

Does the Church Need a Center of Higher Learning in Europe?

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A question has arisen in Europe about the possibility of giving Adventist graduate students (who have attained "Studenteksamen," "Abitur," or "Baccalaureat" status) an opportunity to obtain at least part of their further education under the guidance of Adventist teachers. Even among European students who have come to America the lively debate has been carried on: Should an Adventist school on the university level, adapted to specifically European needs and educational systems, be established?

Such a school would meet the needs of two different groups. First, it could function as a seminary (Seventh-day Adventist Theological Faculty) based on the regular university entrance examinations and thus adapted both to the student's scholastic background and to his future professional needs as a church worker in Europe. Second, it could be a "temporary station" for Adventist students in other academic fields, who now go directly from their intermediate schools (*gymnasiums*) into secular universities.

There is in fact already a sort of temporary station common to all students entering a university in Europe. During their first semester or two of graduate work, they still have time to reflect before definitively choosing their respective careers. For whatever line of academic studies they choose, there is one indispensable prerequisite: philosophy, which is the common fundamental and compulsory subject for every discipline, including theological studies. It would be an obvious advantage if all Adventist students could spend this period of reflection and vocational decision in an intellectually and religiously congenial environment. There would be an opportunity for Adventist teachers to do some effective counseling during that

time. For example, some students who would make first-class ministers simply never think of the ministry as their vocation, because there is nothing in the "gymnasium" milieu to suggest such an idea. And at the age when ideals have their strongest grip, those who wish to become, say, physicians or lawyers could make up their minds to become physicians and lawyers *for Christ*.

The way any subject is taught may turn out to be a question of eternal life or death for the student. In an ordinary university the particular subject of philosophy is not very likely to be taught in such a way that the students will tend to become Christians. But where the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White could provide a true vision of the drama of the ages, this vision could mold the outlook of both teachers and students. There is no place where a pervading and gently transforming Seventh-day Adventist atmosphere is more desperately needed than in the life of a first-year student in a European university.

Now I am not at all speaking about the establishment of a complete Adventist university in Europe; that would appear to be a dream of the distant future. I am speaking about a response to the present crisis. And because in times of crisis one has to manifest a particularly high degree of realism, I want to be carefully realistic in my suggestions.

Fortunately there are already two fully accredited Adventist universities in America. It would be an honorable task for Andrews University and Loma Linda University, both of which possess a fair degree of academic prestige already, to sponsor some modest beginning of a European school on the university level. The general preparatory courses in philosophy would give adequate and indispensable knowledge to any European Adventist in his first year of university study, regardless of the profession he enters. The theologian needs all the proper knowledge he can acquire about the inroads of philosophy; and on the other hand the nontheologian needs all the proper knowledge he can acquire about religion during the decisive preparation year for his professional career and his life. I do not doubt that a series of extensions would be fully recognized as qualifying Adventist students for the "preparatory examinations" that would allow some students to enter existing European universities on the level of specialized studies and would enable other students to continue with a theological education in the Adventist center for higher learning.

As far as official recognition of Adventist-sponsored courses is concerned, it is encouraging to see that other universities, both in America and in Europe, have willingly accepted Adventist-educated students for further

studies toward doctorates. It is further encouraging to see how rapidly American degrees, and American education generally, are being acknowledged in Europe. American university manuals are being adopted in Europe in an increasing number from year to year, particularly in such fields as psychology, sociology, education, and the natural sciences. America is able to help Europe now as never before.

Unless an institution has some kind of "missionary project" (in the form, for example, of an extension program abroad), it is doomed to become weaker and weaker, and perhaps even to die out some day. There is nothing to lose by establishing an urgently needed more-or-less permanent overseas branch of the existing Adventist universities; and European students would greatly benefit from the academically recognized courses offered by Adventist teachers.

