

## **The Aims of Adventist Education in Historical Perspective**

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“Concerning church schools,” summarized C. C. Lewis in 1888, “it was the unanimous opinion that great care should be exercised in starting out. A poor Seventh-day Adventist school would be about the poorest thing in the world.” That statement was part of Lewis’s report to the church of the first Adventist teachers’ convention. Adventists, he pointed out, were not willing to support Christian schools with either their sympathies or their means.<sup>1</sup> The essence of the Adventist attitude toward Christian education 44 years after the Millerite disappointment can be captured in two words—*caution* and *apathy*.

To Adventists living in 2001, it may seem that Christian education has been central to their church from its inception. However, that is far from the truth. Formal education, in fact, was the last major institutional development within the denomination. It was preceded by the establishment of the publishing work in 1849, centralized church organization in 1863, and the health-care program in 1866. By way of contrast, the Adventist church established its first school in 1872 and did not have an extensive elementary system until nearly 1900, despite the fact that as early as 1881 the General Conference had recommended the widespread establishment of schools.<sup>2</sup>

There was a good reason for that tardiness. After all, wasn’t Jesus going to come? And if He did, what was the use of education? Why educate Adventist children for a world that would be gone before they grew up? In fact, didn’t sending children to school indicate a lack of faith in the soon coming?

It was that mentality that led W. H. Ball in 1862 to ask if it is “right and consistent for us who believe with all our hearts in the immediate coming of the Lord, to seek to give our children an education?”<sup>3</sup> Note that that question was being asked *eighteen years* after the Millerite disappointment. The anti-education “bug” had firmly implanted itself in the Adventist mentality.

James White’s reply is of interest, since he argued in answering Ball that “the fact that Christ is very soon coming is no reason why the mind should not be improved. A well-disciplined and informed mind can best receive and cherish the sublime truths of the Second Advent.”<sup>4</sup> His wife was of the same mind. Ten years later she wrote that “ignorance will not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently.”<sup>5</sup>

The early Sabbatarian Adventists experienced a handful of attempts at beginning schools in the 1850s and early 1860s in such places as Bucks Bridge, New York, and Battle Creek, Michigan, but all were unsuccessful. James White’s greatest educational success during this early period had been the *Youth’s Instructor*, which not only provided the denomination’s young people with spiritual information but also contained the Sabbath School lesson. However, the lack of interest among Adventists in formal education would change in the early 1870s.

### **Founding Adventist Education: Early Visions of Educational Purpose**

By 1872 not only had the frequency of educational discussion picked up, but the denominational leaders were proposing the establishment of a school. Twenty-eight years had passed since the Millerite disappointment and nine years since the formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church was not only growing, but it needed ministers. Those who had come into the church from Millerism were aging and

the church needed to think seriously about training future leadership. Beyond that, by the early 1870s, the church was earnestly considering its responsibility toward foreign missions.

It was with those concerns in mind that the General Conference established the School Committee. The committee reported in May 1872 that

there are persons all through our ranks, who have come to years of maturity, who have convictions that they ought to do something to directly forward the glorious and important cause in which we are engaged. To this end, they want immediately to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the teaching of the Bible in reference to those great truths which pertain to this time.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the committee noted, those people needed instruction in general knowledge so that they would be more effective in speaking and writing. As a result, the denomination was establishing a school in Battle Creek so church workers could be “prepared to wield those weapons for the advancement of the cause.”<sup>7</sup>

There was no doubt in the minds of the denomination’s leadership in 1872 that the purpose of the school they were establishing was to train people to spread the gospel. Ellen White, writing her first major statement on education (“Proper Education”) for the new school, was in full harmony with that aim. “We need a school,” she penned, “where those who are just entering the ministry may be taught at least the common branches of education, and where they may also learn more perfectly the truths of God’s word for this time.”<sup>8</sup>

But Mrs. White’s vision of the goals of Adventist education were broader than those of the other church leaders. Thus in her 1872 article she also dealt with the importance of education, the distinction between education and training, discipline as self-control, the need for a practical/useful education, and the need to balance out the mental and spiritual aspects of education with the physical.<sup>9</sup> In short, while she agreed with the worker-training educational aim of the church leaders, she was also intro-

ducing themes that foreshadowed a much broader education. The next thirty years would see her flesh out the implications of those aims.

Meanwhile, by 1873 James White and other denominational leaders were realizing that the 1872 school was inadequate and that “there is no branch of this work that suffers so much at the present time as the proper education of men and women to proclaim the third angel’s message.” While, he noted, “we have no time to give students a thorough course of education,” the church needs to prepare “young men and women . . . to become printers, editors, and teachers.” In addition, they needed to be taught the “living languages” (rather than the dead classical languages), since we have “a message . . . that is to be proclaimed before many nations and tongues and peoples.” White took pains to point out that such education should not take a long period of time since time was short.<sup>10</sup>

By early 1873 the recognition that the denomination needed to send men and women overseas also was becoming intense. Thus in April 1873 John Nevins Andrews could editorialize in the *Review and Herald* that “the calls that come from every quarter, from men speaking other languages, must be answered by us. We cannot do this in our present circumstances. But we can do it if the Lord bless our effort in the establishment of our proposed school. We have delayed this effort too long.”<sup>11</sup>

The year 1874 witnessed a major shift in Adventist history. In that year the denomination sent its first official missionary—J. N. Andrews—to a foreign land and opened its first collegiate institution—Battle Creek College. Those two events must not be seen as two separate events, but as one. After all, the foremost purpose of the denomination’s early educational enterprise was to train men and women to spread the three angels’ messages. With that in mind, it is symbolically fitting that Adventism’s first institution of higher learning would eventually be renamed as Andrews University in honor of Adventism’s first official missionary.

