

College Newspapers Shift from Denominational Controversy to Campus Issues

by Mary Pat Koos

Adventist college students are tired of the controversies in the denomination and on their campuses, according to some editors of current college papers. Consequently, the amount of attention given controversial issues during the 1981-82 academic year has decreased in this year's papers. "Students have become apathetic to church issues and to all the infighting," says Ken Rozell, editor of the *Southern Accent* at Southern College. Rozell suggests another reason editors in the 1982-83 school year are more reluctant than before to focus on denominational controversies. "When students hear about all the politics and possible corruption in the church, they feel helpless and question their membership in the SDA church."

At the La Sierra Campus of Loma Linda University, the so-called "preoccupation" with controversy of the 1981-82 *Criterion*, which included lengthy features and strongly-worded editorials, has led the 1982-83 *Criterion* to swing away from what some considered to be excessive coverage of denominational issues. In his first editorial of the new year Glenn Jeffrey cited the *Criterion's* "first and foremost" priority as being "fun and popular." Later, associate editor Brent Bradley affirmed the paper's policy to include potentially controversial material in an informative manner. Asked whether the amount or type of church issues had changed over the past two years, Rhonda Robinson, editor of the *Columbia Journal* at Columbia Union College, answered, "Yes. A few years ago, an editor printed very negative opinions and news

about the various issues in the Adventist Church. We are now striving to move to a more balanced approach." As a result, she said, "We have not gotten much into church news and/or controversial issues."

However, one editor—Kris Coffin in charge of the *Campus Chronicle* at Pacific Union College—thinks that Adventist college students have maintained the interest in denominational issues their papers reflected in 1981-82. "Students are more critical of the organization and the ways it's run. They don't accept things just because the 'church' says so. They want to study and decide for themselves, to analyze and re-evaluate what has been taught them without question for many years."

During the 1981-82 school year, collegiate journalists explained how the forces of opinion within the church affect not only their own colleges but Adventist higher education as a whole. An index of items concerned with churchwide news and issues in nine papers surveyed includes dozens of articles under some 25 headings.

General Conference President Neal C. Wilson, in an interview in the *Campus Chronicle's* special issue, "The State of the Church" (May 27, 1982), granted a measure of latitude to Adventist college newspapers with the following comment:

I don't feel that it is improper at all for a student paper to explore and investigate these various viewpoints or ideologies, even some controversies, that exist in the church. I think that is something that a college paper can do which an official journal of the church cannot.

Wilson's statement came during a school year when several college newspapers were under fire from some students, faculty, administration, and constituency for news, feature, and editorial content.

On two campuses—Southern College and Pacific Union College—the papers themselves and the treatment of issues therein played a major part in campus and denominational controversy. Landmark editions of *Southern Accent* and *Campus Chronicle* exploring the state of the church, denominational controversy, and the problems of

their own religion faculties were published in the spring of 1982. Heated and highly varied reaction from constituents, faculty members, and students came as a result of the *Campus Chronicle's* publication of side-by-side pro and con reviews of Lewis Walton's book *Omega*.

Andrews' *Student Movement* received criticism for its sale of a half-page ad for local meetings featuring former seminary professor Smuts Van Rooyen and Desmond Ford (as did the *Campus Chronicle* for a similar ad for Van Rooyen meetings.) (This school year the *Student Movement* reported an administrative ban on advertising for the Ford-Van Rooyen meetings, but that did not stop the paper's coverage of the meetings in a feature, "Ford and Van Rooyen return to Andrews," by Keith Lockhart.)

Freedom of the press and a denominationally controversial issue also came head-to-head with Southern College *Southern Accent's* sale of a full-page army recruitment ad which led to a series of letters to the editor regarding the propriety of the ad and the issue of bearing arms. A subsequent editorial titled "Studying War Some More" advocated either complete conscientious objection or the bearing of arms.

Reporting of controversial issues and the resulting counter-opinion and objection from readers has led to an examination of the proper role of the Adventist student newspaper. Some reference to this issue has surfaced in nearly all the papers.

A letter from Andrews' *Student Movement* printing manager David Burgess (May 6, 1982) described the situation there:

I have watched with alarm as the *SM* staff has received pressure from the AU administration over the content of the paper. Apparently, administrators feel that the *SM* gives a view of Andrews which is damaging to its image. The paper is now to blame for a prospective decline in enrollment.

As a result of pressure from key officials, the editors—in all their wisdom—produced two remarkably bland and boring issues of the *SM* . . . What I fail to see is how an article contributing facts and thoughts on particular subjects can damage the image of a university. After all, isn't a university the place where facts are discussed in the hope of coming to the correct conclusion?

Andrews' *Student Movement* has been thorough in its news coverage of denomination-wide events; this paper was unique in its "outside" news reporting and analysis of the problems at Pacific Union College and Southern College.

Mention of church-wide news and controversial issues though not totally absent has come with markedly less frequency in Union College's *Clocktower*, Walla College's *Collegian*, Columbia Union College's *Columbia Journal*, Canadian Union College's *Aurora*, and Southwestern Adventist College's *Southwesterner*. Today's collegiate editors are aware of the vital position Adventist colleges hold for the future of the denomination. Their varying editorial decisions reflect a struggle to act responsibly during a turbulent period in the church's history.

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How Two College Presidents Were Chosen

by Kent Daniels Seltman

John Wagner and Malcolm Maxwell are the new presidents of Southern College and Pacific Union College, respectively. Both campuses were besieged by conservative attacks for many months prior to the September 1982 announcements by their presidents, Frank Knittle and John Cassell, that they would leave office June 30, 1983.*

The two college boards, in selecting the new presidents, followed the recommendations of board-appointed presidential search committees. The new appointments appear to have strong support from the faculties and constituencies of the institutions.

*"Adventist Colleges Under Siege," *Spectrum*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 4.