In one of the publications of the Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference, *Liberty News*, there has been issued a series of "position papers" on federal aid to education. The second of these papers, dated April 19, 1968, starts with a quotation from North Carolina United States Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. Senator Erving, probably the most dedicated segregationist in the Senate, is very much against federal aid to the schools of the nation, and for the very evident reason that any school receiving federal aid must be desegregated. This, Senator Ervin cannot brook. Considering Senator Ervin's motivation, we deem any statement from him on federal aid to education subject to question. Indeed, one of the commendable aspects of federal aid to the schools is compulsory desegregation. If the words of our pledge of allegiance to the flag are to mean anything — "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" — our nation cannot continue segregated schools.

The *Liberty News* article cites several kinds of federal aid which Seventh-day Adventists do accept. One of these is the Hill-Burton Act of 1946, which

grants financial aid to general hospitals and medical facilities. Adventist hospitals have accepted millions of dollars in Hill-Burton funds for construction purposes, authorized by the Autumn Council of 1949.

The National School Lunch Act of 1946, extended to parochial schools in 1949, enables church schools, hospitals, summer camps, homes for the aged, and similar agencies to receive surplus foods. Seventh-day Adventists are participants in this program.

The National Defense Act provides funds for public and nonprofit private educational institutions to make loans to college students at low interest rates if the student is preparing for a teaching career. Adventists make generous use of this program.

Adventists also participate in the program of education set up in the GI Bill of Rights. Thousands of Adventist young men have profited greatly through this program, and in our educational institutions, too.

Adventists also share in the National Institutes of Health scholarship plan for the subsidization of those who take the nursing curriculum.

Our Adventist colleges and universities also take grants and make contracts with the federal government for research projects. There are eighteen research programs available under the Public Health Service Act. Our schools are beneficiaries of this program.

All our colleges in the United States also participate in the Federal Student Work Program by which our schools are given money from Washington to employ needy students in various work projects on the campus. Hundreds of students in Adventist colleges right now would have to drop out if it were not for this money from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, a federal executive agency.

Our educational institutions have also benefited from the Surplus Property Disposal Act, not only in furnishings, machinery, and various lines of equipment, but also in the acquisition of land and buildings. At such schools as the Monterey Bay Academy in California and the Thunderbird Academy in Arizona, real estate worth millions thus was passed over to our schools by the federal government.

The foregoing is only a partial list of examples of largess which our church has accepted from the federal government. But now there arises an inconsistency in our policies, for the official action of the General Conference declares that Adventist schools "shall refrain from accepting gifts of land, buildings, or equipment from the government, or public tax money for capital improvements, the salaries of teachers, or the maintenance, operation, or support of the services which the schools supply."

Personally, I could go along with the latter part of that statement, but not with the first half which concerns "gifts of land, buildings, or equipment from the government, or public tax money for capital improvements." I am in complete disagreement with this section of the policy statement, for I wholeheartedly believe we Adventists should accept federal monies for buildings, equipment, and libraries, and not only for our colleges and universities, but also for our secondary schools.

Why do I thus believe?

One of the reasons for my position is that if Ellen G. White were alive today, she would take the same view of the federal aid issue. Let me quote from *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pages 202-203.

Just as long as we are in this world, and the Spirit of God is striving with the world, we are to receive as well as to impart favors. We are to give to the world the light of truth as presented in the Sacred Scriptures, and we are to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do in behalf of His cause. The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers in behalf of His people, *and it becomes those who are so deeply interested in the religious liberty question not to cut off any favors, or withdraw themselves from the help that God has moved men to give, for the advancement of His cause.*

We find examples in the word of God concerning this very matter. Cyrus, king of Persia, made a proclamation throughout all the kingdom, and put it into writing, saying: "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. . . ."

The Lord God of Israel has placed His goods in the hands of unbelievers, but they are to be used in favor of doing the works that must be done for a fallen world. The agents through whom these gifts come may open up avenues through which the truth may go. *They may have no sympathy with the work, and no faith in Christ, and no practice in His words; but their gifts are not to be refused on that account.* [Italics mine. ALB]

It is very strange that some of our brethren should feel that it is their duty to bring about a condition of things that would bind up the means that God would have set free. God has not laid upon them the responsibility of coming in conflict with the authorities and powers of the world in this matter.

Under what circumstances did Ellen G. White pen the above?

The government of Rhodesia in the middle of Africa, through its Prime Minister, Sir Cecil Rhodes, had offered Seventh-day Adventists 12,000 acres of fertile land absolutely free if we would start a mission station there with a school and a medical dispensary. The brethren in Africa wrote the General Conference in Battle Creek for counsel. This was in the year 1894. The Religious Liberty Department was then headed by Alonzo T. Jones and Calvin P. Bollman. These two men wrote our missionaries in Africa telling them not to accept the gift, for this would constitute a union of church and state.