But all was not well in early Battle Creek College. The goals of the founders were not being met. There was no required Bible course, there was no practical or missionary training, and there was no physical/mental balance in the course of studies. The curriculum was largely dominated by the Greek and Latin classics and the training of teachers for public institutions. The school’s catalogs even went so far as to advertise

that “there is nothing in the regular courses of study, or in the rules and practice of discipline, that is in the least denominational or sectarian. The biblical lectures are before a class of only those who attend them from choice.” And later, “The managers of this College have no disposition to urge upon students sectarian views, or to give such views any prominence in their school work.”<sup>12</sup>

Emmett K. Vande Vere, the first historian of Battle Creek College, summed up the disjunction between the goals of the founders of the college and its curriculum as a “philosophical betrayal.”<sup>13</sup> Part of the problem, according to Ellen White, was that none of them, including herself, really understood “what changes should be made.”<sup>14</sup> W. C. White was of the same mind. Looking back from the perspective of a half century, he pointed out that the lack of understanding on how to reform the curriculum had led the founders to agree “that the work of the school should be organized in the ordinary lines” of the schools of the day.<sup>15</sup>

### **Reflecting on Adventist Education: Midcourse Re-Evaluations**

For various reasons things went from bad to worse at Battle Creek College between 1874 and 1881. Finally, in 1881, the unimaginable happened; the college was closed for a year with no sure promise of reopening. During that year Ellen White presented several powerful testimonies on Christian education in an attempt to get Adventist education on track. She noted in December 1881,

If a worldly influence is to bear sway in our school, then sell it out to worldlings and let them take the entire control; and those who have invested their means in that institution will establish another school, to be conducted, not upon the plan of popular schools, nor according to the desires of principal and teachers, but upon the plan which God has specified.<sup>16</sup>

And what was her burden? In September 1881 she plainly told her audience that

the Lord never designed that our college should imitate other institutions of learning. The religious element should be the controlling power. If unbelievers choose this influence, it is well; if those who are in darkness choose to come to the light, it is as God would have it. But to relax our vigilance, and let the worldly element take the lead in order to secure students, is contrary to the will of God. The strength of our college is in keeping the religious element in the ascendancy.<sup>17</sup>

In Ellen White's writings an important change of emphasis had transpired between her two most important early documents on education: "Proper Education" in 1872 and "Our College" in 1881. In "Proper Education" she had devoted about four-fifths of her space to such topics as physical health, practicality, and manual labor, while almost nothing was said about the importance of the Bible in the curriculum. That proportion was reversed in "Our College." Why the distorted balance in these important documents, we might ask? It appears that Ellen White in 1872 correctly surmised that practical topics would have a difficult time establishing themselves in the curriculum in a world that highly revered intellectual education. But, on the other hand, she had little fear about the central role of the Bible in the curriculum, since the other founders of the college had had so much to say on that topic.

Yet both emphases were missing from the 1870s Battle Creek College curriculum, which was dominated by the classics. Apparently Ellen White had reversed her order of concerns between 1872 and 1881 because what had been incomprehensible in 1872 had actually come to pass. The study of the Bible had been largely neglected, while the school had patterned its curriculum after that of non-Christian institutions. It is true that the practical, physical, work-study side of education had also suffered neglect, but the point is that that problem paled into relative insignificance in the eyes of Ellen White in 1881 next to the problem of the neglect of the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note that while Ellen White had not the slightest doubt that the primary purpose of the college was to train workers for the church, she was not advocating a narrow Bible college or Bible institute curriculum. As she put it in her forceful address to the General Conference and educational leaders in her December 1881 testimony, “God’s purpose has been made known, that our people should have an opportunity to study the sciences and at the same time to learn the requirements of His word.”<sup>19</sup> Her overall council on education definitely pointed toward a broad-based education in which the arts and sciences would be studied in the context of the biblical worldview. That position was evident in the 1885 struggle at South Lancaster Academy when S. N. Haskell and others sought to narrow the curriculum to the specifically religious.<sup>20</sup> Over the years she and certain other educational leaders guided Adventism toward a religiously oriented, liberal-arts approach to collegiate study.

