

HAS THE LEOPARD CHANGED ITS SPOTS?

A Commentary on Purpose, Principle, and Change in Adventist Education

PART I

As I was writing *In Passion for the World: A History of Seventh-day Adventist Education* (Pacific Press, 2005), two questions repeatedly surfaced: (1) Why do Adventist schools now differ so dramatically from the earlier ones, and (2) What has been the nature of change in Adventist education? Explanations appear from chapter to chapter as the book's organization required, but this two-part series will link these thoughts together with additional commentary.

One of the best-known identifying marks of Seventh-day Adventist education is the oft-quoted statement describing it as a three-part process that encompasses the mental, spiritual, and physical aspects of the human being. This benchmark stems from Ellen White's 1872 advice to Adventist educators entitled "Proper Education," her first essay about education. Curricula should benefit the body as well as the mind, she wrote, and Adventist schools



Nurses' graduation, 1934, College of Medical Evangelists, Loma Linda, California.

Why do Adventist schools now differ so dramatically from the earlier ones?

By Floyd Greenleaf

were to exist for redemptive purposes. Adventists view their venture into education as distinctive because it stresses this triad of values—mental, spiritual, and physical. Those three words became a slogan that showed up for generations in various forms in the logos of Adventist schools and introduc-

tory remarks in institutional catalogues.¹

Manual Labor and Redemptive Education

Emphasis on educating the physical became a distinguishing mark and a tradition in its own right. Originally, the term meant useful manual labor. Students were to acquire skills in homemaking and various occupations that would enable them to maintain a successful home and possibly to enter gainful employment if their professional aspirations did not materialize. In the 1870s, agriculture was the most obvious field of labor, but skilled trades were also on the agenda. Ellen White dismissed allegations that students would damage their chances of academic success if their school day was divided between academics and manual labor. On the contrary, she declared, they would come out ahead because the exercise gained from labor would benefit both mind and body.

The changes that have occurred in the church's traditional approach to physical education have produced controversy in some quarters. Critics say that Adventist postsecondary schools are more prone to proclaim their university status than their three-part virtue of educating the mental, spiritual, and physical. No longer do either secondary schools or colleges offer wide opportunities for students to engage in physical labor. The sacred aura of student labor is gone, the critics allege, replaced by a smattering of classes condescendingly described as "vocational" from which students choose one or two as a token gesture. Adventist education has lost its identity and its sanctity!

But not so fast. Unquestionably, change has occurred since "Proper Education" appeared. A brief comparison between education in the 19th and 21st centuries will help us to understand this change. For much of the 1800s, elementary schools taught students a command of elemental skills and general knowledge that most people believed was enough for the average person—that's why it was called elementary education. Secondary education was not widespread. Its most important form before 1860 was the private academy that served upper social levels in the North. The idea of a public high school began to catch on in the U.S. only after 1880.

Nineteenth-century college degrees were based on the ancient classics. Rather than preparation for a career, these degrees represented a cultural credential. What the 21st century calls professional education was then termed vocational training or apprenticeships, and not deemed a "genuine" college education as defined at that time.

In short, at the elementary level, the purpose of education was to prepare people adequately to live an average life;

What has been the nature of change in Adventist education?



Ellen White's first testimony on education appeared in this 1872 pamphlet.

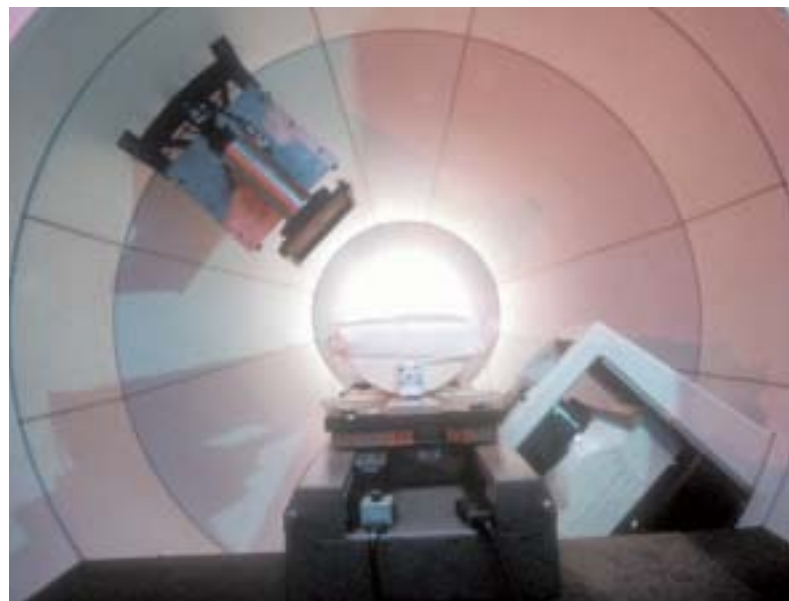
at the secondary level, elite academies and finishing schools conditioned people to be well bred; and at the college level, education sought to establish people in the origins of Western culture.

