

## GOVERNMENT AID TO EDUCATION 2

### Federal Support Is Not Coercive

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Most Americans have espoused the separation of church and state principle which has done much to lift this nation to world eminence. Seventh-day Adventist Americans have been active in promoting this principle — and perhaps logically so, for we are a minority group whose position, religiously and economically, is enhanced by the separation.

Unfortunately, however, many Adventists have been unable to differentiate between church doctrine and national philosophy. This confusion has been abetted by the fact that our national philosophy of separation of church and state, nailed down in the Bill of Rights, has been adopted as policy by the Adventist church in America. An attempt to dispel some of the confusion that exists on the controversial subject of federal aid to Adventist colleges best begins, therefore, with some clarifications.

Church *doctrine* is based on the word of God; and since the word of God doesn't change, neither does basic church doctrine. Church *policy* is based on what seems most reasonable and expedient to the church as a course of action at a given time; this may change from time to time, inasmuch as that which is expedient today may not be expedient under different circumstances in the future. The decision not to accept federal aid for Adventist colleges is not church doctrine but current church policy. And not only is this policy subject to change, but, in the first place, it lacks even clear definition in the minds of many, with the result that in numerous instances Adventist practice differs from Adventist policy.

Again, there seems to be confusion between federal aid to churches and federal aid to education. The federal government has no disposition to aid churches in their ecclesiastical functions; but in recent years it has taken an increasing financial responsibility in the education and health care of its

citizens and has offered limited financial aid to liberal arts colleges operated under the auspices of church bodies. In this situation it is very easy to declare that any matter — whether of religion, education, or health care — is “church” if it is operated by a church. Is this correct? Does a separation of church and state mean a separation of education and state? In practice at least, the United States Congress does not believe this to be the case.

A lead article in the *Review and Herald* last year,<sup>1</sup> setting forth (in the form of a panel discussion) divergent views on the current policy of non-acceptance of federal aid to Adventist schools, is evidence that the church leadership believes in an open discussion of this policy and wants to determine through dialogue whether a policy believed to be effective in past years is still relevant in today’s society and economy.

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All Adventists believe in the principle of religious liberty, and particularly in the protection of the rights of minorities to worship (or not worship) according to their consciences. We believe in the principle of separation of church and state when by “church” we refer to the religious functions of the church. The question here is whether the national philosophy of separation of church and state is undermined when the Congress decides that it can best help the nation meet its higher education needs — that is, provide the most in education at the least cost to the taxpayers — by granting limited financial aid to liberal arts colleges operated by religious organizations.

*Do the Scriptures give us any light on this question?*

Very little, except as we may wrest certain passages to support a position we wish to hold. Throughout biblical history there was little separation of church and state, for in most instances the state was also the ecclesiastical power. This was actually the plan originally set forth by God for his people, who were ruled by judges and prophets. The first separation of church and state was not initiated by God but by Israelites, who desired to be like the nations around them and accordingly asked to have a king appointed. Saul then ruled over the social, political, and economic affairs of the nation, and Samuel, the prophet, continued as God’s religious representative. Even so, the people accepted for religious purposes any aid proffered by local or foreign government.

There are those who try to support the traditional Adventist policy from the New Testament; but as I read the quotations presented, I have great difficulty in arriving at the desired conclusion. The statement “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14) might

be applicable if the church were to go into actual educational partnership with the government. But I know of no one who believes in accepting from the government anything which has restrictions that limit the freedom of the church to carry out its own educational program.

*What has Ellen G. White said about the acceptance of federal aid?*

In the time of Mrs. White federal aid was never available to private colleges, and it is probably for this reason that we find no references to this question. However, she did say much about accepting gifts to the church and about the tax-exempt status of the church.

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An 1893 move by Adventist churchmen in Battle Creek to pay property taxes on the sanitarium and the church (called "the tabernacle") resulted in the following resolution at the General Conference session that year: "Whereas, in view of the separation which we believe should exist between the church and the state, it is inconsistent for the church to receive from the state pecuniary gifts, favors, exemptions, on religious grounds; therefore, resolved that we repudiate the doctrine that church or other ecclesiastical properties should be exempt from taxation; and further, resolved, that we use our influence in securing the repeal of such legislation as grants and exemptions."<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. White later commented: "Our brethren in Battle Creek are not looking at everything in the right light. The movements they have made to pay taxes on the property of the sanitarium and tabernacle have manifested a zeal and conscientiousness that in all respects is not wise or correct. Their ideas of religious liberty are being woven with suggestions that do not come from the Holy Spirit, and the religious liberty cause is sickening, and its sickness can only be healed by the grace and gentleness of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Especially apropos to our topic here is the Solusi Mission experience. In the latter part of 1893, when land was needed for a mission station, H. E. Robinson, who was heading the work of the church in South Africa, arranged an interview with Cecil Rhodes, who was both premier of the Cape Colony and head of the British South Africa Company. As a result of the meeting, a tract of 12,000 acres was presented to the church.