### **Christianizing Adventist Education: Finding a New Center**

The 1888 General Conference session, with its emphasis on the centrality of salvation through faith in Jesus, stimulated the next advance in Adventist educational aims. Even though the “new” emphasis was largely rejected by the leaders attending the session, it was destined to become widely accepted in the early 1890s through the teaching and preaching of A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and Ellen White. Those leaders preached and taught in the late eighties and early nineties at camp meetings, workers’ gatherings, and in local churches across the country.<sup>21</sup> Of greatest importance for the future of Adventist education, however, were the ministerial institutes held during the post-1888 winters, under the direction of W. W. Prescott, leader of the General Conference educational work.<sup>22</sup> Those institutes were aimed especially at enlightening the denomination’s clergy on the centrality of righteousness by faith to Adventism’s teaching and mission.<sup>23</sup>

Early in 1891 Prescott decided to provide a similar institute for Adventist educators. That crucial meeting took place in Harbor Springs,

Michigan, during July and August 1891. W. C. White described the meetings in terms of spiritual revival, stressed an emphasis on spontaneous personal testimonies, and noted that each day began with A. T. Jones's expositions of the book of Romans. Mrs. White also spoke on such topics as the necessity of a personal relationship with Christ, the need for a spiritual revival among the educators attending the convention, the need to displace the pagan classics, and the centrality of the Christian message to education.<sup>24</sup>

Prescott proclaimed to the 1893 General Conference session that Harbor Springs had marked the turning point in Adventist education. "While the general purpose up to that time," he claimed,

has [sic] been to have a religious element in our schools, yet since that institute, as never before, our work has been *practically* [rather than theoretically] upon that basis, showing itself in courses of study and plans of work as it had not previously.<sup>25</sup>

Before Harbor Springs, the teaching of Bible had had a minor place in Adventist education, but the convention adopted a recommendation for four years of Bible study for students in Adventist colleges. More specifically, it was decided that "the Bible as a whole should be studied as the gospel of Christ from first to last; and in which it should be made to appear that all the doctrines held by Seventh-day Adventists were simply the gospel of Christ rightly understood."<sup>26</sup> Beyond reforms in Bible teaching, the convention recommended the teaching of history from the perspective of the biblical worldview. That suggestion should be seen as an early recognition of the importance of the integration of faith and learning.

The Christocentric revival in the church's theology had led to spiritual revival in its educational program, accompanied by a clearer vision of its purpose. As a direct result, noted Prescott, "during the last two years there has been more growth in the educational work than in the 17 years preceding that time."<sup>27</sup>

Ellen White sailed for Australia three months after the close of the Harbor Springs institute. She took with her a heightened awareness of the possibilities of Christian education and of the implications of the gospel for



education. While in Australia she would make several of her most important educational initiatives; initiatives that would heavily impact upon Adventism's understanding of the goals of Christian education.

### **Correcting Adventist Education: Attempts to Refocus Battle Creek College**

The decade following the Harbor Springs convention found Ellen White more intensely involved with education and educational writing than any other period of her life. Before her return from Australia in 1901, she would have opportunity to be directly involved in developing Avondale College—a school that closely reflected ideal education as she had come to perceive it after twenty years of writing and thinking on the topic.

Before the drive to establish Avondale got underway, however, Ellen White once again sought to put Battle Creek College on a firmer foundation. The concepts set forth at Harbor Springs had produced some changes at Battle Creek College, but reform in an established institution was an uphill battle.

In early November 1893, President Prescott received two testimonies regarding the shortcomings of the Battle Creek school. In one of them Ellen White reflected on the establishment of the college in 1872.

The Lord opened before me the necessity of establishing a school at Battle Creek that should not pattern after any school in existence. . . . Teachers were to educate in spiritual things, to prepare people to stand in the trying crisis before us; but there has been a departure from God's plan in many ways.<sup>28</sup>

Not only had Battle Creek College missed the mark, but it was leading other schools astray. It was the oldest and most prestigious of the Adventist schools, and, furthermore, teachers educated at Battle Creek staffed the newer schools. Ellen White was concerned with that influence. Prescott read on:

There needs to be a higher, holier mold on the school in Battle Creek,

and on other schools which have taken their mold from it. The customs and practices of the Battle Creek school go forth to all the churches, and the pulse heartbeats of that school are felt throughout the body of believers.<sup>29</sup>

The problem was clear: Battle Creek College had built on a false pattern, and had, in turn, compounded the error by becoming a false pattern to its sister institutions. Prescott, who wanted to respond to the reform program, read both testimonies to his faculty and one of them to the student body. The students were shocked and disturbed, but generally accepted the counsel. The faculty, however, was split between those who could not envision a college without the classics at the center, and those who responded wholeheartedly to the reform ideas.<sup>30</sup> The eventual outcome was a modified reform curriculum that gave more room to the Bible and history as recommended at Harbor Springs, while maintaining a classical core. Prescott and those faculty members in sympathy with reform were able to add religious elements to the curriculum, but they were not able to thoroughly transform it.

In order to add on the religious elements to the course of study without overly eroding the classics, an extra year was added to the classical course. According to the 1894 *Catalogue*, Battle Creek College now had a seven-year classical course—three years preparatory and four years collegiate—in an era when most people were doing well to have completed elementary school.