Ellen White regarded this philosophy of education as too limited and proposed to change it. The mission of Adventist schools was not only to give students practical education for life in the present world, but also to prepare them spiritually for life in the world to come—and to train church employees who could preach to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" the imminence of that eternal world. By definition, Adventist education above the elementary level was pragmatic because it prepared students for professional careers. Philosophically, Adventist schools differed sharply from their secular counterparts because they replaced the philosophy of the ancient classics with biblical explanations of the source and meaning of human life.

Ellen White regarded Adventist education as *redemptive*, which elevated career education and student labor to the category

of theological belief. It is no exaggeration to say that the words *mental*, *spiritual*, and *physical* used in relation to Adventist education took on a near-biblical meaning, not equivalent to the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath, but much more than good advice.

In order for Adventist schools to implement the principle of meaningful labor, they should be placed in rural loca-



Contrasting the old and the new: On page 11, the Loma Linda Sanitarium early in the 20th century; above, proton beam therapy equipment at Loma Linda University Medical Center in 2006.

tions with enough acreage to support sizeable agricultural projects. Farms were editions of “God’s other textbook” where students learned to know the Creator from His handiwork. Daily school schedules included labor assignments for both male and female students. Optimally, this work could produce salable items that would bring cash to the school and help students defray their education expenses.

It is doubtful that students viewed stubborn mules and 4:00 a.m. milking shifts with the same spiritual idealism that educators gave to the student labor plan, but the idea was nevertheless practical, and it worked. Avondale in Australia

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Early school schedules included work assignments for men and women, as depicted in this early photo of Union College students.

became a model of how to include student labor in the curriculum. Oakwood College in the United States was a monument to the virtue of student labor. Meiktila Industrial Institute in Burma was a national showcase for technical education. Adventist schools around the globe often put the words *industrial*, *agricultural*, or *vocational* in their name, not because this was their primary emphasis, but because their curricula included this kind of education in addition to academic pursuits. In some places, this education was a novelty, but many thoughtful people came to respect the values it represented.²

In some ways, Ellen White was in step with changes in American education during the last half of the 19th century. American colleges were already experimenting with practical education. When the United States Congress provided land and funds through legislation in 1862 (10 years before “Proper Education”) and again in 1887, practical education at the postsecondary level was here to stay. The net effect was to democratize higher education by changing it from immersion in the classics—an elitist and esoteric status symbol—to an open conduit to the world of work.

Probably the most crucial evaluation of 21st-century

education is how effectively it prepares students for employment. Despite calls for more liberal-arts courses for technocrats and scientists, society tends to view school attendance beyond the secondary level as a waste of time and money if it does not lead to a job. Adventist schools and students are no exception. It is no longer necessary to prod Adventist educators to design practical curricula. Because a college's success depends on its ability to graduate competent candidates for employment, classes must enhance student readiness for employment, or they don't get into the schedule. The world of work has taken over higher education, perhaps more emphatically than Ellen White hoped.

Impact of Organized Labor, Urbanization, and Prosperity

But in many places, several influences have combined to remove manual labor from Adventist campuses. Although attempts were made in the 19th century to prevent child labor in most Western countries, it was not until decades later that significant progress occurred in this area. In the United States, it took Congress until 1938 to pass the Fair Labor Standards Act which, among other things, restricted the number of hours children and teenagers could work, prescribed minimum wages, and prohibited minors from operating hazardous agricultural and manufacturing machinery. The purpose of child labor reform was to prevent exploitation of minors, but exemptions allowed parents and schools to employ teenagers under regulated conditions. Because of their age, most college students were not affected by the law, and Adventist secondary schools were able to maintain labor programs by qualifying under the exemptions.

But problems ensued. While this reform was gathering momentum, organized labor, which was also gaining power, questioned student labor. Wages in school industries were low because students were learning a job, and employers did not have to provide them with the same benefits as full-time laborers. Marketable items from schools were thus alleged to be the product of unfair competition.

