

# Targeting Higher Education

*By Douglas Morgan*

**T**wo means for heightening scrutiny of Seventh-day Adventist education were among the items of business for church leaders meeting at world headquarters prior to Annual Council in September.

The measures will have a direct impact on General Conference owned institutions such as Andrews University, Loma Linda University, and Oakwood College.

The International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE), established in 1998, gave final approval to a new system of certifying religion teachers in higher education. The board's duties, as spelled out in the General Conference Working Policy, include setting in place "a process of denominational endorsement" for faculty in programs for ministerial and religious formation at General Conference educational institutions. The final draft of the endorsement procedure was not available at the time of this writing, but its imminence has triggered renewed anxieties in the academic community.

Additionally, Humberto Rasi, director of the General Conference Department of Education, announced on August 7 the launching of a comprehensive, worldwide survey of higher education institutions with the purpose of ensuring "that the schools emphasize the unique Adventist values of our church, and that they support the church's mission." The survey will be administered under the mandate of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) established by the General Conference in 2000 to, among other tasks, assess the strengths and weaknesses of each Adventist college, seminary, and university, strengthen the unity of the Adventist higher education system, and "develop lines of administrative authority designed to apply appropriate means of compliance."

Rasi points out that the number of colleges, universities, and seminaries operated by the Adventist Church worldwide has nearly doubled in little more than a decade from 52 in 1987 to 101 in 2000. Such rapid proliferation has raised concerns about both unity and quality control among educational programs, particularly in younger countries. It has also highlighted the desirability and challenge of ensuring that degrees are "portable" within the worldwide network of Adventist institutions.

As Adventist church leaders have grappled with the challenges of rapid worldwide growth, accompanied by deepening cultural and ideological fragmentation, they have looked to more systematic monitoring and regulation of higher education, particularly theological education, as a means for nurturing unity and identity. Despite widespread concerns among educators and lack of enthusiasm from many directly responsible for administration of the educational institutions involved, efforts have persisted over the past five years at the General Conference level to institute mechanisms above and beyond existing systems that already keep educators accountable to their church constituencies for more centralized, worldwide coordination and supervision of higher education.

One approach leaders in the academic community have taken in response to these initiatives has been to try to make such new mechanisms as constructive as possible through cooperation and compromise. At the same time, there was hope among those concerned about the initiatives that the more objectionable aspects would die

or lose force due to lack of vigorous support from division and union conference administrators. Particularly in view of the change in the General Conference presidency in 1999, it appeared that a sort of “benign neglect” would be more effective than strident protest that could backfire by fueling greater fervor among and sympathy for advocates of centralizing control.

Recent developments, however, suggest that the centralized “coordination and supervision” project has not faded, but taken on new vigor. Much of the driving force behind these ongoing endeavors originated in the broad, ambitious program of the Robert Folkenberg General Conference presidency to address the challenges of church unity, growth, and vitality with corporate quality management techniques.

The document “Total Commitment to God,” voted at the 1996 Annual Council, called the Church’s educational and health care institutions to “spiritual accountability,” which would be achieved through development of a “spiritual master plan, an outcomes-assessment plan, and annual reports.” Folkenberg’s enthusiasm for the document emerged out of his sense of “desperate need to focus again on the reason for our existence—our message and mission.” He described the endeavor to ensure that the Church’s institutions focused on the correct message and were prioritized properly for mission as “effectively quality management, in the context of a spiritual agenda.”

In an interview with *Adventist Review* editor William Johnsson, the General Conference president agreed that the “Total Commitment” document was, in one sense, an attempt to “bring the Church into line.” Pointing out that General Conference leadership has very little direct authority, and must therefore rely on the “bully pulpit,” Folkenberg suggested that public “disclosure of evidence” about problems revealed by spiritual assessment might be a necessary if unpleasant means of making the “bully pulpit” effective, if other means of pleading and persuasion failed.

Application of the “Total Commitment” agenda to the teaching of theology in higher education led to the “Internation-

Coordination and Supervision of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education” document approved at the Annual Council in October 1998. Under the rubric of “maintaining theological unity” and “preserving the message and the mission” in a growing world church, this document provided for the establishment of Boards of Ministerial and Theological Education (BMTEs) in each world division and an International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) at the General Conference.

