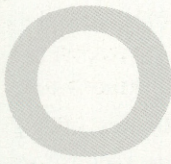


ENCOURAGING SIGNS IN ADVENTIST HIGHER EDUCATION

By Helen Ward Thompson

 Our educational institutions are doing a good job. Our graduates successfully enter professions or gain acceptance to highly recognized graduate programs. But we hangdog ourselves anyway. We act like we believe bigger is better, yet we really do believe, I think, that small can be excellent. I did not realize until I went to Stanford that I had been taught well at Walla Walla College. I had nothing to compare with. Then I looked back at WWC with new eyes.

Throughout our educational system, despite some opposition, we are trying to teach our students to be thinkers, not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts. We have made significant progress from rote to analysis. That's good.

Commitment of Alumni and Constituency

Alumni financial support twenty years ago was insignificant. However, through the tenacious prodding of Milton Murray, we are now urging alumni to remember what their schools did for them and to respond with financial help so that others can have the same opportunity. And they are doing it. From 1980 to 1988 they tripled their donations, and from 1988 to 1998 they gave six times as much.¹ They are singly aware and acknowledge that their success today, wherever they are, is in part due to their education. And they will support it for others. Idealism, commitment to values, whatever. They are there.

Constituency commitment, while often questioned and held suspect, is, I believe, strong. We listen to and quote the occasional grumbler and forget about the multitudes that are sending their own sons and daughters and even their grandchildren to our schools. About the same percent of our academy graduates come to college now as did thirty years ago. That is true, even though the cost is high and we are perhaps bringing in new members who are not as oriented to the desirability of education as earlier converts were. Our alumni are part of the constituency that is so supportive. That's good.

The Quality of Faculty

For the most part, faculty are well qualified, able teachers, serious about their profession, and producing students who will go beyond them in their accomplishments. That is as it should be. Beyond qualifications, however, the faculty have an idealistic, yet practical commitment to the Church and their students, and are eager to prepare them to fill places of influence for good in the world—whether in ghettos or legislatures. That augers well for our educational system.

Identifying Our Mission

More and more we are identifying ourselves, our mission, as we seek to find and fill our unique place in the educational world. We used to see ourselves in relation only to the mission of the Church; now we see ourselves in relation to both the mission of the Church and the educational world. That is a forward step, a healthy step. We are

finally putting the two together. We are committed not only to bean counting in relation to tuition and the market, but also to having a core mission with everything else tested in relation to that. That's good.

We have struggled over the years to define ourselves and have struggled over the years with just whom to invite to join us. However, we are coming to terms more now with who we are and what we can and cannot do. Furthermore, we are less fearful in our invitations. So we are attracting more and more non-Adventists as we define ourselves better.

Example: A mother and daughter sat in the office of a history professor at WWC. The daughter wanted to come to WWC. The professor explained to them that we are an Adventist college and what would be expected if the girl chose to join us. The mother and daughter both said, "That's why we came here. We want what you have to offer." Non-Adventists joining us will not water

down our message as long as our mission is firm. They join us; they choose us. As Avery Dulles puts it, "A religion that firmly adheres to its sacred heritage can make itself a sign of hope and a beacon of truth."² So can an educational institution.

Talking to Each Other

Perhaps helped by technology—but not because of it—we are talking with each other more and more.

There is more dialogue between church administrators and academicians—seminars, workshops, where diverse opinions are expressed with some openness. Despite the historical suspicion of the Church for academics, our colleges and universities are becoming more recognized as thought centers for the Church. That's good.

I think it will continue. Dialogue in the Church and

2000 ADVENTIST ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENTS



BUSINESS

Sally A. Hasselbrack, Ph.D., a graduate of Andrews University, is internationally recognized for her expertise in flame retardant finishing of textiles. She is the only female to be selected as a Senior Technical Fellow for Technical Excellence at the Boeing Commercial Airplane Company.



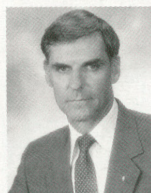
PERFORMING ARTS

Lyndon Johnston Taylor, D.Mus., is a graduate of Andrews Academy and Atlantic Union College. Growing up in a musical family, he and his siblings formed the Taylor String Quartet. His parents were known for their performances as duo pianists. Today, he is the principal second violinist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.