During the 1930s, some church leaders began to doubt the viability of school industries. The doubts related more to secondary schools than to colleges, but at both levels, school administrators found it increasingly difficult to operate profitable enterprises with a work force of part-time employees. By the time students learned a manufacturing trade or even agricultural skills well enough to be truly productive, they had graduated and left the work force. Work supervisors

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Ellen G. White

were constantly training students without ever really achieving a full-sized, competent work crew. They could respond to organized labor that while student labor was cheap, it was also inefficient, which made it costly in the long run.

Urbanization intensified in the decades after World War II. In 1900, about 15 percent or less of the world's population was urban; by 1950, the figure rose to 30 percent; and by the year 2000, it exceeded 45 percent. In economically developed countries, the urban sector included about three of every four persons. To survive, these concentrations of humanity could not rely on their skills to work the land or to manufacture

furniture, brooms, or other household items; instead, they depended on the commercialized food-production industry and an increasingly sophisticated mass-production system to supply their needs.³

In a few decades, the majority of people in the developed world became consumers rather than producers. For the sake of relevancy, educating students to cope with issues of urban life replaced training in the skills of country living. In post-1950 society, farms became big businesses, and school farms became an anachronism. Also, schools discovered that making their industries productive and competitive was more than institutional pocketbooks could tolerate.

We should always bear in mind that the purpose of Adventist education was to train professionals to manage and serve the church, not to prepare agricultural or factory workers. The practical side of education was to provide exercise through useful labor that would also train students in



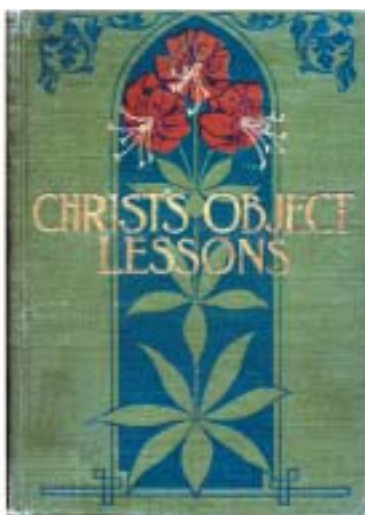
Faculty and students of the Foreign Missionary Seminary in Takoma Park, Maryland, sometime between 1907-1914.

work and homemaking skills, and provide them the means of earning a livelihood with their hands if their professional career goals did not work out. When Adventists began their schools, all of this related largely to an agricultural life because most people lived on farms.

But the new economy was not agricultural. Adventist educators in the urbanized world did not deny that nature was God's other textbook; however, they could no longer assume that a majority of students would live on farms or find employment in agriculture. Practicality and relevancy were key concepts advocated by the founder of Adventist education philosophy, and in keeping with these principles, the church's education adapted. It became vital to teach students to manage personal income earned in weekly or monthly increments, to purchase household goods in a consumer society, to maintain automobiles instead of horses and wagons, to create personal schedules that included leisure time for the sake of health, and on and on.

In addition, a history of debilitating institutional debts conspired with post-World War II prosperity and increased costs of education to threaten student-labor programs. In spite of their virtues, Adventist schools suffered from near-chronic indebtedness from Battle Creek onward. At the turn of the century, Ellen White donated the proceeds from the sale of *Christ's Object Lessons* to help liquidate school debts. Realizing that her offer would only relieve the problem rather than resolve it, she issued an imperative that church leaders and school administrators overhaul their financial policies to avoid indebtedness.

It was only after the Great Depression that schools finally shed their financial millstone, entering the post-World War II era nearly debt-free. But urbanization and the new pros-



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perity produced an upwardly spiraling cost of education and altered the texture of society. A couple of decades after the war, the handwriting was on the wall.

School administrators could either continue to operate outmoded farms and industries that had become a burden rather than an asset, or they could adopt new policies. Rather than risking financial reversals that threatened to send them back to the economic bleakness of the previous era, many schools

closed their farms and industries. The long-standing practice of students "working their way through school" was a thing of the past, a casualty to the new economic times. Loans made it possible for many students to attend college who could not have otherwise done so. The result was a guaranteed source of income for schools, but students now shared the burden of indebtedness.