This became the site of the Solusi Mission, the first one operated by the denomination among non-Christian peoples. A knowledge of this gift created considerable concern among certain leading brethren at Battle Creek, who feared that to accept it would be a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. As the matter was discussed at the General Conference Session of 1895, action was taken: "That we ought not as a denomination either to seek or to accept from any civil government, chief, ruler, or royal chartered company . . . any gift, or donation . . . to

which we are not in common with all others justly entitled as men without any reference to our religious profession or religious work." Later another action was taken by the General Conference Committee as follows: "That in harmony with this resolution that the General Conference Association be instructed to pay an appropriate amount for all government land that may be secured in Africa or elsewhere."<sup>4</sup>

Adventist leaders were then far more solidly united on a policy of non-acceptance of government aid than they are today — and yet before this action could be implemented, Mrs. White wrote from Australia: "With respect to the propriety of receiving gifts from Gentiles or the heathen . . . what they would give, we should be privileged to receive."<sup>5</sup> The following day she wrote further:

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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. . . .

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.<sup>6</sup>

It is sometimes suggested that Cecil Rhodes was acting as an individual or as a company executive and not as a government official when he gave the land for the Solusi Mission. But at that time Cecil Rhodes was the government and the government was Cecil Rhodes.

In regard to the similar case of the Persian king Cyrus, some claim that he gave to Nehemiah from his own funds and not from government funds; again, however, Cyrus was the government. Where did his funds come from if not from the people? Whether the government is representative or monarchical, the funds come from the work and services of the people under the ruling power. It has been argued that this experience in Nehemiah's time, to which Ellen White explicitly refers, is not applicable to the situation today, inasmuch as there is a difference between instances where God influences rulers to assist his chosen people alone and a plan whereby federal aid is made available to any religious group, no matter how far it is removed from genuine Christian truth. But in fact Cyrus also helped groups with divergent religious views:

It must not be supposed . . . that Cyrus was a pious worshiper of Jehovah simply because he is called God's "anointed" and His "shepherd" in Scripture. . . . Nor is his

kindliness toward the Jews an indication of his religious convictions, for at the outset of his reign he committed himself to a policy which called for returning captive gods to their temples and captive peoples to their homes. In his inscriptions he speaks of sending the gods of various peoples back to their shrines, and a line from the Cyrus Cylinder states specifically, "I gathered together all their populations and restored [them to] their dwelling places."<sup>7</sup>

*Will the acceptance of federal aid eventually mean government control?*

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Many say Yes, citing the government takeover of certain institutions which has occurred, it is said, because of the acceptance of federal aid. But these references to isolated instances seem less impressive than the following report by Richard Hammill: "When I went overseas . . . I discovered that in many lands Seventh-day Adventist schools were taking government grants and that as a result of these favors, which enabled us to operate hundreds of schools that we could not operate out of our own resources, literally tens of thousands of people rejoice in our message because they learned it in these schools."<sup>8</sup>

In 1946-47, at the close of World War II, all Adventist colleges in the United States received much surplus equipment from the government. Southern Missionary College, for example, received equipment to operate a new laundry and to set up a central heating plant, trailers for students to live in, beds and mattresses, chairs and desks, and innumerable other items — all from a government interested only in supplying colleges with the necessary facilities to accommodate an exploding college enrollment. SMC doubled its student population in one year, and I don't know what it would have done without this aid. But there was a strong conviction on the part of some that we were not only using poor judgment but that we were sinfully ignoring the traditions of the church and would soon be completely controlled by federal power.

That was more than twenty years ago. Most of the equipment is worn out and gone. So are some of the men who viewed the situation with such alarm. (Others, however, have taken their places and evidently would have us now take a stand similar to that of the General Conference in 1893 and 1895, which was opposed by Ellen White.) Yet there has been no attempt by the federal government to control SMC's actions in any way because of any gift of equipment.

When I say "control SMC's actions" I mean control its actions in a way that would be contrary to Adventist convictions and objectives. It is true that the government may wish to regulate to a certain extent what it

subsidizes. If we were to take money for a new home economics building, we could expect the government to have something to say about the plans for that building — to make sure that it met certain requirements. But the fact that the government would have something to say about the building it subsidized does not imply that it would try to tell an Adventist college how to run its religion program, which the government is not subsidizing.

The majority of Congressmen, then and now, have voted to provide facilities to schools and colleges not with the purpose of gaining control (for this is farthest from their minds) but in the firm belief that this procedure would improve higher education in America. The goal has been to provide the most education for the least cost, with no thought of dictating an instructional program. Whether or not government control is to be the end result of federal aid depends on the purpose behind the gifts.

