

# TOWARD GENDER-INCLUSIVENESS IN ADVENTIST EDUCATION

*Some Personal (and Partisan) Observations*

By Fritz Guy

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Let's begin by looking at an interesting irony. On the one hand, Adventist education—particularly at the administrative and higher education levels—like most modern education, is male designed and male dominated. This makes a male orientation inevitable—not because

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males are chauvinistic (which of course they are), but simply because they are male. To the extent that male is different from female, male-oriented education is less adequate for female students—from kindergarten through graduate and professional school.

On the other hand, Adventist schools have a long history of commitment to educating "the whole person"—as reflected in the Latin words in the official seal of Andrews University, *Spiritus, Mens, Corpus*. We have properly insisted that a good education must involve

the spirit, mind, and body. It includes the religious, social, manual, and physical aspects of human existence along with the intellectual.

The irony comes from the fact that our concern for "whole persons" has resulted in an educational enterprise that seems more interested in producing "whole men" than "whole women." The motto of Loma Linda University, "To make men whole," offers an innocent (but obvious) advertisement of the one-sidedness of Adventist education in general. Compounding the irony is the fact

that much of the continuing inspiration, as well as the initial vision, of Adventist education, has come from a woman.

My concern for gender-inclusive Adventist education is motivated by an ethical sense (because it is a matter of fairness and rightness), an ecclesiastical sense (because it is crucial to the spiritual health and moral credibility of the church), and a theological sense (because gender-inclusiveness points toward re-creating the image of God in human beings). Any culture or subculture that refuses to make the most of its human resources deserves the deterioration and decline toward which it inevitably progresses.

### **Transmitting an Adventist Ethos**

Adventist schools, colleges, and universities should provide the knowledge and skills that will help young people contribute to the life and mission of the church in the modern world. However, these schools must also transmit a set of personal and social values—an Adventist *ethos* or *geist*, a particular way of looking at reality, including God, the world, and oneself. Although formal education cannot

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substitute for experience, growth, and maturation, it remains a major force in shaping a sense of one's place and one's possibilities.

Getting from where we are (with an unintentionally male-oriented Adventist education) to where we want and ought to be (with an intentionally gender-inclusive Adventist education) will require several different kinds of strategies. I will list half a dozen that I consider most important and effective.

### **Teaching Materials**

First let's examine the curriculum. To help further the goal of inclusive education, we ought to examine specific course materials, especially in religion. An impor-

tant step in this direction is the new reading textbook program, which had among its criteria a list of guidelines for sex fairness, including an equal balance of females and males in active roles and different careers.

Women ought to be put back into human history in general, since the standard accounts offer little more than “a Joan of Arc (burned at the stake), a Betsy Ross (whose claim to fame was sewing), a Carrie Nation (moralising battle-ax), a Florence Nightingale (super-nurse), a few queens (all of whom obtained the throne because there were no male heirs).”<sup>1</sup>

We should also put women back into the story of religion. All students, boys as well as girls, need to be aware of the religious strength, ability, and importance of women.<sup>2</sup>

In the Old Testament, male characters greatly outnumber female characters. Nevertheless, we can find a galaxy of strong, vigorous, but relatively unknown women, as well as the familiar, romantic figures such as Esther and Ruth. Miriam the prophet, along with her younger brothers Aaron and Moses, led the liberation from

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begun to use the information supplied by the survey to plan future textbook development.

Predictably, the senior academy curriculum is far less uniform than that of the elementary schools. For example, 49 different textbooks were in use among the 53 vocational arts teachers sampled! In cases where no textbook consensus emerged, the textbooks cited were combined into a single "miscellaneous" category and assessed as a composite whole.

Results of secondary teacher textbook satisfaction ratings appear in Table 3.

### Summary

The findings from the 1987 Profile of Teacher Concerns reveal the following facts:

- Teachers in SDA schools in North America are a relatively young, mobile, and well-educated group. A majority have attended SDA colleges and taught only in Adventist schools.

- SDA teachers are concerned about the spirituality of church schools and feel a sense of isolation and concern about their personal limitations.

- There is a lack of awareness about and use of curriculum guides; teachers are much better informed about and use more widely the textbooks and prepared classroom materials.

- Teachers express strong preferences regarding the effectiveness of curriculum resources.

- Conference educational personnel have essential supporting roles in helping teachers use curriculum materials enabling them to be more effective in the classroom.