One of the earliest omens of the decline of student labor was a revised class schedule. Decades before World War II, because of the steady increase in enrollment, administrators found it necessary to spread teaching duties over the entire day to accommodate all students. Teachers could not emulate the original model of conducting classes for half a day and supervising a small work crew in the afternoon because they were busy at all hours in their classrooms or labs. Besides, there were too many students to organize into small work crews. To expect teachers to supervise work for a portion of each school day would require schools to increase the size of their faculties to prohibitively expensive levels. After 1950, the situation became more complicated as the schools had to offer a greater variety of classes and subject

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School farms were an important source of income for early Adventist educational institutions.

areas in order to meet more demanding graduation requirements.

Physical education developed new dimensions—helping to educate future professionals to use their leisure time and remain physically fit in a world where manual labor was no longer a primary activity for an increasing number of people. Many people still worked hard, such as those in the skilled trades and common laborers, of course. But colleges in general, as well as Adventist schools, were educating professionals instead of skilled tradesmen. Schools began to emphasize a healthful lifestyle from the standpoint of nutrition and contrived exercise. The gymnasium and the athletic field played more important roles in the lives of a greater number of students, not because of distaste for manual labor but because a different approach to physical well being was necessary in a changing society.

Urban Schools

Ellen White advised that where as few as a half dozen students were available, the church should provide a school. Clearly, Adventist schools were to follow the expansion of the church. The result was day schools that served urban congregations or an institutional community. Often, these schools offered both elementary and secondary education. This enabled Adventist parents to keep their children at



Battle Creek Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Michigan.



Battle Creek College, Battle Creek, Michigan.

Picture Removed

Newbold College, England.



Main building, Loma Linda Sanitarium, sometime between 1911 and 1920.

home instead of incurring the greater expense of sending them to rural boarding schools.

In some instances, city schools became a training ground for workers. Such schools had minimal opportunities to incorporate student labor into their curricula. Perhaps the most striking example was the training school that operated in the environs of London, England, before it became Newbold College. Without dormitories or industries, it was not cast in the same mold as traditional Adventist training schools. Students spent their Sundays selling literature on the streets of London to pay for their tuition. After the institution moved to Stanborough Park, it assumed more of a typical denominational form with limited work opportunities, but it was still an urban school. However, its pastors in training had access to a half dozen congregations in London where they could gain practical experience under the watchful eye of experienced mentors.

Another example of a school with limited work opportunities was Washington Foreign Missionary Seminary, which operated from 1907 to 1914 as the recycled edition of Washington Training College in Takoma Park, Maryland. Most of its students were adults who enrolled in intensive courses that left little time for anything else. Other examples were some secondary schools in municipal areas that had little or no space for industries or agricultural projects.⁴

Despite the great importance that Adventists placed on the principle of manual labor and agriculture, denominational urban schools demonstrated that integrating labor with academics was not an absolute for all institutions. Urban schools could fulfill specific needs, depending on local needs. After W. C. White and his mother, Ellen White, attended the European Council in Basle, Switzerland, in 1885,



In the beginning, Ellen White recommended short courses to prepare church employees, including medical personnel.

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which discussed organization and methods of evangelism in Europe, he wrote that a “city mission training school” was the appropriate form of education to prepare workers for England. He called for similar schools for other parts of Europe where evangelism was oriented toward urban populations.⁵

Credibility and Accreditation

All of this relates to another question: Why are Adventist schools secularly accredited institutions, rather than Bible schools? Some critics have accused Adventist higher education of losing its simplicity and purity. In their view, because of accreditation, educators are more focused on achievement as measured by secular standards, rather than traditional Adventist values. If we just returned to operating simple institutions similar to Bible schools, they argue, Adventist education could regain its original ideals.

When Battle Creek College opened in 1874, Ellen and James White believed that short courses were adequate to prepare church employees, and urged school administrators to design programs accordingly. A persistent belief in the immediate return of Jesus led to the conclusion that degree programs were too time-consuming and laden with academic baggage that blunted the urgency of putting trained workers in the field.

