

The Plan for Ministerial Teaching Standards

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A secretly prepared document to reform the training of future ministers in our denomination has been put on hold, due to an outpouring of wrath from Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities.

But that was to be expected. The liberals who control education in our institutions of "higher education" do not want any strictures on what they can teach. They want to be free to instill as much liberalism as possible into the minds of the students.

Here is part of the story. The passing of time will present us with more:

In the spring of 1997, a special highly secret committee was formed. It consisted of General Conference (GC) vice-president, Calvin Rock; North American Division (NAD) president, Alfred McClure; GC director of education, Humberto Rasi; and Pacific Union Conference president, Tom Mostert.

Robert Folkenberg and division presidents from around the world field wanted a basic policy to be prepared which would govern ministerial training and ministerial qualifications.

From the best that we can tell, the objective was a good one. The present situation is a ramshackle one, in which every college and university does "what is right in its own eyes." Most anything can, and is, being taught.

Among others, the crisis at Walla Walla College (which we earlier reported on at some length) woke up some leaders to the urgency of the problem. Conservatives lost the battle at that school, but plans were laid to provide some statutory legislation which would improve future ministerial training at all our colleges and universities.

By fall 1998, the secret document had been completed. When the 1998 Annual Council convened in Brazil, it was presented to them and, on October 5, was approved. The document has a lengthy title, "*International Coordination and Supervision of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education*," and primarily concerns itself with two objectives: (1) theological unity around the world and (2) a requirement that teach-

ers of pastors and Bible instructors believe in Adventist teachings.

Well, you may have thought they already did! Yet it is because so many of our Bible teachers do not adhere to fundamental Adventism, that this document was prepared.

Notice that it does not mandate that all our teachers believe Adventist teachings, only those who teach future ministers and Bible workers or who teach Bible to other students.

Thus the document is quite incomplete in its college and university faculty coverage. Yet it still met with such a storm of anger that the document has been shelved. Yes, shelved. The Annual Council, second highest conciliar authority in the church next to our quinquennial Sessions, had ruled on the matter;—yet the liberal educators were able to stop it cold. This makes them a still higher authority.

(You may have thought the Word of God was the highest authority, but that is not necessarily so in the practicalities of church management.)

In November, 1998, the *Adventist Society for Religious Studies* (ASRS) met in Florida for its annual meeting. At those sessions, a variety of liberal religious theories were happily discussed. Whereas Christians love the Word of God, liberals love theological imaginings. The ASRS gathers once a year to listen to the reading of learned papers, full of quotations by non-Adventist writers and thinkers. But at this particular meeting, they had cause for concern. Only recently had they heard about that document enacted by the Annual Council.

Here is why they were so concerned:

- The document requires the development of a standard core of classes which must be taught at all Adventist schools, worldwide, wherever future pastors or Bible instructors are taught.

- Before any Bible or religion teachers are hired by our colleges, universities, or training schools, they must sign statement that they believe in all the church's basic teachings. They are then "endorsed" as being qualified to teach religion courses.

- Every five years, all Bible and religion teachers must be re-evaluated for basic orthodoxy.

Obviously, such careful controls could be used against historic Adventism. If leaders wanted to promote liberal positions, they could use the above process to weed out those most dedicated to our historic positions.

However, at the present time, the cries of anguish coming from the liberal camp reveal that they are the ones the new regulations would place in jeopardy.

Recognizing that the document would have been diluted into uselessness if the liberals had been permitted to have a part in developing it,—not one Seventh-day Adventist educator was on the committee which prepared it—and none of them were even told that such a committee existed!

This is astounding! Does this tell us that the entire Adventist educational system, at least everything above high school level, is riddled with liberals who no longer believe much of our basic doctrines? Not one Bible teacher, not one college or university president, and not one Adventist editor was placed on that committee.

The document was prepared totally in secret over a period of a year and a half. Not even Werner K. Vyhmeister, dean of the Seminary at Andrews was invited to be on the committee—nor did he know anything about what was taking place!

The first that any of our educators heard of the document—was at the October 1998 Annual Council in far off Brazil.

Here is more about the contents of this document, entitled “*International Coordination and Supervision of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education*,” which so frightened our educational teachers and administrators:

- “Each world division shall establish a *Board of Ministerial and Theological Education* (BMTE) to provide guidance and oversight to all programs for leaders in ministerial formation, such as pastoral ministry, theology, Bible/religion, and chaplaincy offered within its territory.”

- Each division BMTE is to decide which educational institutions within its territory are accepted to conduct such educational programs.

- Each division BMTE is to report all its decisions to a 45-member *International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education* (IBMTE), which must approve all BMTE recommendations, before they can be implemented.

