

"Clarence Barnes: A Voice for Education Reform."

Dr. Samuel London

Associate Professor of History

Chairman of the Department of History and Political Science

Oakwood University

United States of America

Clarence J. Barnes was born on February 6, 1923 to Joseph Nathaniel Barnes and Ursulina May Pitter-Barnes in the Campbell Castle area of Manchester, Jamaica. Both of his parents were Seventh-day Adventists. In fact, they were the first members of the denomination within the rural, southern portion of Manchester. In addition to being hardworking farmers, Joseph and Ursulina Barnes served as effective evangelists within their impoverished community. (Barnes, 2013) In the space of forty-seven years, their missionary endeavors resulted in the establishment of six churches in the region with a combined membership of over fifteen hundred. ("Educational leaders' parents," 1970)

In the 1940s, Clarence Barnes left Jamaica for the United States in the hope of securing employment that would help him acquire the funds to further his education. Arriving in New Jersey, he found agricultural work in the Seabrook Farms community of Cumberland County. After working for a little over half a year, Clarence accumulated sufficient funds to return to the island of Jamaica and pursue his educational goals at West Indies College Academy (currently Northern Caribbean University) in Mandeville, Jamaica. There, he studied for the Cambridge School Certification Examination, which he successfully passed in 1947. During this time, Clarence met and began courting Miss Sylvia Jean Wright. The couple married on March 12, 1950 in Manchester, Jamaica. (Barnes, 2013) Though he had not yet earned a Bachelor's degree, Barnes accepted a teaching position at the Bahamas Academy, which he held from 1950 to 1955. Afterward, he returned to the United States and, in 1957, completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in History at Atlantic Union College. Following graduation, he served as principal of the Berean Seventh-day Adventist School in St. Louis, Missouri, for the 1957-1958 academic year. Shortly thereafter, Clarence began studies at Howard University in Washington D.C. where, in 1960, he earned a Master of Arts degree in History. (Barnes, 1982) ("People," 1990) ("Profiles," 1990)

In 1964, the Lake Region Conference hired Barnes to become the first principal of the Frank L. Peterson Academy in Inkster, Michigan. The school was sponsored by the Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church of Inkster, Michigan and the City Temple Seventh-day Adventist Church located in Detroit. (Roache, 1964) As chief administrator Barnes supervised a teaching faculty of fifteen persons, not including additional support staff, and a student body numbering anywhere from two hundred and fifty to two hundred and sixty. He continued to serve in this capacity up to the year 1968. During his tenure as principal of the institution, Clarence with the aid of his wife, Sylvia, secured government funding and established a school lunch program. Subsequently, they received a commendation from the Michigan House of Representatives recognizing the assistance rendered to the children of the working class communities of Inkster and Detroit. (Barnes, 2013) While fulfilling his obligations as principal, Barnes simultaneously pursued an Educational Specialist degree from Eastern Michigan University. In 1968, he resigned his post at the Academy to complete the final phases of his degree program. (Barnes, 1968) The following year, he was awarded a one year lectureship – at the University. Between 1970 and 1972, the Detroit Board of Education hired Barnes to teach social studies in its public school system. (Barnes, 1982) In 1975, Clarence accepted an offer to lead the Social Sciences Division and chair the Department of History and Political Science at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama. (Barnes, 1982)

In the late 1970s, Barnes commenced his doctoral work with an emphasis on curriculum development at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. His dissertation, "Physical Work as an Integral Part of Education at Oakwood College In Light of Ellen G. White's Writings," was completed in 1982, the same year in which he received the Doctorate of Education degree. This document provides some insight into his teaching philosophy. According to Dr. Barnes, the purpose of the research was to examine whether or not the curriculum of Oakwood College reflected the principles of Seventh-day Adventist education as presented in the counsels of Ellen G. White – the denomination's co-founder and foremost spokesperson. (Barnes, 1982)