On March 21, 1895, Mrs. White responded to this lengthened course of study at Battle Creek College in a testimony entitled, “Speedy Preparation for the Work.”<sup>31</sup> In “Speedy Preparation” she spoke plainly against over-educating a few at the expense of the many, creating an abnormal appetite for intellectual studies “which increases as it is fed, . . . making altogether too much of human education,” and exalting human learning above God.<sup>32</sup> She noted that Moses, in the providence of God, received an education, but that much of it had to be unlearned before he could be truly useful to God. What really counted in education was not a “perfect education” (from a traditional point of view) such as some at Battle Creek sought to give, but that students obtained “a knowledge of God.”<sup>33</sup>

“Speedy Preparation” was misinterpreted by some in Battle Creek as being a justification for a less-than-adequate course of studies. One month later, therefore, Ellen White sent two more testimonies to the leaders in Battle Creek to correct their misunderstanding. In “The Essential Education” she penned: “I have written largely in reference to students spending an unreasonably long time in gaining an education; but I hope I shall not be misunderstood in regard to what is essential education. I do not mean that a superficial work should be done.”<sup>34</sup> Again, in “Diligent and Thorough Education” she reiterated that “no movement should be made to lower the standard of education in our school at Battle Creek. The students should tax the mental powers; every faculty should reach the highest possible development.” She was concerned that students “grasp the principles at the foundation of every subject under consideration.” The school should offer a “most diligent and thorough education . . . , and in order to secure this, the wisdom that comes from God must be made first and most important.” The other subjects were not to be disregarded, but the “Book of books as the grandest study for the human intelligence” was to be put in the center.<sup>35</sup>

Her message should have been clear to her readers in Battle Creek. She was advocating quality education, but she was defining quality from a Christian perspective rather than from the viewpoint of traditional classical education, which she felt was largely a waste of time.

Ellen White continued to press for educational reform at Battle Creek College throughout the nineties. During this period her educational writings repeatedly uplifted the “essential knowledge” in education and the foundational and contextual role of the Bible in the understanding of every other subject. She fought long and hard with the classical traditionalists who were arguing that the study of the classics was the best way to develop mental power. Contrary to that widely accepted academic wisdom, she repeatedly set forth the thought that Bible study was the best agent for developing insight into reality, and was thus the best agent for increasing mental strength.<sup>36</sup> Beyond Bible study for its own sake, by 1895, Ellen White was stressing the fact that the Bible provided a foundation for understanding all knowledge, and that other fields of study needed to be integrated with the Bible and the biblical world view.<sup>37</sup>

### **Revolutionizing Adventist Education: The Avondale Pattern**

Battle Creek College, as an example of a faulty pattern of Christian education, would continue to struggle with educational reform, but Ellen White was beginning to turn her mind to the development of a school in Australia. In early February 1894 she wrote that “our minds have been much exercised day and night in regard to our schools. How shall they be conducted? And what shall be the education and training of the youth? Where shall our Australian Bible School be located?”<sup>38</sup> That was the lead statement to her influential testimony entitled “Work and Education.” That testimony was the keynote for the school eventually to be established at Cooranbong.

Mrs. White was giving serious thought to the proposed Australian school because, apparently, she saw the possibility of developing a school outside the sphere of influence of Battle Creek College. Conditions for innovation were ideal: Australia was beyond the reach of the conservative Adventist leadership in the United States, Australia was a new mission field for Seventh-day Adventists and thus had no established Adventist church or educational traditions to contend with, and some of the church’s most responsive reform leaders were already in the Australian field. As a result the 1890s saw several innovations piloted in Australia that would have been much more difficult to experiment with in the United States.

The message in “Work and Education,” her keynote for the Australian school, set the tone for thinking about a new type of Adventist school. That school would center on the Bible and uplift missionary work and the spiritual side of life. In addition, it would be practical, teach young people to work, introduce agriculture, and have a rural location. That last point was especially emphasized: “Never,” wrote Ellen White, “can the proper education be given to the youth in this country, or any other country, unless they are separated a wide distance from the cities.”<sup>39</sup> Coupled with that advice was an emphasis on physical labor and the mental-physical balance that had generally taken a back seat since 1872 when it provided the bulk of “Proper Education.”

After twenty years of trial and error, Mrs. White was more convinced than ever regarding the type of education that could be called “proper.” From her growing understanding of her testimonies over the past two decades, she had already explicitly affirmed that the Bible must be at the center, and that Adventist schools should not follow the false leads of classical education. With those issues cared for, she could once again stress the final pillar of her reform package—the necessity of useful work being united with mental effort. At the Australian school she would not advocate purchasing a 160-acre farm or a 50-acre fairground at the edge of a city as she had in Battle Creek, but rather the 1,500-acre Brettville Estate in rural Cooranbong. During the next few years she would demonstrate an ever-increasing understanding of how to implement the reform program first advocated in 1872. It had “taken much time to understand what changes should be made” to establish education on a “different order,”<sup>40</sup> but the process of understanding and implementing that understanding would reach top speed between 1894 and 1899.

Ellen White’s numerous testimonies on education during the next few years continued to give direction to the Avondale School. Furthermore, she lived adjacent to the campus during its formative stages and was able to take part in developing the school in a way that was unique to her experience. Her proximity also enabled the teachers and administrators to talk matters over with her on a regular basis. In addition, Prescott, who had collected and edited her manuscripts for *Christian Education* (1893) and *Special Testimonies on Education* (1897), spent several months in 1895 and 1896 on the campus. During that period, he and Mrs. White had extended conversations on Christian education. They both benefitted by being able to come to a fuller grasp of the implications of the testimonies and how their principles might be implemented. Ellen White wrote to James Edson White and his wife that Prescott drew her out as her husband had done earlier. Their conversations, she claimed, enabled her to clarify her thinking and to say more than otherwise. “We could see some matters in a clearer light.”<sup>41</sup>

