

Reclaiming The Vision Of Adventist Education

BY LAWRENCE T. GERATY

A cover story in the decade's very first issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*¹ had this headline, "Worried About 'Anything Goes' Moral Code, Colleges Are Stepping in to Help Students Shape Values." Its author, Robin Wilson, wrote:

As colleges embark on the 1990's, many institutions are finding that developing students' academic skills is no longer enough. College officials are increasingly concerned about what they call an anything-goes moral code that leads many students to indulge in wild fraternity parties, to drink excessively, and to have sex with people they barely know. Several institutions are stepping in to encourage students to bolster their values.

Wilson's analysis of the situation suggests that "helping students shape their values has become more important because many of the support systems young people once had at home and on campuses [and dare we add, in the church] have disintegrated over the last two decades."²

A Lost Sense of Community

At home, 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, and most parents have to work full time. At college, few activities remain that once shaped students' values and established a feeling of community—gone are required weekly chapels and frequent visits to faculty homes. At church, everyday issues seldom receive the illumination of soundly adduced biblical principles, and the modeling that takes place

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there is not always worthy of emulation.

This lack of a sense of community on college campuses is borne out by the Carnegie Foundation's study of American higher education in the last decade. The foundation's head, Ernest L. Boyer, found that despite the American system of higher learning being the envy of the world

- About 50 percent of today's students say they "feel like a number in a book."
- About 40 percent do not feel a sense of community on campus.
- About two-thirds of today's students say they have no professor interested in their personal lives.
- Most disturbing was the finding of a trend on the campus toward ethnic/class separation.
- And there was evidence that in racial matters there has been very little significant progress in 20 years.³

A Loss of Mission

About three years ago Boyer's definitive report of the Carnegie Foundation's research on the status of American higher education appeared under the title, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*.⁴ In this report he alleged that many American colleges have lost their sense of mission and are confused about how to impart shared values. He remarked with dismay on the discontinuity between schools and higher education. Boyer also described the colleges as void of vigorous intellectual exchange, as places where the faculty and administration distance themselves from student life, not to mention from civic and social obligations in their neighborhoods and in the world. Overall, the book described a lack of wholeness in American education.

And yet Boyer was not pessimistic. The points of tension that he identified are also, he contends, points of unusual opportunity:

The American college is, we believe, ready for renewal, and there is an urgency to the task. The nation's colleges have been successful in responding to diversity and in meeting the needs of individual students. They have been much less attentive to the larger, more transcendent issues that give meaning to existence and help students put their own lives in perspective. This nation and the world need well informed, inquisitive, open-minded young people who are both productive and reflective, seeking answers to life's most important questions.

Colleges need to establish a wellness and fitness prerequisite on campus.

Above all, we need educated men and women who not only pursue their own personal interests but are also prepared to fulfill their social and civic obligations. And it is during the undergraduate experience, perhaps more than at any other time, that these essential qualities of mind and character are refined.⁵

Recommendations

To alleviate the problems that now characterize American higher education Boyer recommended that

1. teachers care more for their students;
2. colleges develop an integrated core curriculum;
3. academic and nonacademic life become interlocked;
4. teachers become active with students in campus events;
5. colleges schedule convocations when everyone comes together;
6. colleges establish a "wellness" prerequisite to all else on campus, so that there is good food, exercise, and caring for the body;
7. schools attempt to find common values that can then be shared;
8. there be many more attempts at community building;
9. and even that the college president become more directly involved in planning and oversight of the residence halls!

Blueprint for SDA Education

I don't know how you react to these

***According to Boyer,
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suggestions, but they sound like a blueprint of the Adventist educational model, a model that is shared by all of the colleges within our system of higher education. For anyone who doubts that assertion, take a look at the General Conference *Statement Respecting Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Higher Education*,⁶ or Ellen G. White's programmatic book, *Education*,⁷ upon which the former is based. Boyer's suggestions describe the qualities that Adventist colleges stand for now and have stood for throughout their history.

In a sense, perhaps Adventist colleges were ahead of their times. And even today Adventist colleges are a great place to prepare oneself holistically for life. If we really live up to the vision of Adventist education that has been so well articulated by Ellen G.

White, we will have just the kinds of colleges that will make a difference, in terms of renewal, to Adventist churches and homes—not to mention to the society at large.

Swimming Against the Current

There is, however, room for improvement. If we are honest, we have to admit that not all of our colleges are patterned after the model in every respect. It is incumbent on us, as Adventist educators and administrators, to swim against the currents all around us, currents that have brought American higher education into the dangerous eddy it is in.