In light of the skyrocketing cost of higher education, Dr. Barnes argued that what is being done at Oakwood, as well as all the denomination's colleges and universities, deserves careful scrutiny to see if these educational programs – as they currently exist – are cost effective. He contended that manual training or industrial programs (defined as work requiring the use of the body's large muscles groups involved in activities such as: agriculture, auto-mechanics, construction, and janitorial maintenance) would equip students with much needed skills and reduce both operational and educational costs. Consequently, these programs have the potential to reduce the operational costs of the institution through the employment of pupils, which would in turn offset tuition rates by subtracting the value of student labor exerted in the maintenance and upkeep of the school. (Barnes, 1982)

In examining Oakwood College, Dr. Barnes divided the history of its educational curriculum into three phases. During the period of its inception in 1896 to the year 1932 the curriculum was definitely slanted in favor of industrial training. The period of 1932 to 1945 trended toward a more balanced curriculum of physical labor and academics, but nevertheless fell short of the ideal standard delineated in Ellen White's writings. The latter phase of 1954 to 1980 consisted of a marked decline and ultimate dissolution of the practical industrial arts from the curriculum – correlating with the institution's drive toward regional accreditation, which was finally granted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1958. In light of this schema of events, Dr. Barnes contends that Mrs. White's directives regarding education were never carried out at Oakwood. (Barnes, 1982) In consideration of the denomination's stance, which affirms the gift of prophecy as evidenced in the writings of Ellen G. White, this is a serious matter. Doctrinal belief number eighteen found in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* states,

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's Messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the Church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. (Seventh-day adventist church, 2010)

In lieu of the importance placed on the writings of Mrs. White, and Barnes's declaration that Oakwood failed in carrying out the educational guidelines contained therein, it is imperative that we examine some of her statements.

In support of his position advocating manual training, Dr. Barnes quotes from Mrs. White's volume *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*. In it she states, "several hours each day should be devoted to working with the students in some line of manual training. In no case should this be neglected." (Barnes, 1982) (White, 1913) In relation to the development of sound judgment in pupils via physical labor, she says: "An education derived chiefly from books leads to superficial thinking. Practical work encourages close observation and independent thought. Rightly performed, it tends to develop that practical wisdom which we call common sense." (White, 1903) Emphasizing the invaluable nature of practical labor in the instructional process, she writes,

If the youth can have but a one-sided education, which is of greater consequence – a knowledge of the sciences, with all the disadvantages to health and life, or a knowledge of labor for practical life? We unhesitatingly answer, the latter. If one must be neglected, let it be the study of books. (White, 1954)

In reply to inquiries concerning the course to be taken should financial loss result from strict adherence to manual training and industrial programs, White provides the following counsel. "Because difficulties arise, we are not to drop the industries that have taken hold of as branches of education." (White, 1948) In other words, Seventh-day Adventist schools must not – under any circumstance – dissolve the physical labor component of the general education curriculum.

On the issue of sports (frequently understood in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as gymnastics, physical amusements, and play) being a substituted for practical labor, Mrs. White states,

Gymnasium exercises . . . were brought in to supply the want of useful physical training, and have become popular with educational institutions; but they are not without drawbacks. . . The manual training connected with our schools, if rightly conducted, will largely take the place of the gymnasium. (White, 1948)

Commenting further on the effect of these games, she writes,

Diligent study is essential, so also is diligent hard work. Play is not essential. Devotion of the physical powers to amusement is not most favorable to a well-balanced mind. If the time employed in physical exercise which, step by step leads on to excess, were used in working in Christ's lines, the blessing of God would rest upon the worker. (White, 1930)

In essence, abstaining from unproductive physical activity (that is strenuous exercise serving no practical purpose) typified as sports and games will result in a sound mental state suitable for missionary service.