The period from 1894 through 1896 was one of preparation for the full educational program at Avondale: 1894 was largely taken up with finding a suitable location, while 1895 and 1896 were experimental years as

the work program was launched and the initial buildings constructed. In 1897 the school was ready to add its course of studies to the existing work program. Ellen White was deeply concerned that Avondale was “not to be a school after the common order of schools.” It was to be “such a school as the Lord has marked out should be established.”<sup>42</sup> To Willie White, she wrote in June 1897:

I believe that in Bro. Hughes [the principal] the Lord has sent the right man. We must all work earnestly and intelligently to do the utmost to make this school as God would have it. No man’s notions are to be brought in here. No breezes from Battle Creek are to be wafted in. I see I must watch before and behind and on every side to permit nothing to find entrance that has been presented before me as injuring our schools in America.<sup>43</sup>

If Battle Creek College, as a first beginning in Adventist education, had proven to be a poor but influential pattern; then Ellen White was determined to make Avondale, as a second beginning, a correct and even more influential pattern. Avondale, she later reminisced, was “not to pattern after any school that had been established in the past.” Rather, it was to become a pattern or object lesson of proper Christian education.<sup>44</sup> The importance of the Avondale School experiment gradually dawned on W. C. White and others. In October 1898 he wrote that

recent testimonies tell us that this is to be a pattern school, that being so, it is of great importance that we make every reasonable effort to make a perfect and correct pattern. . . . From mother’s recent writings, we see that there is much more at stake in the success of this school than any of us have realized.<sup>45</sup>

A large proportion of Mrs. White’s educational writings was produced in connection with the Avondale experience. By September 1899 Willie could write:

During the past two years I think Mother has written more upon the

principles of education, the importance of Bible study and the importance of combining labor with study, and the value of agriculture . . . than in all the years before. I think she has written more largely upon it than any other branch of our work.<sup>46</sup>

The instruction of Ellen White in relation to the Avondale School has continued to guide Adventist education. Much of it found its way into *Special Testimonies on Education* (1897),<sup>47</sup> *Education* (1903), and the large section on education in the sixth volume of *Testimonies for the Church* (1900).

In volume six, her lead article was entitled, “The Need of Educational Reform.” Ellen White began the article by likening Adventist education to “waste places” and “desolations” that needed to be raised up and rebuilt. She then wrote:

When the truth for these last days came to the world in the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages, we were shown that in the education of our children a different order of things must be brought in; but it has taken much time to understand what changes should be made.<sup>48</sup>

The second educational article in volume six, “Hindrances to Reform,” proclaimed that “we need to begin over again. Reform must be entered into with heart and soul and will. Errors may be hoary with age; but age does not make error truth, nor truth error.”<sup>49</sup> The rest of the article illuminated aspects of the all-important reform.

The zealous effort put forth in the development of Avondale was not lost. The Adventist church by 1900 had a significant body of educational writings from Ellen White, and the denomination had a “pattern” school that exemplified the ideal as set forth in those writings. The Avondale “object lesson”<sup>50</sup> stimulated a reform movement in Adventist schools in the United States and other countries in the late nineties and early years of the twentieth century. Especially influential in this reform were E. A. Sutherland<sup>51</sup> and Percy Magan who sought to recreate Battle Creek College as a reform institution.

### **Universalizing Adventist Education: The Church-School Movement**

Another of Mrs. White's important contributions to Adventist education during the 1890s was her stimulation of the elementary-school movement. The church had dragged its feet on elementary schooling, even though by the mid-nineties it had a fair number of secondary and collegiate institutions. In 1881 and again in 1888 there had been talk by Adventist leaders regarding elementary schools, but nothing much had been done.<sup>52</sup> That began to change in the late 1890s, and Mrs. White was at the forefront of the drive for local church schools. In Australia parents were compelled by law to send their children to school. That situation agitated the issue in her mind, and she wrote to Willie in May 1897 that this subject had "long been neglected" in spite of the fact that "the first seven or ten years of a child's life is the time when lasting impressions for good or evil are made." Speaking to the Australian situation, she wrote: "In this country parents are compelled to send their children to school. Therefore in localities where there is a church, schools should be established, if there are no more than six children to attend."<sup>53</sup> In the following months she would write much regarding elementary education.

That counsel was taken to heart by Adventist educational reformers. The phenomenal growth of Adventist elementary education is reflected in table 1.

By 1900 the place of the local elementary school was firmly established in Adventist congregations. Most of those schools were one-teacher schools. The church had taken seriously the counsel that it should establish a school if only six students were available.

The 1890s was the decade of advancement in Adventist education. The church had entered the nineties with a handful of schools and a poorly perceived, and even more poorly executed, philosophy of education. The turn of the century found Adventists with a rapidly expanding international system of education at all levels with a sound philosophy that had been experimentally validated. Ellen White had been a key personality in stimulating that accomplishment.



**Table 1**  
**The Growth of Seventh-day Adventist Elementary Schools from 1880 to 1910.**

| Year | Number of Schools | Number of Teachers | Enrollment |
|------|-------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1880 | 1                 | 1                  | 15         |
| 1885 | 3                 | 5                  | 125        |
| 1890 | 9                 | 15                 | 350        |
| 1895 | 18                | 35                 | 895        |
| 1900 | 220               | 250                | 5,000      |
| 1905 | 417               | 466                | 7,345      |
| 1910 | 594               | 758                | 13,357     |

SOURCE: *Christian Education* 3 (September-October, 1911): 14.

