1. Purpose and Mission of Seventh-day Adventist Schools in Australia and the Solomon Islands – Past and Present

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Reasons for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to Start School Systems in Australia and the Solomon Islands

When the first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in Australia on the 6th June, 1885, Seventh-day Adventists had been involved in the establishment and operation of denominational schools in North America for about 27 years. Indeed, the first attempt to establish a "church school" was in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1858, two years before the new movement agreed on what name to call themselves. This was also about the time when the first steps were taken toward formal organisation of local churches and before the church established an administrative structure.[1] When church pioneer, prophet and educational reformer, Ellen White arrived in Australia in 1891, the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* reported an Australian-based church membership of 492 worshipping in 7 churches (Yearbook 1982:78). The importance placed on education by this small group of believers, struggling to expand their membership and house it in suitable buildings, is evidenced by the commencement of the Australasian Bible School in St Kilda in Melbourne in 1892. This school was closed in 1894, but with the strong leadership of Ellen White and church administrators, the Avondale School for Christian

1 Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000: 90–94 (for church name and organization of administrative structure), 116–124 for earliest Adventist schools. See also Clapham 1985: 10–15 for the early beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism in Australia.

Workers officially began operations in 1897 (Hook 1985: 147; Hook 1998: 15–41).

George Knight explains the motivation that led early Seventh-day Adventists to set up church schools in the following terms:

> The existence of Adventist schools is no accident. To the contrary, the church early in its history realized that because its philosophy differed significantly from other segments of society, it had a responsibility to pass on that philosophy to young people through the development of an educational system (Knight 2016: 43; cf Knight 2015).

That Knight has captured the philosophical underpinning of the Avondale School for Christian Workers is reflected in the earliest surviving official Calendar of the school. In the very first words of the "Introduction" it is stated: "True education is the co-operation of man with God in working out the plan of redemption; it is a process by which God works in man to restore His image in the soul" (Third Annual Calendar 1899: 9). After canvassing the plan of salvation and the conflict between good and evil, the "Introduction" is concluded with the following:

> For this reason it has become necessary for us to establish denominational schools. It is the aim of the Avondale School to so direct every line of study pursued that it may do its part in restoring the image of God in the soul, that students may here be fitted to give the light to others, and finally that all together may have an inheritance among those that are sanctified (Third Annual Calendar 1899: 12).

It was not until 1914 that the first officially sponsored Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in the Solomon Islands. Almost their first act was to establish a mission and a mission school, and the expansion of the church was mirrored by an expansion of the school network. As Wendy Jackson comments:

> The impetus for the growth of education in the Solomon Islands was solely one of mission. Driven by the conviction of the soon coming of Christ, and emphasis on education in the writings of Ellen White, the church in Australasia saw education as a key strategy in the rapid spread of the Adventist message (Jackson 2017).

Institutional Drift

These, then, are some of the impulses that caused members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia and the Solomon Islands to establish denominational schools. Yet with the establishment of educational institutions and the growth of the church comes the risk

of institutional drift. Sociologists tend to view the institutionalization of a religious movement as an almost inevitable outcome as a movement establishes itself. For example, in his highly influential book, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Max Weber outlines what he describes as "the routinization of charisma and its consequences." In doing so, he describes what happens to religious movements with the passage of time, and the death of its leadership. He states,

> In its pure form charismatic authority has a character specifically foreign to everyday routine structures. The social relationships directly involved are strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of charismatic personal qualities. If this is not to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, but to take on the character of a permanent relationship forming a stable community of disciples or a band of followers or a party organization or any sort of political or hierocratic organization, it is necessary for the character of charismatic authority to become radically changed. Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both. (Weber 1947: 363–364)

Institutions allow the founding leadership of a movement to extend their reach and to ensure that the movement continues after their passing. Institutions bring stability and shape to a religious movement. But they can also become inhibiting factors, and it is probably fair to say that sociologists have tended to have a negative view of the long-term contribution of institutionalization to a religious movement's vitality and continued growth.[2] There is the ever-present danger of institutional drift, when institutions that have been established for one purpose become absorbed in their own activities and lose sight of the original purpose for which they were established.

David O. Moberg, for example, has suggested that a church has a life-cycle which moves from incipient organization, through formal organization, maximum efficiency, institutionalization and finally to disintegration (Moberg 1984: 118–125; Knight 1995: 23–35). The proliferation of institutions is seen by Moberg as an indication of the imminent collapse of the church, or at least of a process of institutional drift.