The document gave these boards responsibility to regulate the curricula and control faculty appointments at all higher education institutions that offered theological and pastoral training programs. The new measures rapidly prompted expressions of concern from the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, which met for its annual meeting the following month in Orlando, Florida, and from the North American Division of Adventist University and College Presidents. The concerns mainly fell into three categories:

1. **Process.** Perhaps more troubling to the educators than any other point was the fact that the document had been produced by a five-member drafting committee chaired by Folkenberg and that none of the members was directly involved in theological education or in the hiring and formation of pastors. The policy was then abruptly introduced at the Annual Council in Brazil without any consultation with or preparatory information given to the Church’s educa-



### The Commission on Higher Education: Terms of Reference

1. Develop in conjunction with the General Conference planning process, a global plan for Adventist higher education in response to the current and projected needs of the Church in fulfilling its mission.
2. Conduct research, surveys, and evaluations regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges at each Adventist college, seminary, and university.
3. Identify areas of duplication in institutions and programs within each division.
4. Outline conditions necessary to establish new institutions and to launch new educational programs.
5. Develop strategies to strengthen the unity, integrity, and financial viability of the Adventist system of higher education.
6. Develop lines of administrative authority designed to apply appropriate means of compliance.

Source: Commission on Higher Education Planning Document, June 8, 2001

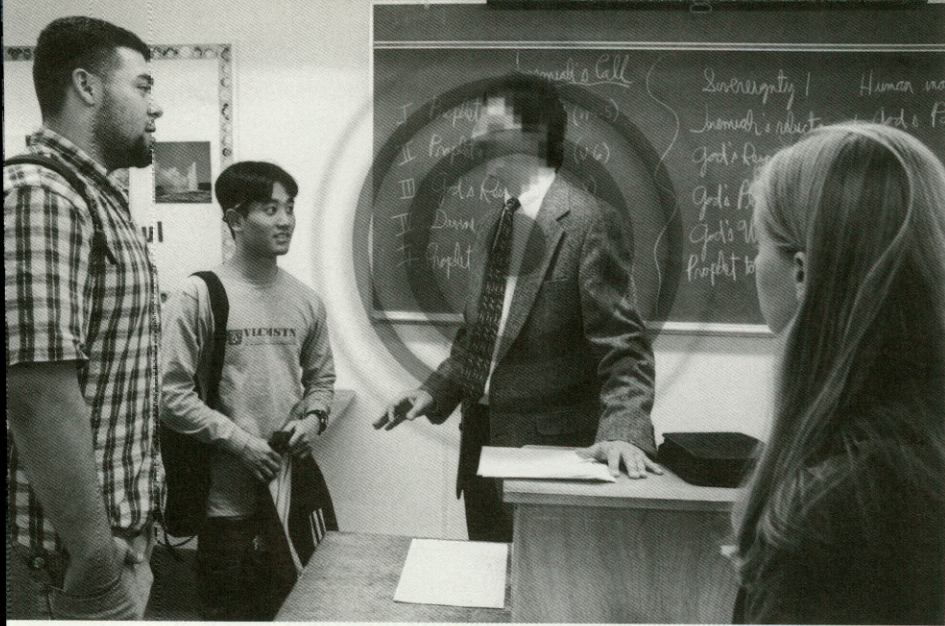


Photo: James Reeder

tional leaders and religion scholars. The North American Division's (NAD) university/college presidents, while affirming the goal of improving the theological formation of pastors, urged that those who train, hire, and listen to pastors from the pew have broad participation in the NAD's implementation of the new policy.

**2. Integrity of institutional governance and accreditation.** The ASRS statement pointed out that in giving authority to "endorse programs, curricula, hiring procedures and individual leaders and teachers" to entities other than the boards that govern each institution, the document "jeopardizes the integrity and responsibility of faculties and boards, and may threaten the accreditation of their institutions."

**3. Redundance.** The educators pointed out that existing bodies, such as the Adventist Accrediting Association, already carried out the responsibilities assigned to the new boards. Thus, the new policy seemed to be establishing "parallel structures that cost time, money, and energy but bring no new benefit to our church."

Although the "coordination and supervision" document became part of the General Conference Working Policy in 2000, little progress was made in establishing functioning BMTEs in the divisions. In his keynote address to the Annual Council in 1999, the new General Conference president, Jan Paulsen, voiced firm support for the principle that "the church, as an international community, must have significant say in what constitutes training for its ministry." While acknowledging the possibility of problems in regard

to the wording of the document and the process by which it came into being, Paulsen urged division and union presidents and the heads of educational institutions to, for the good of the Church, "move briskly to accomplish what we have agreed on in this matter."