### **“Missologizing” Adventist Education: The Drive to Worldwide Mission**

Another great shift in Adventist education to come out of the 1890s was due to the unprecedented growth of the denomination’s mission program. Like the spiritual revival that it paralleled, the mission explosion grew out of the late 1880s.

It is important to realize from the outset that the mission enthusiasm of the 1890s was not restricted to the Adventist church. Sydney Ahlstrom, a leading student of American church history, has noted that “the closing two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the climactic phase of the foreign missions movement in American Protestantism.”<sup>54</sup> One of the main stimulants of that interest was the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, which grew out of an appeal by Dwight L. Moody in 1886 for college students to devote their lives to mission service.

One hundred took their stand. That number increased to 2,200 in 1887, and within a few years many thousands of young people had pledged their lives to mission service. Their motto was: "The evangelization of the world in this generation." The Student Volunteer Movement stimulated, claims Ernest R. Sandeen, "the greatest demonstration of missionary interest ever known in the United States."<sup>55</sup> As a result, Protestant Americans began to see such places as India, Africa, China, and Japan as their spiritual provinces.

The foremost educational result of that mission thrust was the rise of the missionary college and Bible-institute movement among American evangelicals. The aim of those schools was to prepare large numbers of workers in a short period of time to staff mission outposts both at home and overseas. The schools focused on providing practical training and Bible knowledge, while avoiding academic degrees and rigorous intellectual training. Their aim was not to replace regular colleges, but to provide what Moody called "gapmen" who could stand between the ordained minister and the ordinary layman. The first of those schools was established in 1883 as the Missionary Training College for Home and Foreign Missionaries and Evangelists (now called Nyack College).<sup>56</sup>

Events within the Seventh-day Adventist Church paralleled both the mission explosion of evangelical Protestantism and its educational extension. Signs of new life in Adventist missions began to surface in the mid-1880s. In 1886 *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*—a book that did much to promote a missionary spirit among Adventists—was published in Basel, Switzerland. It was followed in 1889 by S. N. Haskell's two-year itinerary around the world, during which he surveyed the possibilities for opening mission work in various places. By 1890 the stage was set for what Richard Schwarz has called the era of "Mission Advance" in the Adventist denomination.<sup>57</sup>

That advance was fueled by an eschatological excitement that has never been duplicated in Adventist history. Beginning with the Blair Sunday Rest Bill in 1888, the next seven years saw a rash of national Sunday bills and the aggressive prosecution of Adventists for Sunday desecration in several states, as well as in England, Switzerland, South Africa, and other nations. Jones, Waggoner, Prescott, and Ellen White tied those de-

velopments to righteousness by faith as they preached the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 with new vigor and insight. Roy McGarrell has demonstrated that that important combination of Adventist doctrines empowered the dynamic thrust of Adventist missions throughout the world in the 1890s.<sup>58</sup>

In 1880 Adventists had only eight missions with five evangelistic workers outside the United States. In 1890 they still had only eight missions, even though the number of workers had risen to 56. By 1900, however, the number of missions had risen to 42, and the number of evangelistic mission workers to 481. The last decade of the nineteenth century initiated an accelerating trend that remained unabated throughout the first 30 years of the twentieth century. By 1930 the church was supporting 8,479 evangelistic workers outside of North America, representing 270 missions. That outreach had transformed the very nature of Adventism.<sup>59</sup>

Mission outreach had a direct effect on the expansion of Seventh-day Adventist schooling. The denomination looked to its schools to supply the ever-increasing number of workers for its rapidly expanding worldwide work, just as the evangelical expansion of missions had stimulated the Bible-institute and missionary-college movement to train large numbers of missionaries in a short period of time.

John Harvey Kellogg, who appears to have been the Adventist in closest touch with evangelical educational ideas,<sup>60</sup> was probably the first to develop a missionary school within the denomination. His Sanitarium Training School for Medical Missionaries was established in 1889, followed by the American Medical Missionary College in 1895. Meanwhile, the Avondale School for Christian Workers (1894), the training schools stimulated by E. A. Sutherland and Percy Magan, and the Adventist missionary colleges, such as Washington Missionary College and Emmanuel Missionary College, soon were dotting the Adventist landscape—all of them similar in many ways to the schools spawned by the evangelical mission movement.

Mission expansion affected Adventist educational expansion in at least two identifiable ways. First, it greatly increased the number of schools and students in North America, since most of the denomination's early workers came from the United States. Second, Adventists began to

establish schools around the world so that workers could be trained in their home fields. By 1900, therefore, not only had Adventist educational institutions greatly expanded in number, but the system also had been internationalized.

The magnitude of that whole process was compounded by unprecedented institutional development during the 1890s. Besides churches and schools, Adventists developed hospitals, publishing houses, and eventually (to a lesser extent) health-food factories in the United States and overseas. Thus the schools were called upon to supply ever larger numbers of institutional workers in addition to evangelistic workers.

From its inception, nineteenth-century Adventist education had been inextricably connected with foreign missions. For example, both the opening of the church's first college and the sending of its first missionary took place in 1874. That was no coincidence. The stated purpose of Battle Creek College was to train for mission service at home and in foreign fields.<sup>61</sup> The first great motivation for Adventist schooling had been rooted in mission. The same was true in the 1890s of the second great thrust of Adventist education.

