

# SHAPING CURRICULUM

## *in an Adventist College*

By Frederick E. J. Harder

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**S**ecularism and naturalism thoroughly dominate contemporary science, art, literature, business, government, education, the professions, communications media, recreation. Indeed, they so saturate our culture and environment that we have difficulty comprehending what is meant by the dictum: "In the highest sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one"<sup>1</sup> or how to go about making it a reality for Seventh-day Adventist institutions of higher learning. To the question, Can liberal education be Christian? Adventist leadership has generally given a qualified Yes.

The fear of finding a fundamental disharmony between faith and knowledge, religion and learning, piety and intelligence, Christian commitment and intellectual achievement is not new. Atheists and skeptics always have suggested that faith is most compatible with credulity, religion most at home with ignorance, piety most congenial with gullibility, and Christian commitment most fervid among the intellectually sterile.

Such judgments echo the oldest heresy in the world. The Father of Lies proclaimed this first when he suggested that God preferred to

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keep His creatures ignorant. Some religious sects have embraced this falsehood and have discouraged—sometimes forbidden—their children to obtain any schooling beyond the most rudimentary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. For some even this represented a grudging concession to legal requirements.

### **A Higher Standard**

More than a century has passed since Ellen White's earliest writings on education. The church responded promptly to her counsel by establishing Battle Creek College in 1874. Mrs. White envisioned an academic excellence that we still must struggle to achieve: "God

designs that the college at Battle Creek shall reach a higher standard of intellectual and moral culture than any other institution of the kind in our land."<sup>2</sup>

In her writings on education, Mrs. White went on to describe how to reach this higher standard. The following statements of principles, though severely abbreviated, characterize the philosophy that prompted the development of a Seventh-day Adventist system of higher education.<sup>3</sup>

- Achievement of both intellectual and moral culture should be the highest in the land.
- Principles of religion are both the entry into and the basis for true education.
- Appreciation of the sciences will be maximized within a religious world view.
- Nurture of a divine-human communion is an exalted function of the Adventist college.
- The school is one of the mightiest evangelizing agencies available to God.
- Helping students develop symmetrical characters for the present and future worlds is a prime objective.
- Recognition of the true dignity of human beings as children of God created in His image must be fostered and taught.
- Challenge for the most vigorous intellects may be found in themes and fields of thought dealing with the most profound and eternal interest.
- Refinement of the higher faculties is to be stimulated and nurtured so that students will be prepared to maintain a respectable, honest, virtuous status in society.
- Preparation of effective witnesses to the gospel of Christ is a primary goal.

### **Liberal Arts Versus Applied Arts?**

The tension that frequently has—and often still does—exist between proponents of general and special education, liberal and professional, human and vocational, science and technology ought not to exist among Adventist educators.

The liberal studies stress the development of the individual's

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humanness—his or her physical, mental, and spiritual powers—inde-  
pendent of the person's usefulness. They aim not at preparing the student for *doing* but for *being*. Although they encompass a vast amount of factual knowledge, their real purpose is to promote comprehension and understanding. They treat not only what was and what is, but also what ought to be. They contribute to values devel-

opment and life enhancement.

Special education—vocational, technological, and professional—concerns itself primarily with the ability to *do*. Establishment of Land Grant colleges during the latter half of the 19th century, and post-World War II educational grants to veterans generated an influx of students more interested in the special than the general curricula.

This influx tended to produce a proliferation of applied courses in liberal arts colleges. Such courses concern themselves more with the honing of particular skills than with the internalizing of values that help a person to adjust to life's changes.

While liberal education does not provide specific, detailed skills such as how to program a computer or produce a cash-flow chart, it does offer practical benefits in the shaping and uplifting of society. When the liberal curriculum is also Christian, it produces graduates who support and lead the church toward the accomplishment of its divinely appointed mission in the world.

The Christian factor in the curriculum is not so much an additional quality as an enhancement of all liberal studies, endowing them with eternal as well as temporal significance. Christianization of the curriculum and enhancement of intellectual content in professional and technological studies have diminished, and in some cases erased, the previous dichotomy between liberal and applied arts.

**Methods and materials must encourage heavenly as well as earthly citizenship.**

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### **What Makes a Curriculum Christian?**

Should the definition of curriculum be limited to the traditional areas of textbooks and syllabi, lesson plans, and classroom lectures? No. Curriculum encompasses every activity that takes place under the organized supervision of the school and includes chapel programs, worship services, lyceum productions, physical culture, recreation, social activities, student labor, residence hall life, and more.

But these activities are so diverse, so dissimilar. How can a college make its whole curriculum Christian?

