

Article Title: William John Cannon (1908-1984)

Author Name: Grant Leitma & Angelisa Andrade

William John Cannon, pastor, evangelist, professor, psychologist, author, founder of first psychology degree program for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

William John Cannon was born on September 16, 1908, in Pontypridd, South Wales, Great Britain. As a young man John Cannon took an interest in becoming a colporteur, this may have been inspired by his father who was a literature-evangelist. He attended Stanborough College, described as a diligent and hardworking individual, earning himself three scholarships over the course of one summer while also working simultaneously as a janitor and colporteur. John Cannon graduated with a Ministerial Diploma in 1931. Within that same year, he entered ministerial and evangelistic work as well as marrying his first wife Dorothy Olive Tasker. He continued his studies at Wolsey Hall, Oxford, and earned his F.L.C.Th. degree from the London School of Theology in 1946.<sup>1</sup>

He served as a pastor-evangelist for 19 years in Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> By the 1950s Cannon had built fourteen churches in eight different cities that previously were never entered by Adventists; and being formally recognized as a skilled and enthusiastic pastor. He was then called by George Vandeman to the United States in 1951 to aid in evangelistic meetings that were to occur at Sligo SDA Church in Takoma Park Maryland.<sup>3</sup> By 1953 John Cannon became senior pastor at the Capital Memorial church in Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup>

John Cannon would continue with his education by obtaining his M.A. and B.D. divinity degrees in 1954 and 1956 respectively from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Takoma Park, Maryland. Then in 1959 he would earn his Ph.D. from American University. He taught a few ministerial classes at Potomac University (1954-1960) when it was associated with the SDA church seminary and graduate school. This educational facility was later moved to the campus of Emmanuel Missionary College now known as Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan in 1959.

John Cannon started his academic career at Columbia Union College (CUC) as an Associate Professor of Religion and Psychology in 1960. John Cannon would become the first instructor at CUC to have earned a Ph.D. for psychology. He maintained a part-time clinical practice at a local medical building and later moved it to his home office. His academic, clinical, and ministerial experiences plus his doctoral degree would earn him the rank of Professor of Psychology at CUC by 1964. During his tenure at CUC, he would serve as chair of the Department of Psychology for ten years between 1961-1971 and again from 1976 to 1981.

In September of 1969 Dr. Cannon would mourn the loss of his first wife.<sup>5</sup> He would marry again in 1971 to Lois Lowery who shared his passion for education and evangelism. Dr. and Mrs. Cannon would host workshops and seminars across the conference on family and marital topics.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Cannon would retire in 1982 but would still work part time within the General Conference.<sup>7</sup> Dr. John Cannon died on August 24, 1984 from complications due to lupus in Takoma Park, Maryland. He was survived by his wife Lois; one daughter, Ruth; six stepchildren; and 14 grandchildren.<sup>8</sup> After Dr. Cannon passed away a psychology library and an annual scholarship was made in dedication to his contributions to psychology in the Seventh Day Adventist Church.<sup>9</sup>

### *Initial Start (1960-1970)*

The most significant development at CUC was the establishment of the first psychology major in 1961 by John Cannon. There was a strong reaction by some within the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist that felt psychology was too closely aligned with Freudian influences, mind control, hypnosis and considered to be a soft pseudoscience. However, John Cannon brought his academic expertise and energy to the college and in 1961 organized the first B.A. in psychology in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. John Cannon became the chair of the new Department of Behavioral Sciences in 1962. This was the first important step toward a full-fledged psychology program. Believing the reputation and strength of the psychology program depended on a well-trained and knowledgeable personnel, he recruited Elden Chalmers, Ph.D., and Robert Schwindt, M.A. to the psychology faculty by 1966. That same year John Cannon began to urge upon the CUC Board to consider developing a MA psychology degree at CUC. According to Cannon, "Adventist approach in this area is quite different in many respects from other schools. It takes the concentration of a master's program to adequately develop this. There are no Adventist schools in the world to which our students may apply."<sup>10</sup> He felt that "Andrews University does envisage such a degree but at this point are unable to make it professionally acceptable since they do not offer an undergraduate major in psychology, a sociologist is directing the program and its multi-disciplinary approach and not dedicated for psychology."<sup>11</sup> Dr. John Cannon's desire for a fully dedicated Department of Psychology finally arrived, sadly in February of that same year the infamous Columbia Hall fire occurred destroying numerous documents and books owned by Dr. Cannon.<sup>12</sup>

It would take another 39 years until an M.A. degree in professional counseling psychology would start in 2009 at the now Washington Adventist University. The current M.A. Counseling program would fulfill Cannon's dream for a psychology graduate program that would promote sound concepts in harmony with the Spirit of Prophecy and the Bible.

### *Later Years (1970-1984)*

Recognizing the need to educate the church about the value of studying psychology from a Christian approach, Cannon took a leave of absence from the Department of Psychology from 1971 to 1976 and joined the General Conference Education Department as an Associate Secretary. He spent those five years compiling and organizing psychological topics found in the Spirit of Prophecy writings at the Ellen G. White Estate in Takoma Park, Maryland. All this was

done without the modern benefit of today's modern personal computer. The result was the 1977 publication of the two-volume set of *Mind, Character, and Personality (MCP)*, a work many psychologists consider to be a major development toward integrating the Christian faith and the academic discipline of psychology. Consequently, many Seventh-day Adventist schools now have the opportunity to use MCP to integrate faith and learning and promote the correct understanding of psychology and the Bible.

During the 1970's Dr. Cannon strengthened the practical application of psychology by being a frequent speaker at Family Life seminars held throughout the Columbia Union and contributed many articles for the *Adventist Review*. He published many relevant articles in the *Adventist Review* such as: *Importance of Fathers at Home*, *Building Better Homes*, *Adventist Home and Education*, *Early Home Influences*, *Preparing for Marriage*, *NAD Family Ministerial Conference*, and a seven-part series on *Happiness at Home*.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Cannon is best remembered as the individual who established the first psychology degree in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination at CUC and compiled the *Spirit of Prophecy* statements for the two-volume set of *Mind, Character, and Personality* published by the Board of Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate.

#### Sources:

1. Keough, A., Obituaries. *Messenger*, 89(23/24), 15. November 16, 1984
2. Obituaries. *Visitor*, 14. December 1, 1984
3. Buck, E.A. *Derby's Dream Come True*. *British Advent Messenger*, 56(11), June 1, 1951
4. M. Kathryn Kavanaugh, *News Notes*. *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 26, 1953
5. *Columbia Union Visitor*, 74(24), November 28, 1969
6. Lindsay, H., *The John Cannons Speak at Hyattsville, Bladensburg*. *Columbia Union Visitor*, May 8, 1975
7. *Madison Survey*, 67(1), January-March, 1985
8. *Bulletin Board Obituary*, *Adventist Review*, October 16, 1984.
9. Suddarth, B.H., *Social Science Library is Dedicated*. *Visitor*, November 15, 1985
10. Cannon, John., *Proposition for Graduate Program in Psychology*, Columbia Union College, May, 1966
11. Cannon, John., *Proposition for Graduate Program in Psychology*, Columbia Union College, May, 1966
12. *Columbia Hall Burns*. *Columbia Union Visitor*, March 19, 1970
13. White, James Library, *Seventh-day Adventist Periodical Index*, Updated August, 2018.