Thus the spread of Adventist education during the 1890s was directly related to the spiritual revival in the denomination's theology and to an enlarged vision of the church's mission to the world. It is important to note that those were positive motivators. Negative motivators—the need to escape from incipient Darwinism and religious skepticism—played a minor role. Adventist education at its best stands for something of great importance, rather than representing an escape from the non-Christian world.

With the lessons of the 1890s in mind, we can conclude that the health of Adventist education is dependent upon its ability to maintain its spiritual identity and sense of mission. Without these distinctive qualities, it loses its reason for being. With them it will continue to be a dynamic force in a world in need of redemptive healing.

### **Shaping Adventist Education: Ellen White's Mature Thoughts on the Aims of Education**

An important outgrowth of Ellen White's involvement with the development of the Avondale School in the 1890s was the constant stream of letters and articles on Christian education from her pen. Those writings, along with the publication of *Christian Education* in 1893 and *Special Testimonies on Education* in 1897, not only helped guide the development of existing Adventist schools, but generated a pervasive awareness of Christian education among Adventist leaders and members.

Beyond that awareness, Ellen White's writing on education in the 1890s prepared the way for the publication of her matured thoughts on the topic in *Education* in 1903. In that book more than any other she addresses the primary goals and aims of education as she frames education within the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In masterful strokes she retells the Genesis 1-3 story in educational terms and concludes that

to restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.<sup>62</sup>

Again she penned:

In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one. . . . To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher's first effort and his constant aim.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond making conversion to Christ the primary aim of Christian education, Ellen White was equally clear in *Education* that the ultimate

aim in Adventist education is service. She penned,

Our ideas of education, take too narrow and too low a range. . . . True education means more than the persual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.<sup>64</sup>

Thus in her *magnum opus* in the field of education, Ellen White set forth conversion to Christ as the primary aim of Christian education and service to God and other people as the ultimate aim. Within the framework of those aims she discusses such intermediate aims as character development, the role of work, and the Christian understanding of such fields as historical, literary, scientific, and biblical knowledge. From her perspective, all of those intermediate aims are based upon a conversion experience and are instrumental in preparing individuals for service.

### **The Professionalizing of Adventist Education: The Move Toward Accreditation**

The changing nature of twentieth-century education and work led to one major adjustment in the goals of Adventist education. To put it bluntly, both work and education were becoming more professional. That development created a tension in the denomination in the early twentieth century.

On the one hand were educators such as E. A. Sutherland who had led out in abolishing academic degrees in Battle Creek College in the late 1890s. That was not problematic since in the late nineteenth century degrees were not necessary to enter such fields as medicine, teaching, nursing, ministry, or the worlds of business or government. In 1899 Sutherland wrote that “the first *degree* was granted by a pope,” and that

degrees were the “germs” of the disease that permeated the Protestantism from which the third angel’s message was calling people. By 1915 he was asserting that “any Seventh-day Adventist school that grants degrees, thereby invites State inspection, and must accept the world’s standard and come into conformity to the worldly system of education.” The time was coming, he claimed, when degree granting would be done by the Papacy. Thus a degree would come directly from that organization and would be “a seal or the mark of the beast.”<sup>65</sup>

But at the very time that Sutherland was making such moves and pronouncements, the very nature of professionalism and education was being transformed. A case in point was medicine. In 1910 the “Flexner Report” exposed the dismal state of medical education in the United States. The report and accompanying actions eventually led to the closing of more than half of the nation’s medical schools. The American Medical Association, on the basis of the Flexner Report, evaluated Adventism’s fledgling College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda in 1911 and gave it the lowest possible rating. Eventually the medical school would either have to achieve a higher rating or be closed, since without American Medical Association approval its graduates could not practice medicine. Achieving a higher rating, however, meant that the schools and colleges sending students to the College of Medical Evangelists also had to be accredited by the developing, regional, accrediting associations. Thus the issue of degrees had evolved into one of accreditation.

Those developments and how to relate to them divided the Adventist leadership. Some believed the church should train Bible instructors at Loma Linda who could also give natural treatments, while others believed the church needed to train fully certified physicians. In their concern, they placed the matter before Ellen White. Her reply was unequivocal:

We must provide that which is essential to qualify our youth who desire to be physicians, so that they may intelligently fit themselves to be able to stand the examinations required to prove their efficiency as physicians. . . . We are to supply whatever may be required, so that these youth need not be compelled to go to medical schools conducted by

men not of our faith.<sup>66</sup>

She also indicated that this would affect Adventist colleges.

Our larger union conference training schools in various parts of the field should be placed in the most favorable position for qualifying our youth to meet the entrance requirements specified by state laws regarding medical students. . . . The youth . . . should be able to secure at our union conference training schools all that is essential for entrance into a medical college. . . . Inasmuch as there are legal requirements making it necessary that medical students shall take a certain preparatory course of study, our colleges should arrange to carry their students to the point of literary and scientific training that is necessary.<sup>67</sup>

That counsel provided the basis for the eventual accreditation of Adventist colleges. It also meant that the service function of Adventist education could continue to be fulfilled since by the middle of the twentieth century accredited degrees were needed in a large number of fields, including medicine, teaching, nursing, and so on. Times had changed and the church's educational system was fortunately in a position to face those changes as it continued to prepare young people for service. Even Sutherland realized the changing nature of the world in which Adventist education was taking place. As early as 1923 he had "quietly" begun to send his teachers from Madison for advanced degrees.<sup>68</sup> By the 1940s, accreditation had become an accepted necessity in Adventist education.