EDUCATION

Leland R. Kaiser, Ph.D., a graduate of Union College and Union College Academy, is the preeminent healthcare futurist in America today. Kaiser is a pioneer in electronic teaching technologies and was a leader in developing the first distance learning education program established for health care administration.



PUBLIC SERVICE

Richard D. Rutan, a graduate of Fresno Academy, made history in December 1986 after completing a nine-day, three-minute and forty-four second around-the-world nonstop and nonrefueled flight, setting a world's record that holds today. Before retiring from the U.S. Air Force in 1978, Lt. Colonel Rutan was awarded the Silver Star, five Distinguished Flying Crosses, sixteen Air Medals and a Purple Heart.



HEALTH SCIENCE

George T. Harding IV, M.D., is a graduate of La Sierra and Loma Linda Universities. He is a practicing psychiatrist and clinical professor. He has served at Harding Hospital as president and CEO for over twenty-one years and chairman of the board for six years.



HONORARY ALUMNUS

Walter J. Turnbull, D.M.A., has celebrated thirty years as the leader of the Boys Choir of Harlem, Inc. He turned a small church choir into a world-renowned institution and built an innovative program addressing the social, educational, and emotional needs of urban boys and girls, thus transforming their lives through music.

Five years ago, a small group of Adventist alumni shared their interest in creating an event where all alumni could celebrate their roots in Adventist education. They established the Adventist Alumni Achievement Awards to recognize the outstanding success of alumni from Adventist schools. The goal of the awards is not only to honor achievement, but also to inspire greater involvement in schools, and thus impact excellence at all levels of Adventist education. Over \$140,000 in grants have been given to education as a direct result of the Achievement Awards. This year's Achievement Awards banquet was held in March in Palm Springs, California, and hosted by Bob and Cheryl Summerour.

between Church and education will become more and more open. We will learn to listen to each other—perhaps not because we want to, but because we must. Multiculturalism can become separatism unless we come to understand each other. Understanding will not be easy, though. This Church has a history of strong people in disagreement. A few fell away but most talked it out and came to a consensus—and that process has given us strength as well as courage for the future. We do not want to become Adventist First Church, the Second Advent Church, the Church of Revelation, and so on. We want to remain Seventh-day Adventists with an Adventist educational system. That desire will spur us to listen and negotiate, to formulate and be true to a common mission.

We are becoming, even in our concern for unity, more tolerant of diverse opinions. Not in all corners, but in many. We are becoming more respectful of those who disagree with us. Not in all corners, but in many. We are maintaining unity within diversity, not in all corners, but in many. That's good.

Prophecies

Our educational system, which is one of the largest church-related systems in the world, will continue, but it

will know change: a small institution can survive if it maintains excellence (and it can), knows what it is about, and invites those who are interested in its mission to join it. I think of Whitman College, in Walla Walla. It deliberately holds its enrollment at a little over a thousand and is widely known for its quality education.

The Church will continue its support of Adventist education, despite rumors occasionally to the contrary, for the simple reason it dare not do otherwise. First, educated people have more potential for financial support of the Church. Second, there are enough historians among us who will trumpet what happens to church-related educational institutions when the Church fails to provide support. The risk is too great for our Church to take.

So, although Catholics argue with their Church about birth control, divorce, and even purgatory; and although Baptists and Methodists negotiate on their agreements and disagreements; and although Adventists debate the Sanctuary Doctrine and the exact nature of inspiration, we are all still identifying ourselves as Christian and claiming a relationship to some religious organization. Mark Chaves refers to this as "Religion's stubborn refusal to disappear."³ Greeley, citing Rodney Stark and Lawrence Iannaccone says, "the evolutionary future of religion is not extinction."⁴ This is good for our Church and it is good for Adventist Christian education. The tenacity, the excitement of investigation, probing one's faith as well as one's professional discipline, they're here for Adventist Christian scholars—here to stay—and that gives me great courage personally as well as hope for the future of Adventist Christian education—and for the future of the Church.

Notes and References

1. Ken Turpen, Philanthropic Services to Institutions, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
2. Avery Dulles, "Orthodoxy and Social Change," *America*, June 20, 1998, 8.
3. Cited by Andrew Greeley, "The Persistence of Religion," *Cross Currents* (spring 1995) vol. 45, no. 1, 24.
4. Ibid.

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