However, in subsequent dialogue with leaders from several world divisions, not just the NAD, Paulsen encountered considerable resistance to the plan and conceded that there may be another way to accomplish the basic goals involved. In the NAD, virtually no progress was made in establishing a BMTE, probably due both to a lack of enthusiasm for it on the part of some and to the demands of more pressing problems, such as the impending retirement of division president A. C. McClure in 2000, and conflict over changes in the division's retirement plan.

Whatever the impediments to implementation at the divisional level, the IBMTE had been voted into official church policy and proceeded with its work. The most controversial duty given to it was authorization of theological faculty to teach at General Conference educational institutions. Such faculty would need an "endorsement" voted by the IBMTE. The endorsement would need to be renewed every five years.

The policy allows divisional BMTEs to establish alternative procedures for "endorsement," provided that they accomplish the same goals and receive the approval of the IBMTE. This provision, along with slowness of action in the divisions, has for the time being buffered most of the Church's educational institutions from the oversight plan.

Of crucial importance, though, is the fact that the way is now open for the IBMTE to formulate and implement an endorsement procedure for religion faculty at institutions directly under the governance of the General Conference: Andrews University (locale of the theological seminary), Loma Linda



University, Oakwood College (locale of the undergraduate training of the majority of black ministers in North America), Home Study International/Griggs University, and the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS—the theological seminary and graduate school in Cavite, Philippines).

A 113-page draft of the handbook was presented to the IBMTE in July. At least two members of the IBMTE believed that they had a definite agreement with the IBMTE leadership that the July draft would be widely circulated to deans of schools of religion and

chairs of religion departments prior to the pre-Annual Council meeting of the board in September. A prominent scholar who spoke with these members reported that they seemed shocked that this had not happened.

Major responsibility for finalizing the draft procedures handbook was assigned to Werner Vyhmeister, former dean of the theological seminary at Andrews University, according to sources at the General Conference. Individuals who have seen earlier drafts indicate that the proposed endorsement procedures would involve submission of 'all faculty members'



## Membership of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education and the Executive Committee of the IBMTE, July 2001

### Ex Officio Members

GC (General Conference) President: *Jan Paulsen*  
 GC Vice President: *Calvin B. Rock (chair)*  
 GC Vice President: *Eugene Hsu (vice chair)*  
 GC Vice President: *Ted N. C. Wilson (vice chair)*  
 GC Department of Education Director: *Humberto M. Rasi (secretary)*  
 GC Ministerial Association Secretary: *James A. Cress (associate secretary)*  
 GC Secretary: *Matthew A. Bediako*  
 GC Treasurer: *Robert L. Rawson*  
 GC Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Director: *Richard O. Stenbakken*  
 GC Biblical Research Institute Director: *George W. Reid*  
 GC Education Department Associate Director: *Enrique Becerra*  
 GC Ministerial Association Associate Secretary: *Joel Sarli*  
 President, Africa-Indian Ocean Division: *Luka T. Daniel*  
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 President, Inter-American Division: *Israel Leito*  
 President, North American Division: *Don C. Schneider*  
 President, Northern Asia-Pacific Division: *Pyung-Duk Chun*  
 President, South American Division: *Ruy H. Nagel*  
 President, South Pacific Division: *Laurie J. Evans*  
 President, Southern Asia Division: *D. Ronald Watts*  
 President, Southern Asia-Pacific Division: *Violetto F. Bocala*  
 President, Trans-European Division: *Bertil Wiklander*

### Elected Members

*Gregory Allen*, Chair, Religion and Theology, Oakwood College  
*Richard Carlson*, Pastor  
*Jaime Castrejon*, President, Inter-American Theological Seminary  
*Gordon E. Christo*, Vice President Academic Administration, Spicer Memorial College

