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Examining The Blueprint: The Case of Longburn College in New Zealand Adventist Education 1975 -1996.

A research exercise presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for a B.A.
honours degree

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1996

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of Phil Hann, Arnold Reye, Ian Young, Arthur Yeo, Adrian Bell and Maria Henry. Thanks also to all those who endured my periodic obsessing.

List of Abbreviations

- GS Greater Sydney Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
- LAC Longburn Adventist College of Seventh-day Adventists
- NA Northern Australian Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- NNSW North New South Wales Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- NNZ North New Zealand Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- SDA Seventh-day Adventist
- SNZ South New Zealand Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- SPD South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists
- SQLD South Queensland Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- TAUC TransAustralian Union Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists
- TTUC TransTasman Union Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists

INTRODUCTION

Adventist Education in Australasia

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has been proud of its education program around the world. It has been considered an essential part of the evangelistic work of the Church. The ideological catalyst for the expansion of Adventist education in the South Pacific at the turn of the century was the central tenet of SDA doctrinal belief that the second coming of Christ and that consequently the end of the world was imminent. Educational institutions therefore were dedicated to training the youth of the Church for a life of service for the Church and community.¹

The demand for a more highly trained and qualified ministry in a rapidly expanding mission programme caused the denomination to regard the establishment of its own schools as an urgent necessity.²

The objectives of Adventist education emerged from the interchange of ideas in early Adventism and a set of educational ideals formed a framework for the development of Adventist educational philosophy. This set of ideals became known as the educational blueprint, or just the 'blueprint'.

A century on, the education ideals have been subjected to considerable debate regarding the continued purpose, mission, and relevancy of the blueprint. This has taken place in an environment of significant challenges to the traditions and doctrines of the SDA Church. The world of Adventism in New Zealand, has changed substantially from that in which the first Adventist school was established. Much of the change has taken place between 1975 and the present.

This research exercise aims to examine the responses that educators have had to challenges in applying the blueprint concept to Adventist schooling, and how it has been reinterpreted within the changing educational and religio-political climate in New Zealand Adventism. In particular it will examine the

¹ W.J. Gilson, 'The History of Seventh-day Adventist Education in Australia and New Zealand', (Auckland 1963) p.8.

² Gilson, p.18.

way in which SDA blueprint philosophy was applied at one prominent institution, Longburn College, as a case study examining how Adventist educators have attempted to adapt to a changing world and sought to remain viable and as well as essentially Adventist during the period 1975 to 1996.

An Historical Background

The visit by Church leader and inspirational writer, Ellen G. White to Australia and New Zealand at the turn of the century initiated a process of establishing schools with a common purpose throughout the Australasian region. The schools were instituted on a pattern that reflected the values, standards, and beliefs adopted by the SDA Church. The model of Adventist education set down in White's books, *Education and Counsels to Teachers, Parents and Students*, and later compilations of her letters and articles such as *Fundamentals of Education and Counsels on Education*.

Longburn College, formerly known as New Zealand Missionary College, was established in 1907, following the establishment of Adventist education in Australia. The College transferred its site from Pukekura, Cambridge, to Longburn, five miles from Palmerston North in 1912. This rural site was sold to the Church by George F. Wright, a member of the locating committee and was seen as an ideal place for the education blueprint to be put into practice in New Zealand.³

Elements of Change

The Church in Australia and New Zealand in 1975, however, faced growing theological instability, financial problems and increasing apostasy rates among the youth of the Church. The traditional doctrinal beliefs were challenged by the teaching of Dr Robert Brinsmead and later Dr Desmond Ford, a Theology lecturer in the Australian training college Avondale College, Cooranbong in New South Wales.

From the early sixties there was an increase in apostasy in New Zealand churches. This impacted on the financial support for the Church organisation

³ Gilson, p. 218.

because the financing of institutions, relied partially on the support of members, tithes and financial donations to provide the income for Church workers.⁴ There was also a developing lack of confidence in the notion that Adventist schools were producing committed church members who perpetuated the evangelistic vision of their forebears.

During the eighties, Longburn College experienced this lack of confidence in the education system and the financial problems that the church faced. The structural organisation of the Church system meant that Longburn was controlled by the TransTasman Union Conference. The question of administrative and financial responsibility for the College, is one that became increasingly contentious within the Church's administration in Australasia in the late eighties and early nineties. The financial state of the College, its falling rolls and an undercurrent of philosophical uncertainty challenged the viability of an Adventist boarding institution in New Zealand.

In the context of theological and church instability and financial instability, Longburn as an Adventist educational institution in New Zealand faced questions about its role and function in delivering a relevant Christian education for its students. The element of conservatism in Church administration saw Adventist education as responsible for protecting Adventist students from worldly influences and maintaining church beliefs and standards. The Longburn College management responded in the eighties with actions aimed at preserving conservative Adventist orthodoxy at the institution.

In the nineties there were moves by governing administrators to close down the College, and it was only the prospect of integration with the government in 1993 that enabled it to survive. The period from 1993 to 1996 was one of consolidation of its relationship with the government and regaining the support of SDA Church administrators and church members by representing the College as preserving a distinct Adventist education for New Zealanders, while providing educational opportunities for the wider Christian community that was largely disregarded by the College's previous philosophical agenda.

⁴ W.G. Litster, 'The SDA School System in New Zealand', in *In And Out Of The World*, (ed.) P.H. Ballis, p. 123.