When this letter arrived in Africa, Elder Stephen N. Haskell was making a visit to our African missions. He read the letter from Battle Creek and then said, "Let me send a letter to Mrs. White in Australia asking her counsel."

He did. The quotation from *Testimonies to Ministers* I have cited above was her reply. As a consequence we took the 12,000 acres of gift land from the Rhodesian government, and upon that site our great Solusi Mission came into being. From that day to this God has abundantly blessed the Solusi Mission. Thousands, yes, tens of thousands of Africans, know about Christ as a result of the acceptance of this land from the government.

To be sure, the issue of federal aid to education was no issue at all during Mrs. White's lifetime. She died in 1915. No one up to 1915 had ever even thought of federal programs to help education in the United States. Expenditures for education in all the years of Mrs. White's life were negligible when compared with our age. At that time only a very small percentage of American youth went to college, and even the number of those going to secondary schools was infinitesimal compared with our day. In fact, up to 1915, far more than half of the children in the United States did not even complete elementary school.

But contrast 1915 with 1968! Today America has some fifty million children and youth in the educative process. California, for example, requires by law that all young people complete a twelve-grade high school. In California sixty percent of all high school graduates continue on into college. In America we have more than seven million young people in college.

This burgeoning of education in America costs a prodigious amount of money, most of it provided by the individual states and their political subdivisions. Of recent years, particularly since World War Two, it has become painfully evident that the states must have federal aid in education, or else millions of youth cannot go to school; or if they do, they will get an education of inferior quality.

John F. Kennedy was the first American president to realize that the federal government must give massive aid to education. When Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded to the presidency, he, too, saw that federal aid to our schools and colleges was no longer optional but mandatory if America's youth are to receive a quality education. President Kennedy put through the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, and then under the Johnson administration came the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In 1966, President Johnson followed through with the gigantic appropriation by the Congress of \$3,500,000,000 for aid to education, a history-making forward step in the annals of our nation.

An equitable share of these monies and gifts is available for Adventist schools. Most private schools are taking advantage of this generosity on the part of "kings and rulers," as Ellen White phrases it. These schools are therefore able to give more education to more young people, and education of much higher quality and relevance than if they refused the gifts.

For many years I taught at the University of the Pacific, a Methodist institution in Northern California. When in 1949 I joined that faculty, the university had a student body of 900 and was desperately struggling to keep afloat financially. Many predicted that the university would have to close its doors, and that would have been tragic, for University of the Pacific was the first college chartered in California, eighteen years before the state university was even heard of.

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But just at the time the future looked so black for University of the Pacific, along came the federal government with its program of major aid to American education. The university gladly accepted that aid, and soon new buildings sprang up all over the campus — classroom buildings, laboratory buildings, and residence halls for young men and for young women. New colleges were added — pharmacy, engineering, law, dentistry — mostly with federal money. Now the University of the Pacific has more than 2,500 students, all of them getting top-quality education. Without federal aid, this would have been quite impossible.

Public educational institutions, too, have profited immensely by federal aid. The University of California, for example, one of the half dozen truly great universities of the world, with a student body of 90,000, has an annual budget of \$700,000,000. Approximately half (forty-eight percent) of that budget is furnished by the federal government in the way of grants, research contracts, and construction funds for the nine campuses.

Are Seventh-day Adventist schools in need of new buildings, new equipment, new libraries, all of which could be supplied by federal funds?

Yes, desperately so!

While it is true that our General Conference has poured generous monies into Andrews University and the Loma Linda campus of Loma Linda University, yet most of our colleges are starving for money for libraries, laboratories, residence halls, classroom buildings, and suitable auditoriums, all of these in the realm of capital expenditures. It may be quite justifiable that we should not accept monies from the government for teacher salaries and other operational expenses, but in my mind there is no argument whatever against accepting government monies for capital expenditures. Let the church furnish the money for operations through tuitions and gifts, but let

the federal government, anxious to assist us, help in building and equipping the physical plant.

For the school year of 1968-69, a full-time resident student in the College of Arts and Sciences at Loma Linda University will pay \$2,228. This is about as much as we can expect the average Adventist parent to pay per year for a Christian college education for his son or daughter, particularly if he has several children to educate in one of our institutions. But the sad fact is that this amount of money does not pay the operational costs of the college, and, of course, it provides not one cent for capital expenditures. Capital funds have to be supplied by the conferences that form the constituency of an Adventist college. These conferences never have funds adequate to the need of an expanding Adventist educational program; therefore Adventist colleges, all of them, suffer, and suffer drastically. They cannot give an education which is one hundred percent adequate in the last third of the twentieth century, a century which has witnessed an explosion of knowledge which far exceeds the much-talked-of population explosion.