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2 A negative view of institutionalization in religion is either an explicit or implicit aspect of the writings of many of the key thinkers in the academic field of sociology of religion. See for example, Fenn, 2009, and Titus Hjelm and Phil Zuckerman, 2013.

Examples of institutional drift are not hard to discover. One might cite the work of James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), with its careful documentation of religious impulses that played a part in the establishment of Dartmouth College, Beloit College, Lafayette College, Virginia Union University, Concordia University and Boston College, amongst others. Some of these institutions had rather loose links with their parent religious body, but others were carefully nurtured as part of a well-defined religious impulse to create an establishment of Christian learning. Yet with the passage of time, each of them gradually disengaged with its parent religious body.

Since their beginnings in the 1890s in Australia, and in the 1910s in the Solomon Islands, there have been dramatic changes in Seventh-day Adventist Schools and the society in which they operate. They have grown to be a significant presence in the educational systems of both countries. According to the Education Department of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, by 2016 the school system in Australia had grown to include 73 schools in which 12,776 students were enrolled, taught by 962 teachers. In the same year, the school system in the Solomon Islands had grown to include 103 schools in which 14,723 students were enrolled, taught by 514 teachers. The workforce in the school system is much larger than the workforce in the church in each country. In other words, there are substantially more teachers than ministers. Considered from the perspective of staffing, budgets and property, the school system has outgrown the church system from which it originated.[3]

3 According to the official Church statistics found in the *2016 Annual Statistical Report: 152nd Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2014 and 2015*, in 2014 (the latest year for which there are published figures), there were 28 secondary schools in Australia with enrolments of 5,055 students taught by 458 teachers, and 43 primary schools with 7,269 students taught by 413 teachers; while in the Trans Pacific Union Mission (of which the Solomon Islands Mission is an integral part), there were 29 secondary schools with 5,480 students and 295 teachers as well as 129 primary schools with 7,269 students taught by 733 teachers (2016: 76, 77). In comparison, as shown in church-membership statistics, in the Australian Union Conference in 2015, there were 422 churches and 105 companies with a membership of 59,723, served by a pastoral team of 314 ordained and commissioned ministers and 36 licensed ministers. In the Solomon Islands in 2015, there were 191 churches and 262 companies, with a combined membership of 48,940 members served by 52 ordained and

Other changes can be noted. Whereas for much of the 130 or so years that the Adventist schools have been operating in Australia almost all students came from homes with at least one Seventh-day Adventist parent or grand-parent, students with an Adventist background are a small minority in many Seventh-day Adventist schools today. Even where they are in the majority, there is a significant number of students from non-Adventist backgrounds in attendance. The school systems in both Australia and the Solomon Islands are almost entirely funded separately from church resources (a combination of government-funding and school fees; this arrangement is documented for both Australia and the Solomon Islands in two chapters in this book, by Kilgour and Pitakia and Kilgour and Williams, respectively). Both school systems work in an environment where there is considerable government oversight of curriculum. The Adventist school system in Australia has been incorporated and has a parallel governance structure to that of the Conferences and Union. Given these changes, the legitimate question may well be raised—has there been any substantial shift over time in the philosophical basis and goals of those who operate and work in Seventh-day Adventist schools from their beginnings to the present day?

The Survey of Institutional Workers

The year 2000 saw two events in the Adventist Church which have provided the impetus for the survey reported in this book: the election of Elder Ted Wilson as President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and the appointment of Dr David Trim as the Director of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics and Research (ASTR). The reference group used by Dr Trim to determine the direction of research sponsored by the General Conference included some of the highest officers of the church, and between them they decided on 8 research projects. Among these projects were a survey of members, a survey of church pastor survey, a survey of workers in organizations affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist church (the institutional workers survey) and an analysis of tithing patterns among Seventh-day Adventists. Two teams headed by Associate Professor Rob McIver of Avondale College of Higher Education, Australia, were funded to carry out two of the projects: the study of tithing patterns (McIver, 2016) and the institutional-workers survey.

The research question that to be addressed by the institutional-workers survey was as follows: “What perceptions are held by

commissioned ministers and 55 licensed ministers (2016: 23, 63)

employees of Seventh-day Adventist organizations of their relationship to the mission of the church?" This survey was focused on mission and on the present thinking of the teachers and school administrators most involved in delivering mission outcomes in the Adventist school systems. This book also includes chapters in which the initial vision of the Adventist pioneers that set up the first Adventist schools is described, enabling comparison to be made between the initial vision and the current vision of teachers and administrators. The results are noted in the subsequent chapters. It will be discovered that while institutional drift has been a real possibility in the development of the Adventist school system in Australia and the Solomon Islands, to date there has been a development of the original impulse and vision for the schools rather than a drift. Consequently these developments can more fairly be described as a trajectory of the mission of Adventist schools rather than a drift in their mission.