A common Adventist center for higher learning in Europe would also be an inestimable asset for the spirit of unity — that is, a sound, enthusiastic Adventist internationalism — that is much needed among both young and old. The right kind of school can help to overcome a spirit of narrowminded nationalism. Speaking about Europe as a whole — in desperate need, then as now, of a transforming missionary endeavor — Ellen White advised:

Some who have entered these missionary fields have said: "You do not understand the French people; you do not understand the Germans. They have to be met in just such a way."

But I inquire: Does not God understand them? Is it not He who gives His servants a message for the people? He knows just what they need; and if the message comes directly from Him through His servants to the people, it will accomplish the work whereunto it is sent; it will make all one in Christ. Though some are decidedly French, others decidedly German, and others decidedly American, they will be just as decidedly Christlike.¹

In spite of the fact that universities all over Europe have basically a similar structure, some will say, "Impossible! How could students with such different languages and divergent backgrounds fit together in one school?" But turning the different national characteristics into a source of inspiration is precisely what an international Adventist school is supposed to do in preparation for an international event — the coming of Christ.

The diversity in languages is a certain barrier, to be sure; but at the same time it is a new door of communication and oneness. For to the European intellectual of the present day, English is the great *lingua franca*. And any progressive Seventh-day Adventist student knows that the "new Latin" of his own sacred fraternity is English. So it is simply a blessing in disguise to have to look for a common language and to find that the only one available

is English. If an educational center in Europe is to be a real center of awakening, a cornerstone of Adventist unification in the Old World, it cannot ignore the prime importance of historic Adventist literature. To know the language of the writings of Ellen White is a necessity for anyone who really wants to be an effective Adventist leader.

It is perhaps superfluous to mention how much less expensive it would be for a European seminary student to attend school in Europe than to travel to America, where prices have proved prohibitive for many. Also, a much larger number of students from Africa and the Middle East could probably afford to study in a theological seminary located in Europe.

It seems certain that to erect a permanent school structure, with all the facilities demanded in modern times, would be a long-term project. But the church simply cannot afford to postpone into the indefinite future a plan for a European center for higher learning. Something must be started almost immediately. The present Adventist schools in Europe may not be able to accommodate any additional group of students during the winter. But along the Mediterranean coast, at least, there are thousands of hostels and seashore houses fully equipped with modern facilities and simply left empty from the end of September to the beginning of June (because that is the slack season for tourism). At that time of year prices for accommodations are surprisingly low, so that the winter might well be a veritable summer filled with radiant light and buoyant life for a zealous student digging for knowledge in an Adventist school.

Of course the vision of a permanent school building is a pleasant one. Adventist history has proved, however, that it is entirely possible to obtain rich blessings in rented rooms. And sometimes it is good to be relieved of the worries inevitably connected with large capital investments and high maintenance costs. Furthermore, in Europe the necessity of having immediately a fully equipped library is not the same as in America, for the nearest state university library is open to anybody who cares to use it (although of course a smaller library would be needed for the indispensable reference books).

A university-level extension program can be begun at once in rented quarters. If it develops into a permanent school, an ideal location might be Switzerland, whose international political neutrality might allow students from behind the Iron Curtain — who should not be forgotten by any means — to join the cosmopolitan Adventist fellowship.

In this article I have not attempted to present a detailed program. But perhaps the suggestions here can stimulate the thinking of church ad-

ministrators and interested laymen. The innovation I am proposing will demand a degree of internationalism and cooperation even more resolute and tenacious than that which has become proverbial among Adventists. But something like this must be done to meet the present acute Adventist educational needs in Europe.

REFERENCE

- 1 ELLEN G. WHITE, *Testimonies for the Church* (volume nine of nine volumes. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association n.d.), pp. 179-180.

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THE SEA

MAX GORDON PHILLIPS

The necklace
of the sea
was amber
I remember.
I remember
how the waves
ran out forever,
rushed and laved
our desert-bitten
feet there, after we
had reached the shore,
O Lord!
when we had reached
the sea!