
What Is the Church's Commitment to Academe?

By Calvin B. Rock

If the most accurate gauge of an organization's commitment to its programs is their rank in the budget, academe rates very high on the Seventh-day Adventist list of priorities. In fiscal year 1990 the total General Conference world budget was \$159,816,000. Of this amount, 17.23 percent was specifically allocated to education. This included major appropriations in the following areas:

1. The three General Conference institutions in the North American Division:

- Andrews University \$5,172,000 (incl. the SDA Theological Seminary)
- Loma Linda University 15,725,000
- Oakwood College 1,607,000

2. Special appropriations to overseas colleges and universities \$1,650,000

These figures reveal that the General Conference allocated \$20,154,000 to higher education, worldwide, in this one year. A comparison of allocations made by the General Conference to the world divisions and unattached fields during this same year—1990—reinforces the point. Amounts received by the world fields were as follows:

Africa-Indian Ocean	\$9,375,800
Eastern Africa	7,465,600
Far Eastern	6,390,800
Inter-American	5,005,300
North American	37,485,000
South American	2,972,200
South Pacific	4,064,100
Southern Asia	3,154,200
Trans-European	4,232,300
Russia (USSR)	100,000
China	850,000
Middle East Union	1,583,800

Higher education alone was allocated more money than any world area, except the North American Division. In fact, higher education received almost as much as the amounts sent to Inter-America, South America, South Pacific, Southern Asia, and Trans-Europe combined! The General Conference appropriation to the three institutions that it supports in the North American Division, mentioned above, averaged \$5,059 per

The General Conference appropriation to its three institutions of higher education in the North American Division averages \$5,059 per full-time equivalent student.

full-time equivalent student—a noteworthy contribution indeed.

Other Education Subsidies

And that is not the whole story. In 1990 General Conference also supplied to the North American Division \$10,101,100 for its K-12 operations. In fact, more than 25 percent of General Conference funds received from NAD reverts to this division for use in education programming. The other world divisions also share liberally with secondary and higher education from the unrestricted General Conference appropriations that they receive.

The union and local conferences likewise provide liberally for education. For example, in 1990 the Pacific Union budgeted \$2,053,000 for each of its campuses of higher education—Loma Linda University Riverside and Pacific Union College. The Lake Union Conference contributed \$1,710,272 to the undergraduate program of Andrews University. Contributions from the Michigan Conference, the Pioneer Memorial church, and Hinsdale Hospital added \$411,532 to this amount. Also the regional conferences and churches in NAD added to the General Conference appropriation to Oakwood College the healthy sum of \$1,726,533.

Why does the church appropriate so much of its budget to academe?

Because it recognizes the unparalleled worth of Christian education as a soul-winning influence. Leaders and members alike realize that, except for the family, education is more critical to the church's welfare than any other institution or service.

Christian education is the undisputed leader in matters of indoctrination, socialization, talent development, mate selection—in short, the recycling of our culture and the perpetuation of our ethos. As no other church unit, education buffers our youth against the destructive forces of societal unbelief. It is a primary force in guaranteeing the continued existence of Adventism as a focused movement.

This latter fact was recently highlighted in three separate research efforts by Jim Epperson, Warren Minder, and Robert Rice. Each study surveyed members in separate parts of the North American Division. The Epperson study analyzed the Southern Union membership; the Minder study looked at members in the Lake Union; and the Rice study utilized two California groups of 1976 graduates—a public school group and an academy group.

The results of the studies show that a much higher percentage of Adventists who attended church schools became and remained members of the church than those who did not attend Adventist schools. The comparison between those having all elementary and secondary education and those having none are as follows: Minder—98 percent versus 51 percent; Epperson—89 percent versus 53 percent; and Rice—77 percent versus 37 percent.¹

Christian education is not included in the list of fundamental church doctrines, but it is undeniably a function without which we would soon cease to exist as a distinctive people.

Understanding the Education Funding Crisis

Financial commitments notwithstanding, we are still faced with some difficult questions:

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1. Given the verbal and dollar support of the church leadership on all of its levels to our education program, why do so many of our elementary schools and academies fail to reach and maintain desired levels of operation?