The Profile of Teacher Concerns will be repeated periodically to help determine emerging trends and shifting priorities. Information derived from these surveys will enable classroom teachers to participate in curriculum decisions that affect their daily life. □

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Confidential questionnaires were mailed to a representative group of 832 elementary and secondary teachers and conference education personnel. Of these, 719 responded, giving an effective return rate of 86.4 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Conference supervisors concurred in rating spirituality in SDA schools as a top priority. They also rated making teaching attractive, discipline/class management, science/health grades 5-8, improving instructional strategies, board member orientation, and small schools as major concerns.

<sup>3</sup> See for example John Miller and Wayne Seller, *Curriculum: Perspectives and Practice* (New York: Longman, 1985).

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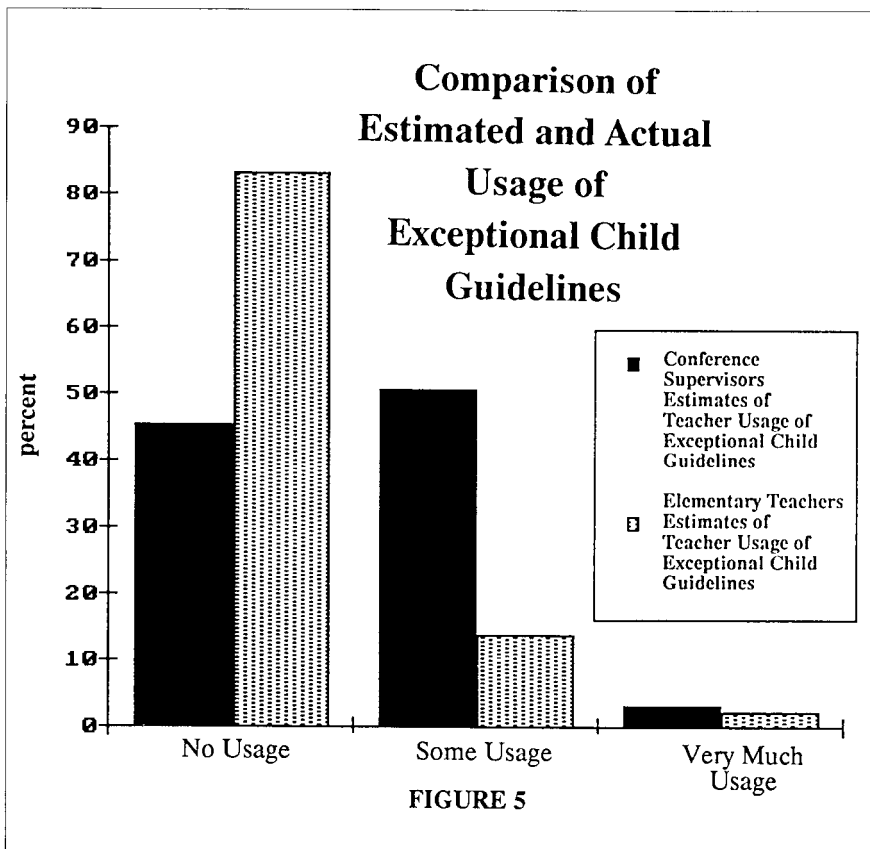
Egypt<sup>3</sup> and was a significant enough critic of Moses to incur divine wrath.<sup>4</sup> Deborah, a charismatic judge of Israel, summoned Barak to confront the Canaanites and initiated the attack that brought a decisive victory.<sup>5</sup> Huldah the prophet was consulted by the king and high priest when they wanted to know the real significance of the newly discovered scroll of the law.<sup>6</sup> Naomi took charge of her life when she was bereft of her husband and sons, acting with courage and creativity.<sup>7</sup>

In the history of a predominantly patriarchal society, these women provide vivid reminders that God sometimes works "counterculturally," doing the unexpected as a way of encouraging broader understanding. We see another example of God's countercultural activity in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

In the New Testament, women appear prominently as believers and disciples—not merely spectators or "Jesus groupies."<sup>8</sup> Women were theological conversation partners of Jesus—listening, learning, interacting: for example, the Syrophenician woman,<sup>9</sup> the Samaritan woman,<sup>10</sup> Mary of Bethany at home with Martha<sup>11</sup> and at Simon's party in honor of Jesus,<sup>12</sup> and Martha too at the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>13</sup>

Women first announced Christ's resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Priscilla, also known more formally as Prisca, is mentioned four times in the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> Phoebe was a deacon (*not* deaconess, in spite of the common English translation) in the church at Cenchrea.<sup>16</sup> Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, became Paul's first convert in the city of Philippi.<sup>17</sup>

We should also put women back into denominational history. Besides Ellen White (who for many Adventists seems to have been a unique phenomenon—a sort of genderless prophet), Adventism



has had many other significant women,<sup>18</sup> beginning with the assertive Rachel Oakes, from whom some of the Millerite Adventists in 1844 got the idea of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

Minerva Jane Chapman served as treasurer of the General Conference, editor of the *Youth's Instructor*, secretary of the SDA Publishing Association, and treasurer of the Tract and Missionary Society—all at the same time. Kate Lindsay, one of the first women physicians in America, started a nursing school at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Lillian Eshleman Magan, another physician, worked to put her husband, Percy T. Magan (later president of the College of Medical Evangelists) through medical school. Maud Sisley at the age of 26 was the first Adventist woman missionary to Europe.