Given our heritage and our traditions, we can seize the forefront of educational leadership pointing to a better way. How? It will not necessarily be easy; the obstacles in our way are formidable. But as Derek Bok said in a different context, the problems are not "immutable."⁸

Ways to Facilitate Change

Listed below are some ideas to help facilitate change. Many are drawn from the programs I know best, at Atlantic Union College. The list is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, merely as a stimulus to discussion and action. Creative cooperation among educators, constituents, administrators, and students will produce numerous other ideas and pro-

Community service programs like Teach-a-Kid help college students develop a sense of civic and social responsibility.

grams. So, a few suggestions to get you started:

Clarify Our Mission

1. We need to clarify our mission. Gone is the day (if it ever existed) when we could be all things to all people. At Atlantic Union College, we are unabashedly Christian and proudly Adventist. This is evident in our curriculum as well as in our emphasis on traditional values and standards of appearance, dress, deportment, music, required chapels and worships. Solidarity with the church is symbolized by the weekly *Adventist Review* in every student room and apartment and the bimonthly *Journal of Adventist Education* in every teacher's office.

Use Visioning

2. We need to envision ways to achieve change. Project Affirmation has taught us all how to "vision." Now we must put those visions to work.

At the beginning of this college year I asked my faculty to share with me the results of their visioning. One veteran professor said:

I see a campus where students are not campus-bound, but are constantly moving out into the communities around, relating their ideas from the classroom to the lives of others around and changing their own lives. I hear the classroom changed from the professorial lecture to the raising and exploring of questions, the telling of stories about lives, the investigation of subjects.

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And I see the opposite movement, of adults of all ages onto the campus for seminars, workshops, bringing wisdom and experience, gaining fresh insights and enthusiasm, establishing friendships and working relationships with the young people there. I see the entire campus a part of the college program, the community around it, and extensions of the campus, as they are now in the student missionary program, but involving the entire school body including faculty, around the world.

Improve Academics

3. We need to improve the academic quality of our offerings. At AUC the English, music, and history departments are only three justly well-known examples where this is happening. However, our attempts go beyond the liberal arts to the traditional Adventist professional programs such as ministry, teaching, and nursing. AUC's Honors Core Program was recently declared to be one of

only two of the 175 such programs across the country that "stand out conspicuously as examples of excellence."

We are revamping our general education program to give it more cohesion, perspective, and especially to take advantage of our New England location. This program affirms the centrality of the written and spoken word. However, it also stresses the necessity for volunteer service so that academic, personal, civic, and social obligations are blended during college, as they must inevitably be blended during life.

Achieve Balance

4. We need to achieve a better balance between study, work, and physical activity so that "wellness" is more than a popular slogan. At AUC we are trying to inculcate the notion that work, exercise/athletics, health education, and food are all of direct concern in any college that is committed to a quality undergraduate experience. Our goal must be to have every student adopt such a life-style for life, getting into the habit in college.

Build a Multicultural Community

5. We need to take better advantage of the multicultural strengths of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is a microcosm of the world. At AUC

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we consciously seek to achieve a healthy ethnic and gender balance because only together do we reflect God's image. We aim to be a community that challenges and supports the dream fulfillment of the broadest possible spectrum of people. Our Human Relations Statement is under continual review.

Strengthen the Sense of Community

6. We need to strengthen both the sense and reality of community on campus. At AUC the building of a new campus center helps to make certain that the academic and nonacademic components of campus life are seen as integrally interlocked. As Boyer says:

The college of quality remains a place where the curricular and co-curricular are viewed as having a relationship to each other. At a time when social bonds are tenuous, students, during their collegiate years, should discover the reality of their dependency on each other. They must understand what it means to share and sustain traditions. Community must be built.⁴

Plan the Religious Component

7. Just as our physical and academic environments need planning, so, too, does the religious component of our lives. After all, that is what really sets us apart from our non-Adventist competition. At AUC, therefore, the entire campus family has been developing a spiritual master plan that coordinates the resources currently available.

However, it goes beyond that to enhance this vital ingredient to the successful accomplishment of our mission. This plan includes chapels, worships, weekend services, special events and weeks, religion and ethics classes, general studies classes, friend-to-friend initiatives, community services, prayer life, world missions, counseling, nurture, and much more.

Franklin Roosevelt is said to have believed that to educate a [person] in mind and not in morals results in a menace to society.

As Adventist educators we have much to offer American higher education. However, if we expect to have an impact, we must get our own house in order. We have no time to lose. Without concerted and studied effort now our problems could easily worsen.

Since an individual leader's impact

on his or her institution, let alone on the church or on the nation, can take a while, that is all the more reason to determine to do our utmost without delay.

No Time to Lose

In that respect, we can be inspired by a story President John F. Kennedy told (and President Bok has retold) about the French General Louis Lyautey. When Lyautey took command in North Africa, he surveyed the desolate landscape and declared that it was necessary to plant trees. When his aide objected that a tree would take a hundred years to reach full growth, Lyautey replied, "In that case, there is no time to lose. We must begin to plant this afternoon."¹⁰ □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Robin Wilson, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 3, 1990), p. A1.

² *Ibid.*, p. A28.

³ From Boyer's remarks to Institute for Educational Management, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., August 7, 1989.

⁴ New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ Published in pamphlet form in 1973.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903).

⁸ In a speech to Institute for Educational Management, Harvard, August 5, 1989.

⁹ Ernest L. Bover, *College: The Undergraduate Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 195.

¹⁰ Derek Bok in IEM speech, Harvard, August 5, 1989.