Education is distinctly Christian when the authority of Christ and the realization of His authority in our lives is the justification for all educational activity. All subject matter will be recognized as a revelation of His truth. All activities will be motivated by His life, will, and Spirit. . . . A Christian curriculum centers in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Curriculum in a Seventh-day Adventist college will be shaped by such factors as these:

- Stated objectives of the school, including a formal expression of its accepted world view and philosophy of life.
- Nature of the student, viewed in the light of his creation, fall, and redemption.
- Traditions of the church and society.
- Christian professional leadership—faculty, college, and church administration.
- Public demand and church constituency needs.
- Educational practices in the public sector.
- Student interests.

### **Choosing Curriculum Materials**

Curriculum materials must be chosen to develop the students' physical and intellectual powers and to nurture their spiritual growth into a fellowship with God. Such materials should inspire the Christian student to fill his or her place in both the church and the secular world. They should help the student understand and demonstrate the significance and effectiveness of Christian principles in secular and religious society.

Subject matter in the Adventist college must encompass intellectual, cultural, and spiritual elements, and demonstrate how these elements have intertwined in the aspirations and activities of the human race through the ages. Principles for understanding and interpreting human events may be found in the revealed Word of God as found in the Bible, especially in the ministry of Jesus, and in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, particularly as manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White.

### **Achieving a Christian World View in a Secular Culture**

This presents the Adventist edu-  
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cator with a formidable challenge: How to formulate a Christian curriculum that fosters spiritual growth and activity within the context of a secular culture.

Materials and methods must encourage heavenly as well as earthly citizenship. Students must be prepared to give effective Christian service in a very earthly culture through the various professions and vocations they choose.

The task of shaping curriculum, then, is too important and involves too many factors to entrust it exclusively to any one group.

## Who Shall Determine Curriculum?

Most college faculties have active and competent committees dealing with courses and curricula. However, participating in board meetings over more than a score of years in North America and abroad has convinced me that trustees give meager attention to curriculum concerns.

Furthermore, constituency sessions often ignore curriculum matters entirely, or treat them so superficially that they might better have ignored them!

The following plan of action may help administrators, faculty, boards, and constituencies understand what is expected of an Adventist college and how these expectations may be realized:

1. At its organizing meeting, the newly elected board should appoint its own curriculum committee.
2. Soon after its appointment, this committee should meet with the faculty curriculum and courses committee to learn what studies are currently in progress and to determine the status of curriculum development.
3. Each board member, but particularly new members and those on the curriculum committee, should review the principles of

Christian education and become acquainted with course and curricular offerings at other institutions as set forth in their academic bulletins.

4. Near the close of the first year or beginning of the second, the board might profitably spend a full day with its curriculum committee and the faculty curriculum committee studying:

- a. the unique curricular needs of an Adventist college, in particular its own college;
- b. the leadership and staffing needs of the church and its institutions;
- c. the educational needs and interests of the young people within its territory;
- d. professional and vocational opportunities open to college-trained Adventists in secular society;
- e. curricula and courses to be offered (affordable within available resources) in order to meet the needs, interests, and opportunities of present and prospective students.

5. The board should annually review progress and assign the curriculum committee to report on its activities.

6. Each fifth year the board could well spend several hours, perhaps half a day, in evaluating curricular development during the quinquennium and preparing a report to the next constituency session.

7. The constituency in session should spend whatever time necessary to allow delegates to react to the report and discuss its implications for future studies and development. Areas of special concern might be identified for consideration by the new board.

Some means must be found to achieve broader and more intensive involvement in curriculum development if Adventist institutions of higher learning are to merit the support of their church, its youth, and secular society.

Our system of colleges and universities must offer learning opportunities in every field, for which there is substantial demand within the church, and for which funding that guarantees excellence can be achieved.

## A Nurturing, Intellectual Climate

Adventist colleges must have quality facilities and well-trained, dedicated teachers. These institutions must provide an intellectual climate that will foster the most rigorous studies in the humanities, sciences, professions, and vocations. Our schools are called upon to prepare high-quality graduates to serve the church and the larger society. The climate of a Christian college with this kind of mission will nurture students such as those described here:

Perseverance in the acquisition of knowledge, controlled by the fear and love of God, will give them [students] an increased power for good in this life, and those who have made the most of their privileges to reach the highest attainments here, will take these valuable acquisitions with them into the future life. . . . The capability to appreciate the glories that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," will be proportionate to the attainments reached in the cultivation of the faculties in this life.<sup>5</sup> □

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 30.
- <sup>2</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 4, p. 425.
- <sup>3</sup> ———, *Counsels on Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1968), pp. 33-69.
- <sup>4</sup> H. W. Byrne, *A Christian Approach to Education* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), p. 151.
- <sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), p. 49. (Originally published as "An Appeal to Our Students," in the June 21, 1877, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*).

## GREAT TEACHING—GREAT THINKING

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overtake the spies if they hastened to pursue them?

4. Why do you think Rahab spoke as she did?

5. If you had been one of the Hebrew spies, what would you have wanted Rahab to say?

6. What should Rahab have said?

7. If Rahab had turned the Hebrew spies over to the Jericho