- In the North American Division (NAD), the *Ministerial Training Advisory Council* (MTAC) is to be replaced by the NAD BMTE. The MTAC is a board, consisting of conference presidents who made recommendations to the colleges and universities (which, in turn, generally ignored any sug-

gestions they did not like.)

- The IBMTE is to “establish a basic series of subject areas, international guidelines, standards and policies for admission, and faculty selection that will meet the needs of the field and foster the mission of the Church.”

This includes (1) providing “guidelines to be used by BMTEs for faculty endorsement, (2) facilitating ‘the exchange of endorsed faculty from among the recognized programs offered in the world divisions,’ and (3) granting or renewing ‘denominational endorsement’ for faculty at General Conference institutions who teach courses for leaders in ministerial formation.”

Calvin Rock, one of the committee members who formulated the new educational document, attended the November 1998 annual meeting of the *Adventist Society for Religious Studies* (ASRS) in Florida, in the hope of calming the turbulent spirits of our NAD religion teachers.

Upon questioning, he admitted that none of our schools or teachers were involved in preparing the document. When asked why such a set of regulations was needed, he replied, “We have some [teachers and pastors] who express doubts about the Sanctuary, and some who question the bodily resurrection of Christ.”

Can you imagine that? Some of our Bible teachers do not even believe Jesus rose from the dead!

William Johnsson, who was also present, commented, “There was much discussion at the [Annual] council before the document was voted. It was not railroaded through.”

That November ASRS session was remarkable for the pent-up outrage and fear engendered by the document.

The implication of their comments were clear: (1) Faculty jobs are considered far more important than protecting historic Adventism. (2) Freedom to teach error should take precedence over submission to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. (3) Historic Adventist beliefs and standards are superfluous details which can be dispensed with.

- The charge was made that such a document would destabilize our theology departments, in order to ensure that all Adventist religion professors agree on doctrinal interpretations.

- “This document hints at a fairly deep vein of distrust of the mind and distrust of the Spirit and people of God. It’s further evidence of skepticism in the church, of the value of the mind and the importance of learning,” was the incisive comment of Charles Scriven, president of Columbia Union College. He apparently views the “value of the mind”

and the “importance of learning” as being far superior to such petty things as the beliefs God gave our forefathers.

- Scriven also said, “This document tends to suggest a hierarchical mentality as opposed to the mentality of the Protestant Reformation.”

- One angry teacher said, “In what ways is that document less papal than what comes from the Vatican?”

- In order to instill fear that our schools would be emptied if such dangerous regulations were enforced, it was stated that the talented and imaginative students would leave and go to outside educational institutions.

When asked, Calvin Rock admitted that the new document would not cover non-conference operated schools and programs, or local church ordination programs (such as the one at Loma Linda University Church—which now has a separate ministerial ordination procedure, by which it ordains women pastors). Nor would it apply to non-religion or non-Bible teachers. It does not apply to grade school or academy level teachers either.

When pressed on the point, Rock said that our college and university religion teachers should respond honestly to the questions; and, if they do not believe Adventist teachings, they should stop taking salaries from the church. “Adventist religion teachers and pastors are obligated to teach orthodox Adventist doctrines,” he said, adding that it would be wrong for any Bible teacher to lead students down a path of skepticism and doubt. “When a religion teacher’s or pastor’s doctrinal positions contradict those of the church, the honest thing to do is to take off the uniform and play for a different team.”

In response, Larry Geraty, La Sierra University president, said ominously, “It depends on how seriously the college presidents and the boards of trustees take it.” In other words, he hinted that our colleges and universities might rebel and refuse to obey the document.

The wording of the document requires that plans to implement its stipulations be set in place prior to the next Annual Council, which will meet in October 1999.

But Richard Osborn, vice president for education in the North American Division, hinted at the stalling tactics which would begin. He made the comment: “It will be very difficult to get ready in a year, as the document wishes. Our NAD Year-end Meeting doesn’t convene until November, a month after Annual Council.”

That comment, which revealed on which side

he stood, was only an excuse.

The 1998 Annual Council met in October, and the annual NAD meeting (called the Year-end Meeting) convened a full month later. This provided the committee members time to read the document and, at the meeting, initially discuss it and appoint subcommittees to begin preparations to implement it. They, like all other divisions in the world field, would then have a full eleven months to develop programs in harmony with its provisos. We should not be expected to think that the officers of the North American Division are only able to hold one meeting a year.

It appears that the liberals are yet in the ascendancy in this, as in other matters affecting our colleges and universities.

With the opening of 1999, little more was heard about the extent to which our colleges, universities, and Richard Osborn’s General Conference Department of Education were energetically making preparations.