Georgia Burrus became, in 1895, the first Adventist missionary to India. Minnie Sype, a housewife and mother of three, became an evangelist in western Oklahoma. Serepta Myrenda Irish Henry, the national evangelist of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, later became a Seventh-day Adventist. Pictures of these and other Adventist women could well hang in classrooms alongside the bearded visages of Joseph Bates, Uriah Smith, and J. N. Andrews as a silent reminder that Adventism is indeed gender-inclusive. Schools could organize weeks of prayer around the lives of Adventist women.

Course materials of this sort can be introduced without the expense of rewriting current textbooks. The General Conference Department of Education could develop supplementary materials. Additional resources could be provided through Sabbath school lessons (at all age levels), and such periodicals as *Primary Treasure*, *Guide*, *Insight*, and the *Adventist Review*. From time to time THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION could compile a list of these and other resources. And when textbooks are revised, both the written content and the illustrations could be updated to reflect gender-inclusive themes.

### Teaching Practices

To promote wholeness in Ad-

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ventist education, teachers themselves must recognize the importance of gender inclusiveness and adopt teaching practices that reflect this orientation. Teachers can, for example, pay as much attention to the questions of girls as those of boys.

In addition, teachers can compliment girls on their academic and intellectual success more than on the way they look, thus balancing a popular tendency in talking to and about children. (When a little boy recites the 23rd Psalm in front of the congregation, people say, "Isn't he bright!" When a little girl does the same, people say, "Isn't she cute!")

Students of both sexes tend to visualize males when humanity is referred to by the supposedly generic term *man*.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, teachers should use gender-inclusive language, and encourage their students to do the same, particularly in writing. By periodically reminding their pupils about this problem, teachers can demonstrate that male language is not the contemporary norm for Christians or Adventists.

At the same time, teachers can recognize the significance of gender differences in the thinking of their students,<sup>20</sup> and give due recognition to the validity of girls' experience and values.<sup>21</sup> In making moral judgments, for example, boys tend to be more interested in the "rights" of the persons involved, while girls tend to be more interested in their relationships.<sup>22</sup> These are equally valid and complementary ways of thinking about moral questions; neither is "better" or "more mature" than the other.

Even our understanding of "sin" needs to recognize gender differences. In a culture in which boys are taught to win and girls are taught to please (especially to please men), it is not surprising that aggression and a desire to dominate are common male problems. (This, incidentally, may help to explain why men see some sort of moral evil in attempts by women to become involved in leadership

and decision-making.) Nor is it surprising that dependence and flight from freedom and responsibility are common female problems.

In-service training, such as workshops and seminars, can present both the need for gender-inclusive education and ways of meeting that need.

### Vocational Awareness

Both teachers and students need to understand the world beyond the educational experience, a paradoxical world that offers opportunities for vocational fulfillment, but also resistance to the full participation of women.

To adequately educate women, we must introduce them to the increasingly diverse possibilities for service, which result from both technological developments and social change. A generation ago, a professional woman could be a teacher, nurse, or secretary (the last two as assistants to, and taking orders from, men). Or, if she were particularly energetic, she could become a physician. Now the situation is significantly different. More and more, a woman can do vocationally whatever she wants to do. Adventist education must prepare young women to take advantage of these broadened opportunities.

But there is another side to the story. This world of opportunity for women is also a world in which women have to take care of themselves. It is not always a warm and friendly world. So women need a good deal of self-confidence. They need to know how to deal with a bank, take care of a car, and ask for a raise. They also need to know what to do if (or more likely, when) they are treated unfairly.

Women need to understand how complicated situations can be, and why men are ambivalent<sup>23</sup> about the new roles of women at work, in society, and in the church.<sup>24</sup> They need to know that for all the alleged equality of opportunity, women in general are still being short-changed in remuneration, status, and advanced education.<sup>25</sup>

Some necessary understanding can come from an enlightened curriculum, but a part of it will best be realized through mentoring by sensitive teachers, both men and women, who are committed to gender-inclusive Adventism.