The experience of Southern Missionary College is not unique. Many government donations of land and equipment have been received by Adventist schools. According to Drew Pearson: "During the first fiscal year after Kennedy became President, July 1, 1961, through June 30, 1962, discount gifts to Catholic institutions numbered 21, while those to other denominations totaled 11. Of the Protestants, the Seventh-day Adventists got the most — ranging from five buildings for a Navajo mission school in the Kingman Air Force Base in Arizona, to property from the Fairchild Air Force Base in California to other buildings at the Nebraska Ordnance Plant, the John Day Lock and Dam in Oregon, and the Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota."<sup>9</sup>

*Is federal aid to parochial schools constitutional?*

Frankly, I don't know; and, for practical purposes, neither does anyone else. No one will know officially until the question is tested in the United States Supreme Court. In the meantime, however, this question is beside the point of our discussion. Today federal aid is available. If the Supreme Court rules it unconstitutional, it will not be available. As of now, we are concerned as to what Adventist policy should be in regard to its acceptance.

*Can acceptance of federal aid be justified on the basis of current national policy?*

Definitely so. And here I believe there are few who will disagree, because within the last few years the federal government has committed itself to substantial support of education and the health care of individuals.

Legislators know that funds granted to a private college in partial support of its instructional facilities will enable that college to continue to exist and enroll more students. The alternative facing the government (and the taxpayer) is to create additional tax-supported colleges in which practically the entire cost of a student's education is borne by the public. The latter course is considerably more expensive. The federal government recognizes that funds supplied to private colleges save the taxpayer money rather than increase his taxes. For this reason there is a great difference between the state's supporting a church in its ecclesiastical function and giving assistance to or cooperation with a church-affiliated liberal arts college to make higher education available to more citizens at less cost to the public.

One of the greatest obstacles in the government's program to provide adequate health care to its citizens is the acute shortage of nurses. Country-wide there are 315 nurses for every 100,000 people — a supply far short of the need. In Tennessee there are only 175 nurses per 100,000 residents. Therefore both the state and the federal governments tell us they need help in providing more nurses, and they will assist us financially to enable us to cooperate with them to fill this need.

Shall we cooperate by accepting the aid and doing a better job? Or shall we refuse "to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do in behalf of His cause"? What is the task of the church — to do the work of Christ and provide healing and knowledge, or to build fences between itself and the needs of the world? When we cooperate with the government on such projects as these, are we not aiding it and the public as much as they are aiding us?

Adventists have always expected to be the object of persecution. Perhaps this expectation is so profound that we look on the Congress as a group of men who are trying to lure us into a position in which Adventist institutions can be taken over by the government. I seriously question the present prevalence of such a legislative motive.

On the other hand, God has endowed each of us with reason and judgment, and he expects us to use our powers of discernment to the best of our ability to do everything that we can to help ourselves. Christ never performed a miracle to accomplish that which someone could do for himself. Does not this principle apply in this matter of accepting the help that is available to church-related colleges today? In accordance with what Ellen White wrote in 1895, we should take the funds which the Holy Spirit prompts the "powers that be" to provide for us. If we refuse to accept the gift thus

offered, we can hardly expect a miracle to be performed in our behalf to make up the difference.

How has it come about in this land — to which emigrants fled for freedom to worship God, where we have been abundantly blessed, where Christian principles and national philosophy have often been practically synonymous — that many believe that the taxes we pay may be used to instruct young people in a wholly secular, even God-ridiculing atmosphere, but that not one cent may be used to educate them in a Christian environment? I doubt that this should be classified as American philosophy. Did the authors of the Constitution have this in mind? Have we gone so far in promoting what we believe to be the principle of the separation of church and state that we have relegated American youth to an education devoid of any knowledge of God?

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Federal coercion in private higher education is not a certainty, nor a probability, nor even a trend. Furthermore, does anyone suppose that the government, should our nation fall into some form of tyranny, would *need* the fact of tax support of private schools to justify a takeover (any more than Castro needed it to take over Adventist schools in Cuba)?

On the contrary, the best means of preventing tyranny is a healthy and growing system of Christian-oriented colleges, made possible by improved and expanded facilities and feeding into American society graduates who know what they believe and who know why private education is worthy of assistance and why it should be kept free from government control.

#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 Neal C. Wilson and Others, Church-State Relations, *Review and Herald* 145, 1-7 (September 26, 1968).
- 2 *General Conference Bulletin*, March 5, 1893, p. 475.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1944), p. 200.
- 4 *General Conference Bulletin*, February 21, 1895, p. 283.
- 5 White, p. 197.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.
- 7 Howard F. Vos, *An Introduction to Bible Archaeology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956), p. 68.
- 8 Richard Hammil, in Letters from Readers, *Review and Herald* 145, 15 (November 20, 1968).
- 9 Drew Pearson, *Nashville Tennessean*, November 20, 1963.