Instead, the Folkenberg crisis took center stage, and all eyes were turned toward it. It may well be that our theologians saw in this an opportunity to sweep the document under the rug and later say they did not have time to prepare.

In the April 5, 1999, issue of *Christianity Today*, a brief article, entitled “*Besieged President Resigns*,” appeared. It added no new information that we had not already published; yet, buried within it was this significant paragraph:

“Such progress [growth in the Adventist Church within the past few years, etc.] could not mask other divisions in the movement, including twice-rejected efforts to allow the ordination of women as Adventist pastors. In 1998, a move to establish a ‘*Board of Ministerial and Theological Education*’ in each church division drew fire in several quarters and is on hold.”

So there you have it: The liberals in our denomination have managed to get leadership to shelve the entire plan, to require that our college and university religion teachers believe and teach basic Seventh-day Adventism.

To what degree our new General Conference president may bear partial responsibility for the shelving, we do not know.

There is no doubt that, if he said to put the matter on hold, it would be done. As a result of constitutional changes made at Utrecht, the General Conference president has great power.

But it is more likely that, amid the swirl of new duties, the tabling of the ruling has not been brought to his attention.

It is time to write some letters! —

PLEASE WRITE to key church leaders and ask them to implement this important document! It

is through the schools that the corruption of skepticism, new theology errors, and outright skepticism is draining into our local churches. The future pastors and administrators of our denomination are being drenched in this sinkhole of apostasy.

You might wish to note a few of these facts in your respectful letter:

- A committee was formed in the spring of 1997, and carried out a year-and-a-half study to determine the changes which were needed to ensure that the future ministers and workers, being trained in our colleges and universities, would receive an Adventist education.

- The completed document, entitled “*International Coordination and Supervision of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education*,” was presented to the 1998 Annual Council which met in Brazil; and, after careful deliberation, it was approved.

- If you have any question about the importance of this matter, please contact one or more of its respected authors: General Conference (GC) vice-president, Calvin Rock; North American Division (NAD) president, Alfred McClure; GC director of education, Humberto Rasi; and Pacific Union Conference president, Tom Mostert.

- This document had two primary objectives: (1) theological unity around the world and (2) a requirement that teachers of pastors and Bible instructors believe in Adventist teachings.

- Our colleges and universities, worldwide, were supposed to prepare reports, showing how they intend to fully implement this action.

- Efforts are now being made to table this important legislation, so it will be ignored and not take effect.

- Please take whatever actions are necessary to get this back on track! Our young people need and deserve an Adventist education, not one diluted by skepticism and errant theology.

You may wish to handwrite your letter and leave the top blank. Then make copies; and, on each one, fill in the name of the leader it is being sent to.

Send your letters to the men who count: These are the General Conference president, the men who authored the document, and (those of you who have the money) the division presidents who were assigned the responsibility of overseeing the document and making sure its provisions are carried out.

Here are some addresses; all of these mailing addresses are current. First, the General Conference president:

Jan Paulsen
President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904-6600

Here are the Division presidents:

Luka T. Daniel, President, Africa-Indian Ocean Division, 22 Boite Postale 1764, Abidjan 22, Cote d’Ivoire, West Africa. [Ivory Coast]

L.D. Raelly, President, Eastern Africa Division, P.O. Box H.G. 100, Highlands, Harare, Zimbabwe, Africa

Ulrich Frikart, President, Euro-Africa Division, P.O. Box 219, 3000 Berne 32, Switzerland

C. Lee Huff, President, Euro-Asia Division, Krasnoyarskaya Street, 3, Golianovo, 107589, Moscow, Russian Federation

Alfred C. McClure, President, North American Division, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904-6600

Chun Pyung Duk, President, Northern Asia-Pacific Division, Koyang Ilsan P.O. Box 43, 783 Janghangdong, Ilsan-gu, Koyang City, Kyonggi-do 411-600, Korea

L.J. Evans, President, South Pacific Division, Locked Bag 2014, Wahroonga, N.S.W. 2076, Australia

D. Ronald Watts, President, Southern Asia Division, Post Box 2, HCF, Hosur 635110, T.N., India

Violeto F. Bocala, President, P.O. Box 040, Silang, 4118 Cavite, Philippines

Bertil Wiklander, President, Trans-European Division, 119 St. Peter’s Street, St. Albans, Herts AL13EY, England

Here are the addresses of the leaders who drafted the document. It would be well to send copies to them also:

Calvin Rock, Vice-president, General Conference (same address as above)

Humberto Rasi, Director of Education, General Conference (General Conference address)

Thomas J. Mostert, Jr., President, Pacific Union Conference, P.O. Box 5005, Westlake Village, California 91359