Ellen White fervently promoted the teaching of agricultural science in the denomination's schools. In fact, she ranked this field of study among the highest to be obtained and a fundamental prerequisite to the other natural and physical sciences. In a pamphlet entitled *What Shall We Teach?* Mrs. White makes the following statement concerning Adventist education. "Study in agriculture should be the A, B, and C of the education given in our schools. This is the very first work that should be entered upon." White maintains that a deep spiritual lesson is conveyed in the study of agriculture that is essential in character development. The knowledge obtained via this discipline will equip students with the capability to relate the gospel effectively to other minds. She declares,

In the cultivation of the soil the thoughtful worker will find that treasures little dreamed of are opening up before him. . . The constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God's creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character; and the lessons taught prepare the worker to deal more successfully with other minds. (White, 1923)

The overriding purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system is to prepare young people to enter the mission field, regardless of where God may impress them to serve. Necessarily they must have a complete educational experience, so that it will be possible for them to demonstrate the flexibility needed to attend to any given situation. This missionary purpose may account for the balanced educational philosophy shared by both Ellen White and Clarence Barnes. In accordance with this mindset, White says,

In establishing our schools out of the cities, we shall give the students an opportunity to train the muscles to work as well as the brain to think. Students should be taught how to plant, how to gather the harvest, how to build, how to become acceptable missionary workers in practical lines. By their knowledge of useful industries, they will often be enabled to break down prejudice; often they will be able to make themselves so useful that the truth will be recommended by the knowledge they possess. (White, 1913)

It can be deduced that the future success or failure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in large part dependent on the educational philosophy and subsequent curricula implemented in the denomination's venues of learning. Therefore, it is not inconceivable that White would conclude: "Of all our institutions in our world, the school is the most important!" (White, 1923) Consequently, she warns "if its [the denomination's] responsible men seek to reach the world's standard, if they copy the plans and methods of other colleges, the frown of God will be upon our school." (White, 1948)

In his dissertation Barnes concluded that if Oakwood is ever to comply with the educational policy expressed in Ellen White's writings, the curriculum must change.(Barnes, 1982) Consequently, he made a plethora of recommendations such as: the establishment of a Department of Industrial Technology to complement the various academic departments; the appointment of a Dean of Labor with power equal to that of the Academic Dean; the creation of a Department of Agriculture and Agribusiness; the establishment of a sanitarium and retirement home to provide an additional source of employment and training for students; that physical work be made a part of the general education curriculum and required of all students; that the teaching of trades be reintroduced with the requirement that students demonstrate proficiency in at least one; and that the institution strive to become self sufficient in food production – in order to lower its operational costs. (Barnes, 1982)

Despite his passionate appeal for education reform at Oakwood College, there is no evidence indicating that the measures he called for were ever implemented. In 1988, Dr. Barnes resigned from his post as chair of the Department of History and Political Science. Notwithstanding, he continued working as a full-time professor in the Department until his retirement in 1991. ("Profiles," 1991) Dr. Barnes currently resides in Mandeville, Jamaica with his wife Sylvia.

- (1970). Educational leaders' parents celebrate fiftieth anniversary. *Lake Union Herald*, 62(18), 10.
- (1990). Profiles. *Southern Tidings*, 84(7), 9.
- (1991). Profiles. *Southern Tidings*, (June), 9.
- (2010). *Seventh-day adventist church manual*. (18 ed., p. 162). Hagerstown: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
- Barnes, C. (2013, March 11). Interview by S. London.
- Barnes, C. (1982). *Physical work as an integral part of education at oakwood college in light of ellen g. white's writing*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Barnes, R. (1968). Frank I. Peterson school welcomes its new principal. *Lake Region Herald*, 60(45), 9.
- People. (1990). *Oakwood Magazine*, (Summer), 20.
- Roache, J. E. (1964). Lake region welcomes new teachers. *Lake Region Herald*, 56(38), 16.
- White, E. (1954). *Child guidance*. (p. 358). Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- White, E. (1913). *Counsels to parents, teachers, and students*. (p. 211). Brookfield: Pacific Press Association.
- White, E. (1903). *Education*. (p. 220). Brookfield: Pacific Press Association.
- White, E. (1923). *Fundamentals of christian education*. (p. 36). Nashville: Southern Publishing Association.
- White, E. (1930). *Messages to young people*. (p. 179). Hagerstown: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, E. (1948). *Testimonies to the church volume 5*. (p. 523). Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, E. (1948). *Testimonies to the church volume 6*. (p. 176). Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, E. *What shall we teach?* (p. 124). Silver Spring: Ellen G. White Estate.