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Take education in the sciences, for example. None of our colleges has anywhere near a full complement of facilities for quality training in physics, chemistry, and biology. Much of what we have is fifteen to twenty-five years old. When science knowledge doubles every ten years, as it does today, our Adventist colleges have a lamentable time lag in science equipment. Nowadays there is a rapid turnover and obsolescence in science equipment. Our limited budgets cause us to fall far behind.

Then there are the behavioral sciences — psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Neither the libraries nor the laboratories in our colleges are anywhere near up to date in these fields. This sad state of affairs means we cannot give our students a quality of education that equates with the present.

One of the areas where many of our colleges fall short is in the teaching of business administration. Our schools simply cannot afford the degreed manpower and all the vast array of business machines and equipment necessary to turn out topflight competent business administration majors who can compete with those from institutions with plenteous monies from state funds. To my knowledge, scores of Adventist youth desirous of becoming proficient in business administration quit our schools after one or two years to enroll "outside." When queried they all give the same reply, "Adventist colleges have neglected this area, don't have enough faculty members trained in the various phases of business administration, and this college doesn't have the requisite machines, computers, etc., used in first class schools."

Education, all of it, is in the computer age. Even in the two fields I am trained in — political science and international relations — the computer is rapidly becoming a must for a full educational program. In every phase of the acquisition of learning, the computer will soon be a major factor, even in high schools. That inescapable fact means the expenditure of huge amounts of money to computerize Adventist education in the next decade or two.

When it comes to the heart of any college campus, the library, all of our Adventist higher institutions of learning fall far short. Most of our libraries are housed in small and totally inadequate buildings. The saddest fact of all is that their shelves are only half filled, and then often with volumes of ancient vintage. Loma Linda University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry both have excellent collections. Andrews University is building an adequate library for theology students. Aside from these two, all our other college libraries are not more than fifty percent of what they should be for undergraduate work.

When it comes to the libraries in our secondary schools, it makes one cry just to glance at the average academy library. They usually turn out to be about twenty-five percent adequate. It would appear that too many of our boards think that if they provide a building labeled “library” and have a set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a Webster’s dictionary, a couple of Bible dictionaries, and a few Adventist periodicals and books, the school is all ready for business!

Some of our colleges are now planning to give graduate work leading to the Master of Arts degree, and higher. In fact, some are already conferring such degrees. But can these schools give graduate work of acceptable quality when our libraries are woefully inadequate even for undergraduate work? The outlook for building up first class libraries is very, very dim.

None of these lacks is necessary, for the federal government is ready and willing to help our schools with buildings, laboratories, equipment, and libraries. If we would accept available government monies for major capital improvements, then we could use more of our own money for upgrading our faculties, both on the secondary and college levels. We could send more teachers for advanced study in order to keep up to date in the fast-advancing fields of learning. As it is now, sabbaticals are hard to come by in any appreciable number. Even regular attendance at the annual national or regional meetings of the various disciplines is quite impossible because of a shortage of funds. If more money were available for more teachers, then faculty loads could be reduced so that the individual teacher would have adequate time for research and study.

Our church in the United States should have established a school of pharmacy and a school of law long ago. Many of our leaders agree this should be done but ask, "Where is the money coming from?" The money is available in federal aid.

The world we live in today demands nothing but the very best in the way of educational preparation for life. Twentieth century life requires much more education in scores of new fields than was required in the simple days when we set up our first Adventist colleges in the 1880's. Too much Adventist educational thinking and planning is done in the framework and context of fifty and seventy-five years ago.

Additionally, and even more importantly, too much educational policy in our denomination is made by noneducational personnel. Open the yearbook and take a fast look at the makeup of any college or academy board. The number of educators on that board is dwarfed by the noneducator personnel. To be sure, those who pay the bills, such as the conference presidents and treasurers and committee members, should be represented. But should their voices always be the decisive ones in education planning? Do non-educators know more about education than do educators?

Some will ask, "But wouldn't the acceptance of government money to build a boys' dormitory on our campus constitute a union of church and state?" No more than building a new wing to our local sanitarium and hospital with Hill-Burton funds. Let us be consistent: what is good for the hospital goose is also good for the education gander!

Someone else may exclaim, "If we accept federal aid for our schools, some day the government may tell us what to teach and what not to teach." Remember the citation in which Ellen White recounts the building of a temple for Jehovah God in Jerusalem by Cyrus, the heathen king. Did not the Jews of that day run the risk of Cyrus telling them just how to worship when once he had finished the temple? That possibility did not seem to worry God, nor did it worry Ellen G. White.

Another may ask, "If we do not accept federal aid for our schools, then what?" Without government aid, our schools will lag farther and farther behind in major lines of learning as the cost of higher education rapidly mounts. That means more and more of our young people will seek their education in other than Adventist schools. Youth today, yes, even Adventist youth, will not be denied excellence in learning. If they cannot get it from us, they will go elsewhere. With federal aid we can give them anything and everything they can get at the state university, plus the indispensable and invaluable values of the Christian pattern for living.