Preview of the Chapters in this Book

This book includes the first substantial data-collection using the institutional survey and provides an analysis of the survey responses given by 770 Seventh-day Adventist Teachers from Australia (457) and the Solomon Islands (313) to questions regarding their understanding of the mission of their schools. It also provides a context for a better understanding of the implications of the data collected in these surveys.

Separate attention is given to Adventist schools in Australia and in the Solomon Islands. John Skrzypaszek, in his chapter, "Education as the Heart of Missional Vision for the Seventh-day Adventist Schools: The Australian Context", describes the vision that lay behind the earliest Adventist schools in Australia. He introduces readers to the mature thinking about education by the Seventh-day Adventist pioneer and prophet, Ellen White, and provides a contextual background for the understanding of the philosophy of Adventist schools in Australia. By the time Ellen White arrived in Australia, she had been closely involved in church-sponsored education for more than quarter of a century and was able to draw on her experiences as she formulated her vision for Seventh-day Adventists schools across Australia. This vision she was able to bring to fruition in her close involvement in the establishment of Avondale School for Christian Workers in 1897, and through the earliest years of its subsequent development.

In his chapter, "Mission of Adventist Schools with a Changing Clientele: An Australian Perspective," Daryl Murdoch, national director of Adventist Schools Australia, deals with the present vision that drives the administration of Adventist Schools Australia. It does

so by providing an up-to-date assessment of the operating environment of Adventist Schools Australia, and the key components that Adventist Schools Australia uses to maintain a mission-focused school system. In the following chapter Peter Kilgour and Tony Williams document government funding in Australian independent schools. The data provided in this chapter reveal that the financial underpinning for the operation and capital development of Adventist schools in Australia is almost entirely made up of student fees and government assistance. Adventist schools in Australia, therefore, are not dependent on the Adventist church for their continuing operation.

Given the financial independence of the Adventist schools in Australia and their semi-autonomous governance structures, it is very interesting to note what teachers say about the mission of their schools in their own words. Sherelene (Sherry) Hattingh used NVIVO statistical software to find and analyse common themes in the open-ended comments of these teachers, and discovered that next to providing an excellent education for their students, teachers most frequently commented on sharing the Gospel with their students and leading others to Jesus.

The section on the Solomon Islands begins with a chapter by Wendy Jackson, who recounts the beginnings of the Adventist school system in the Solomon Islands and shows that the establishment of schools was an essential part of the mission strategy to bring the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the Solomon Islands.

In their chapter, Peter Kilgour and Joseph Pitakia outline the funding arrangements that underpin the operations of Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands. While the situation is quite different from the funding arrangements in Australia, the end result has this much in common—the operations of the Adventist Schools in the Solomon Islands are largely funded from government sources supplemented by students' fees.

Dr Sherry Hattingh's analysis of the open-ended questions in the survey undertaken in the Solomon Islands shows that when asked to comment on the mission of their schools, Adventist teachers most frequently wrote about preparing their students for eternity, and teaching the good news of the gospel to their students.

Concluding Observations

The Adventist school systems in both Australia and the Solomon Islands are largely funded independently of church resources, and thus could be in a position to act with considerable independence of the mission goals of the conferences and missions that host them. Yet the research reported in this book provides strong evidence that

this has not happened. Rather it is apparent that the teachers almost all have a strong commitment to goals that are in close alignment with the mission goals of the conferences and missions in which they are located. This conclusion stands out in their responses to questions that invited them to comment on the mission of their school and in their responses to other questions in the survey.

It is also illuminating to compare sociological models of the impact of the institutionalization of religious movements with what has happened with Adventist Schools in both Australia and the Solomon Islands. In both countries communities that have strong local Adventist schools have a lively intellectual life, and consist of families representing all age-groups. In other words, they show strong demographic resilience in a time when Christianity in many denominations in Australia is characterized by ageing congregations and dwindling numbers of participants at weekend services. In contrast to what is suggested by the sociological models, Adventist Schools have been crucial to the growth and health of the Adventist church in both Australia and the Solomon Islands.

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