*Ron Clouzet*, Dean, School of Religion, Southern Adventist University  
*JoAnn M. Davidson*, Faculty, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University  
*Wilson Endruveit*, President, Latin-American Adventist Theological Seminary  
*Enrique Espinosa*, Director, Graduate Studies, River Plate Adventist University  
*Patricia J. Gustin*, Director (GC) Institute of World Mission  
*Ifeoma Kwezi*, Pastor  
*Andrea Luxton*, President, Newbold College  
*Zacchaeus Mathema*, Chair, Religious Studies, Solusi University  
*John McVay*, Dean, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University  
*Daeguik Nam*, President, Sahmyook University  
*Beatrice Neal*, Retired Professor  
*Rick Remmora*, Pastor  
*Angel M. Rodriguez*, Associate Director (GC) Biblical Research Institute  
*Duance M. Schoonard*, Associate Director, North American Division Ministerial Association  
*Felile S. Wakaba*, President, Southern Africa Union Conference  
 Consultant: *Werner Vyhmeister*

### Executive Committee

All ex officio members, except for the division presidents  
*Gregory Allen*  
*Jaime Castrejon*  
*Andrea Luxton*  
*Zacchaeus Mathema*  
*John McVay*  
*Daeguik Nam*  
*Beatrice Neall*  
*Rick Remmora*  
*Angel M. Rodriguez*  
 Consultant: *Werner Vyhmeister*

publications and other public work for review, and that institutions that employ unendorsed teachers would be penalized with loss of Adventist accreditation.

The makeup of the original IBMTE has been altered, establishing more diverse worldwide representation and more faculty and individuals currently in pastoral ministry. However, observers have noted that some IBMTE members who had been outspoken in raising critical questions, such as Joseph Gurubatham, president of Home Study International/Griggs University, and Gerald Winslow, dean of the faculty of religion at Loma Linda University, were not reappointed to the board in 2001. At the same time, the dean of Southern Adventist University's School of Religion, Ron Clouzet, was newly appointed to the IBMTE, despite the fact that SAU moved forward recently with launching a master's degree in religion in violation of action taken on the matter by the North American Division Higher Education Commission.

Meanwhile, the 2000 Annual Council had set in motion yet another mechanism for evaluating Adventist higher education. The Commission on Higher Education, chaired by General Conference vice-president Calvin Rock, is charged with a comprehensive review of all aspects of Adventist higher education—not just theological and ministerial training—for the purpose of developing a “global plan for Adventist higher education” responsive to current and expected needs of the Church in fulfilling its mission.

Administrators of the five General Conference institutions of higher learning are scheduled to give reports in mid-September at the pre-Annual Council meetings. The reports are to include the results of the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis that colleges and universities have conducted at their institutions, a five-year strategic plan, and a rating of institutions based on a document entitled “Characteristics of a Successful Seventh-day Adventist College or University” adopted at the General Conference headquarters in 1996 by the World Education Advisory. This document calls for self-ratings on the extent to which the institution's “philosophy, mission, and objectives” are “congruent with the SDA message and mission” and how committed the faculty and staff are to “the Seventh-day Adventist message, mission, and lifestyle.”

One practical impediment to the project of centralized worldwide supervision of higher education may be the reality that, other than at the five institutions mentioned above, it is the divisions and union

conferences that take responsibility for funding, not the General Conference.

Nor is the General Conference in any position to take greater fiscal responsibility, according to treasurer Robert Rawson. In a talk given to a conference of Adventist college and university business officers in July, Rawson stated that if “administrative authority” over institutions and programs is “centralized at some level, it must be done in such a way that responsibility for funding the institution still lies with those it serves.” He described as “a delicate task” successful achievement of a link in which those responsible for funding educational institutions “share authority for programs” with a “higher” centralized administrative entity that provides little or no funding. One does not get the sense from Rawson's remarks that he is brimming with confidence that such a task can be achieved.

Nonetheless, just as in the larger society, impetus in the Church for centralized measurements of higher education remains strong in some quarters. Rasi sees the coordination and supervision endeavors not as punitive, but for the purpose of unity and coherence in a rapidly growing church, ensuring, for example, “a common understanding of the beliefs and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” among ministerial workers.

Few, if any, dispute the need for accountability. The conflict comes over how the terms for accountability will be structured, who will have a say in them, and how they relate to existing governance systems. Some educators question whether new and overlapping regulatory bodies are the best path to an Adventist future of dynamic faithfulness to the gospel. Or, as one educator suggests, the best administrative means toward that goal in the higher education arena may be the “established channels of accountability—faculty governance, administrative and board review,” along with the Adventist Accrediting Association, which is responsible for ensuring that educational institutions worldwide reach prescribed standards.

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