### Role Models

Role models and mentors can expand student aspirations and dreams by exploding traditional stereotypes and restrictions, and transcending the students' personal experiences. From kindergarten on, both boys and girls will benefit by seeing women as managers (principals) and abstract thinkers (math teachers), as well as from seeing men as nurturers (elementary teachers). We need to vigorously recruit women to teach religion and science, and men to teach language skills and family relations.

Students will also benefit from seeing their teachers assume non-traditional roles in the church—women as elders serving communion and offering public prayers, men as teachers in the cradle roll and kindergarten divisions in the Sabbath school.

More than one woman has told me, "In school I never realized I had academic ability. No one ever told me I was intelligent. It wasn't important. I was female." Or, "My mother told me I should go to college so that I would be able to converse intelligently with my husband and his friends. She never expected me to do anything intelligent on my own."

This reminds us of the bad old days, only a few centuries ago, when a woman was educated to "make her a more agreeable, submissive and ego-massaging companion to men," which is to say, "to run a household, to be able to do needlework, to appreciate (but not create) art and beauty, to keep herself attractive, and to be obedient, religious, cheerful, and always admiring and deferential to men."<sup>26</sup> There is something wrong with a society or church (or family) that expects and teaches its men to do the important, intellectual things and its women to be the cheerleaders.

Gender-inclusiveness should

also apply to boys. Teachers can encourage and reward thoughtfulness, caring, and artistic creativity by male students, and thus help them to develop the interpersonal sensitivity and skills that are as essential to effective management as to a good marriage.

A bright elementary student, commenting on a note telling his mother that he wasn't performing up to his intellectual potential, said wistfully, "But I'm really very nice." Evidently because he was a boy, relating well to others wasn't as important to his teacher as academic achievement.

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### Adventist Context

My final suggestion relates to educational context and atmosphere. Therefore it will be especially challenging to implement. Adventist education occurs within a denominational context. What we teach in our schools shows what we believe as a church. This means that gender-inclusive Adventist education can become truly effective only within gender-inclusive Adventism.

A clear, firm decision to ordain women as ministers (which is not only theologically legitimate but theologically imperative)<sup>27</sup> will provide a powerful statement about the church's definition of all women—who they are, what they can do, where they can use their abilities. The symbolism of ordination has implications far beyond the relatively small number of women who would choose ministerial training; it expresses the attitude of the church toward well over half of its members.

This kind of positive statement will in turn encourage a sense of self-esteem and a vision of service. Even if the world around us continues to be a "man's world," in-

complete and defective, the church can offer a more complete, gender-inclusive context for education and service. Conversely, if the church refuses to move in this direction, other strategies for helping women achieve their full potential will meet with much less success.

The above strategies do not just happen. They result only from personal awareness, organizational affirmation, and persistent effort. Teachers can facilitate both "left-brain" and "right-brain" development in all their students, and thus help them to transcend traditional stereotypes and grow into more complete, truly whole persons, becoming all that they can be. That will be good for individual students, for the Adventist educational system, and for the "whole" (that is, gender-inclusive) church. □

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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Mary Ellen Donovan, *Women and Self-Esteem* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 15:20, 21; Micah 6:4.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 12:1-15.

<sup>5</sup> Judges 4, 5.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 22:11-20; 2 Chronicles 34:19-28.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth 2:6-22; 3:1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 8:1, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 25:21-28; Mark 7:24-39.

<sup>10</sup> John 4:7-12.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 10:38-42.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-10; John 12:1-8.

<sup>13</sup> John 11:20-33.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:10, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 16:1, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 16:12-15.

<sup>18</sup> Kermit Netteburg, "When God Called," *Spec-trum*, 15:4 (December 1984), pp. 44-51.

<sup>19</sup> Sanford and Donovan, pp. 182, 183.

<sup>20</sup> Hilary M. Lips and Nina Lee Colwill, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall/Spectrum, Inc., 1978); John Nicholson, *Men and Women: How Different Are They?* (New York: Oxford, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> See Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> See Anthony Astrachan, *How Men Feel: Their Response to Women's Demands for Equality and Power* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> See *Women in Leadership: Finding Ways to Serve the Church* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Christianity Today Institute, 1986). Published as a supplement to *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: Morrow, 1986); and Julie Kuhn Ehrhart and Bernice R. Sandler, *Looking for More Than a Few Good Women in Traditionally Male Fields* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> Sanford and Donovan, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> Arguments to the contrary by, for example, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), are based on a misreading of Scripture and an erroneous understanding of both gender and ministry. See reviews by Daniel Augsburg, in *The Adventist Woman* (July 1987), p. 3; and Beatrice S. Neall, *Spec-trum*, 18:1 (October 1987), p. 54.