By the end of the century, Ellen White’s advice had begun to change. The implications of Adventism becoming a world movement were sinking in. Although Adventists believed the Second Coming was *imminent*, they also realized that the denomination’s institutions required professional leadership while they awaited Christ’s return. Church leaders, including Ellen White, recognized that professional skills could not be acquired in a few months. Students preparing to practice medicine, for example, could no longer get by with a relatively short, apprenticeship-type training, but needed a longer, more organized experience



**P. T. Magan,
early president
of the College
of Medical
Evangelists.**

that combined academics, mentoring, and internships.⁶

Ellen White’s counsel indicates that she recognized these new conditions were a fact of life, and thus she supported a denominational plan to train medical doctors. After the physicians’ program at Battle Creek collapsed, she told church leaders in effect to do whatever it took to establish an accredited denominational medical school.⁷ Finances were a major concern, but she was also well aware that students would have to spend years of their lives engaged in study, despite the church’s belief in an imminent Second Coming. The expense and time were not only worth it, but the profession required it and “the cause” needed it.⁸

While the church’s need for physicians was the motivating factor in her advice, the principle that Adventist professional education was to be credible and competitive was also central. The impact on Adventist education was profound. Denominational schools from grade 1 on up had to be good enough to prepare students to enter what was rapidly becoming one of the most academically and professionally regimented fields of study and practice.

Students preparing for other professions also faced increasingly longer preparation periods and higher norms. Vocational education, including nursing, began to morph into bona fide college programs. During the century after the church’s decision to establish a medical school, professional life worldwide underwent a revolution. Most lines of human activity required some form of academic training and were regulated by either governmental or professional agencies. Recognized credentials became a requirement for denominational employment—from physicians in hospitals to tradesmen who maintained institutional buildings.

While credentials do not guarantee competence, they are a basic method of identifying qualified employees and offer protection against incompetence and fraud. Before parents and students invest tens of thousands of dollars in Adventist education, they have a legitimate right to know that the teachers are well qualified and can deliver what the schools’ catalogues describe.

The principle of credibility, ensured through accredita-

tion, prevails in Adventist schools, not as an end in itself, but because it enables the denomination to prepare professionals to minister to the world as well as to the Adventist community. It also enables Adventists who choose to work outside the church to find employment. Unaccredited schools could never have produced the professionals the church needed once it started down the road of institutionalism, which itself was a divinely inspired course of action. It is useful to recall that the church's schools were not the first steps in Adventist institutionalism; instead, schools were established in part to serve existing institutions that have expanded their operations exponentially since schools were founded.



Before achieving a meeting of the minds over accreditation, church and education leaders were embroiled in debate for two decades. Two-thirds of a century later, some still argue the matter. Looking back, we need to remember that government accreditation was not the flash point; rather, it was voluntary accreditation by the most powerful recognition system in the United States that drew such heavy fire. When some church leaders, including the General Conference president, suggested closing the church's medical school rather than submitting to accreditation, P. T. Magan, president of the College of Medical Evangelists, pointed out that if they carried out that threat, the Adventist health-care establishment eventually would have to rely on physicians not educated in Adventist ideals, the very situation the church wished to avoid by operating its own medical school!

A Natural Tension in Adventist Education

Changes that spawned allegations of a loss of simplicity derived in part from the perpetual tension between the two original purposes of Adventist education—to retain the denomination's youth and to furnish trained employees to the church.⁹ As the church has grown and its need for a wider variety of academically prepared personnel has expanded, schools have found it necessary to offer much broader curricula than leaders of early institutions imagined.

The trend to widen Adventist academic horizons also fed on the belief of parents and students who chose the church's schools as an alternative to secular education. They wanted a redemptive education from elementary through graduate level. Where else, they asked, could students better learn how to apply Adventist values to a profession—any profession—than at an Adventist institution? But they demanded that the education received should be as credible as programs elsewhere, as well as distinctively Adventist.

Adventist educators have always faced a dilemma in trying to balance the "saving" and "preparing" aspects of their mission without jeopardizing either one. What appears to

some to be a sacrifice of earlier simplicity, others see as meeting the needs of the broader Adventist population and reaching out to those not of our faith. Differences of opinion are thus unavoidable, and people with different agendas will embrace different solutions.

It is necessary to remember that the original Adventist schools served an existing church and its organization and were to *follow* the expansion of the church. But schools also helped spearhead the expansion of the church. In fulfillment of their worldwide mission, church leaders established schools as evangelistic tools in regions with no Adventists. Thus, the original goal of saving students came to include evangelizing or converting students to create an Adventist population. The term *mission school* most aptly describes the function of these schools, whose enrollments are largely non-Adventist

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and where education takes on an evangelistic flavor. Because of the high illiteracy rates in the developing world, the church's early mission schools, in both Christian and non-Christian societies, began with training at the elementary level, using an Adventist curriculum designed to develop literacy, but with the ultimate purpose of producing conversions.