### **The Balancing of Adventist Education: A Necessary Caution**

By the 1940s Adventist education had pretty well been shaped. The last half of the twentieth century would see two major initiatives. The first would be the drive for the creation of universities around the world. In most places outside of the United States that drive necessitated deleting some of the North American cultural baggage that had been imported



through the missionary mentality. Those changes generally provided the upgraded schools with a better “fit” in relation to the home cultures in which they existed.

The second major initiative in the latter decades of the twentieth century was the move toward making the integration of faith and learning a self-conscious practice at all levels of Adventist education. Under the leadership of George Akers and Humberto Rasi, the General Conference Department of Education initiative provided an important corrective in a curricular area that is altogether too easy to ignore.

Before moving away from the topic of educational aims in historical perspective, it is important to spend a moment on the balancing of Adventist education. Ellen White was big on a balanced education, but some who claim to be her followers have tended toward unbalance in the use of her statements.

Ellen White was frustrated by those who selected the “strongest expressions” from her writings and pushed them where they didn’t fit. “Let not individuals,” she penned, “gather up the very strongest statements, given for individuals and families, and drive these things because they want to use the whip and to have something to drive.”<sup>69</sup>

Her writings supply us with many opportunities to gather up the “strongest statements.” Take the Avondale school as an example. Ellen White had not the slightest doubt that Avondale was an “object lesson,” “a sample school,” and a “pattern” for other schools. But some Adventists took those statements to mean that what they called the “blueprint” needed to be plugged in everywhere in Adventist education.

Unfortunately, those with a proclivity to gather the strongest statements often overlook the moderating ones. After all, she not only penned her “pattern” statements about Avondale, but also wrote that “the Lord has not designed any one special, exact plan in education.”<sup>70</sup> Again, she penned, “no exact pattern can be given for the establishment of schools in new fields. The climate, the surroundings, the condition of the country, and the means at hand with which to work must all bear a part in shaping the work.”<sup>71</sup>

One of my favorite illustrations on Ellen White’s contextual, principle-based flexibility is her counsel in the 1890s regarding the location of

schools. "Never," she penned, "can the proper education be given to the youth in this country or any other country, unless they are separated a wide distance from the cities."<sup>72</sup> That counsel undoubtedly reflected what she saw as the ideal. But she also dealt with the realities of people in the real world. Some years later, when larger numbers of poorer families began to be baptized in major cities, she wrote: "So far as possible these schools should be established outside the cities. But in the cities there are many children who could not attend schools away from the cities; and for the benefit of these, schools should be opened in the cities as well as in the country."<sup>73</sup>

That statement indicates not only that rural education was still Ellen White's ideal, but also that her ideals did not make her inflexible in application. Her writings indicate that she held to a distinction between the ideal and the real. A problem arises when her so-called followers compile only the ideal statements, the strongest statements, and try to apply them in every situation. Beyond the distinction between the ideal and the real, Ellen White was quite adamant that her statements be contextualized and that "common sense" be used in interpreting even what appear to be unconditional statements.<sup>74</sup>

Balance is what she advocated. And balance is what is needed today. But that balance will only be achieved through the responsible (balanced) use of inspired counsel.

## Conclusions

Why have Adventist schools?

Earlier Adventists were clear on the topic: to preach the third angel's message to all the world and do the work of the church. Ellen White would sum up that ultimate educational aim as "service."

But being able to serve implied training in both the intellectual and moral realm. The early Adventists were in general agreement that character development was crucial and that the common branches of study

along with the arts and sciences were important, but they also believed that it was the biblical world view that provided the matrix in which Christian understanding takes place.

Thus the ultimate aim of Christian education as service and the instrumental aims of character development and the gaining of knowledge from a biblical perspective were largely agreed upon by early Adventists. But it was Ellen White who would supply the denomination's educators with the primary aim of Christian education when she equated true education with redemption. In addition, she would be the one to provide the denomination with the means to fulfill its ultimate aim of service to God and other people in the modern world when she counseled the church to move in the direction of accredited programs.

The history of Seventh-day Adventist education is rich in lessons regarding the aims of education. The Adventist church in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was repeatedly forced to clarify its educational aims. The Adventist church in the twenty-first century needs to keep its eyes on those aims and the contexts that produced them as it seeks to serve its Lord in contemporary society.

### Notes

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3. "Questions and answers," *Review and Herald*, 23 December 1862, 29.
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5. Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian education* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1923), 45.
6. School Committee, "The proposed school," *Review and Herald*, 7 May 1872, 168.
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8. E. G. White, *Fundamentals*, 45-46.

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10. James White, "Conference address before the General Conference of the S. D. Adventists, March 11, 1873," *Review and Herald*, 20 May 1873, 180, 181.
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28. E. G. White, *Fundamentals*, 221.

29. *Ibid.*

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31. E. G. White, *Fundamentals*, 334-367.

32. *Ibid.*, 338, 357, 358.

33. *Ibid.*, 360, 346, 341.

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35. *Ibid.*, 373, 376.

36. *Ibid.*, 379-389.

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