2. Why are our college and universities experiencing financial problems?

The answer, I believe, is primarily theological. We have, to a large extent, blunted our much needed realism with an under-informed and often misguided apocalypticism. But that is not unusual. People who live in the expectation of the immediate end of the world seldom make long-range plans for group survival. They are slow to heed the Master's command "Occupy till I come." Gilbert Murray describes this mentality as "The sad philosophy of those who know how short time is; they do not undertake to build what they cannot finish or to employ those materials fit only for use in a structure that would require many generations or unlimited time for ... completion."²

Short-term Funding, Long-term Crisis

In relation to academe, this means that in spite of the church's strong moral and material support for education, it has failed to provide an adequate financial undergirding for its school system.

More than 25 percent of General Conference funds received from the North American Division is returned to this division to be used in education.

While we have dutifully responded to the week-to-week calls with offerings, we have not seriously structured the *long-range endowment programming* that successful private colleges, universities, and school systems in America find so necessary.

If a half century ago when many other institutions and systems began to build endowments, we also had done so, today we would have the kind of multimillion or even billion-dollar endowments needed to support our schools. Earned interest alone would make these institutions financially viable.

How to Finance Education

Several improvements should be made immediately:

1. *Increased individual giving.* If the church's membership were more liberal, the existing formulas for subsidy would provide even more funds to support schools and colleges.

Unlike the public sector, which can raise finances through referenda and tax increases, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has only goodwill and the moral persuasion of the Word of God to stimulate its people to giving. The problem here is not the percentage of resources committed by the church; it is the total resources available.

2. *Increased cultivation of the non-SDA dollar.* It is encouraging to note that under the leadership of Milton Murray the General Conference Philanthropic Service (PSI) now has a network of fund-raisers involving most of our colleges and universities and many of our academies that are reaching into society for gifts and grants.

As a result of contacting foundations and writing proposals, these institutions are now strengthening their fund-raising portfolios.

3. *Increased alumni giving for restricted and unrestricted use.* PSI reports excellent success along this line with such programs as the Business Executives' Challenge to Alumni (BECA) and the Class Agent Program for colleges and universities. It also reports encouraging success with its Academy Alumni

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Lobby, Chan Shun Hall (School of Business), Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Advancement Challenge (AAA) in secondary schools.

4. *Increased endowments.* The primary long-range solution to our need is aggressive pursuit of endowment funding. Instead of converting income from land sales, wills, and other special incomes into operations, we must find ways to place them in endowments. Given our late entry into the market and our ever-present operations needs, this endeavor will be difficult, but the rewards will definitely be worth the effort.

Conclusion

It is legitimate to ask whether the Adventist Church is adequately committed to academe. The answer is a resounding Yes! This is clearly demonstrated by the generous allotments to education at every level of administration. But we must also ask whether the church is committed to a fund-raising process that would guarantee the *long-range* viability of its education system? Thus far, the answer has been No. Evidently our longing for heaven has blurred our sense of need for a well-secured future on earth.

However, it does little good to condemn past inadequacies. Clearly our predecessors were committed and sacrificial in blazing trails for education. It is our challenge to capture that spirit and

Why does the church provide such a large percentage of its budget to academe?

to break through the apocalyptic presumptions that prevent us from planning for the year 2025, 2050, or even 2100.

It is, of course, paradoxical and difficult to plan with these dates in mind and still preach the immediate return of our Lord—believing that today, tomorrow, next week, or perhaps before the end of the year—or surely before the end of this century—the end will come. However, that is exactly what we must do if we would build for the future.

Adventists have managed to make this adjustment on the personal level. For example, we no longer debate the merits of *life insurance and retirement planning*. We do not consume all of our present income in day-to-day living, assuming that the imminence of the end makes it unnecessary to plan for retirement or even death—be it years or decades ahead. That same pragmatic principle must be now be employed in

long-range planning for our education program as well.

It would be tragically ironic if, anesthetized by pious clichés and dogmatic assertions about the end on one hand or by selfish materialism and indifference on the other, we should contribute further to the weakening of the very system that preserves our distinctiveness and prepares our world for Christ's return. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Kenneth James Epperson, "The Relationship of Seventh-day Adventist School Attendance to Seventh-day Adventist Church Membership in the Southern Union Conference," Ed.D. dissertation, Loma Linda University Riverside, 1990; Robert W. Rice, "A Survey of the Relationship Between Attending Seventh-day Adventist Academies 9-12 and Subsequent Commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1990; Warren Earl Minder, "A Study of the Relationship Between Church-sponsored K-12 Education and Church Membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Ed.D. dissertation, Western Michigan University, 1985.

² Cited in H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 90.