Over time as educational expectations rose, some mission schools expanded into institutions of higher learning. Such schools sought to combine the converting, saving, and preparing purposes of Adventist education, and to serve both the public and the Adventist population. These schools differed from the original Adventist model because of their large non-Adventist enrollments, which contrasted with the predominantly Adventist student body of traditional training schools that developed into degree-granting institutions in order to produce church workers. This situation is common

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in non-Western and developing countries, but some campuses in developed countries also enroll larger numbers of non-Adventist students than in the past, because the earned reputation of selected programs, as well as the moral values they embrace, have made them attractive to those seeking an education with these characteristics.

Putting Change in Perspective

Critics charge that some mission schools have intentionally sought huge non-Adventist enrollments to survive, and that they pay scant attention to the ideals of Adventist education. They further allege that the operation of such schools is incompatible with preparation for church service, which should have priority in the church's education. Debate has arisen over two questions: Does marketing a school to the public weaken traditional Adventist educational functions? and Is serving the public compatible with or antagonistic to the purposes of fulfilling church needs?

We have no formulas to apply in trying to determine institutional policies in any of the preceding situations; in fact, the original purpose of Adventist education did not come with implementation instructions. The identity of Adventist education derives from its purposes. Maintaining that identity requires a constant and prayerful review of the purposes and principles of Adventist education, combined with a common-sense approach to change.

The accepted pattern for the 1870s and the first generation of Adventist schools elsewhere was non-degree programs narrowly conceived and administered. Such education was credible and served well the purpose for which it was created. Since the 1870s, when Seventh-day Adventists began to operate schools, the church population, the denominational administrative structure, and the societies to which Adventists minister have all become more complex. It naturally follows that the church's education would also become more complex.

An easy pitfall for some critics has been to regard all advice from Ellen White as unchangeable, but changes in professionalism precipitated changes in Adventist education, which she supported. A careful reading of her statements from "Proper Education" (1872) to *Education* (1903) reveals her developing appreciation of the breadth of the general topic. By her own admission, differences in advice and applications of principles were unavoidable as new conditions evolved. At the turn of the century, she wrote that "new methods and new plans will spring from new circumstances."¹⁰ As changes occur, the crux of the problem for both educators and critics is not to confuse the form of Adventist education with its essence.

Indeed, Adventist education has changed. While at first

glance it may appear to have forsaken time-honored principles, school leaders are still seeking ways to prepare the modern student for life in the 21st century and for eternity.

One hundred and 30 years of

Adventist education demonstrate that schools can achieve credibility and academic success without sacrificing spirituality. One underlying conclusion appears obvious: Change in applying a principle has become the only way to preserve the principle itself.

In part two of this commentary (October/November 2006 issue), we will reflect on some of the underlying principles that have shaped change in Adventist education. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *In Passion for the World* (Pacific Press, 2005), chapters 1 and 2, for a discussion of early struggles with the issue of student labor. For statistics on how much land Adventist schools owned, check the *Annual Statistical Report*, published annually by the General Conference.
2. For more details about these schools, see *In Passion for the World*, pages 128-133, Avondale; pages 59-62, Oakwood College; and pages 187-191, Meiktila.
3. One of the best sources of information about urbanization is the United Nations publication, *World Urbanization Prospects*, 1999 edition.
4. *In Passion for the World*, pages 118-122, furnishes more information about the beginnings of Newbold College; pages 149-153 discuss Washington Foreign Missionary Seminary.
5. See W. C. White, "Colporteur Work in Europe," in *Historical Sketches of Foreign Missions*, pp. 275-279, *Adventist Classic Library* edition.
6. Ellen White had firsthand knowledge about the requirements of medical education. According to Arthur L. White, in April 1873, Ellen's two sons, Edson and Willie, both completed a six-month course at R. T. Trall's Hygeo-Therapeutic College in New Jersey, earning the title of Doctor of Medicine with the "rights, privileges, and immunities pertaining to the legalized practice of medicine" (see volume 2 of Arthur White's five-volume biography of Ellen White, *The Progressive Years*, page 380). For a short but accurate description of medical education in the 19th century, see Helen Clapesattle, *The Doctors Mayo* (Rochester, Minn.: Mayo Foundation for Medical Education & Research, 1990 edition), pp. 12, 13, 101-115.
7. For the account of the founding of the denominational medical school, see *In Passion for the World*, pp. 72-76.
8. *Ibid.*, chapter 13, pages 299-323, "Debate Over Accreditation," provides more information about the issue of credibility.
9. See *ibid.*, pages 219, 301, 302, for discussions of the tension between the two major purposes of Adventist education.
10. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 476.