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EDITORIAL

C. GARLAND DULAN

Adventist education functions within a global context of overwhelming challenge and undiminished commitment.

Consider the challenges first: As of 2009, the church operated 7,647 schools; 157 colleges, universities, and worker-training institutions; and enrolled 1.67 million students around the world.¹ For the most part, the system is funded from tuition and the church's limited funds, and does not take public funds as do most other educational systems. The curricular challenge of Adventist education lies in its commitment to a wholistic education, a stand that places on the teachers a peculiar burden to integrate Christian faith and learning. In addition, the increasing non-Adventist enrollment in church-operated schools, while providing an opportunity for missions, increases the burdens of the first two challenges, and to that extent can diminish the "Adventist-ness" of the education offered to church members' children.

Despite these challenges, Adventist education continues to maintain its undiminished commitment and hopeful future. From a little village school in Banepa on the Himalayan slopes of Nepal to the 8,054 students enrolled in Brazil Adventist University, Adventist education stands for quality spiritual maturity

The Uniqueness of Adventist Education

that ensures its certainty for the present and its dreams for the future.

What makes Adventist education so stable, and so unique? I suggest seven elements:

1. Its unifying mission. Adventist schools have a common mission and purpose: to communicate to all peoples the everlasting gospel of God's love as revealed in the life, death, resurrection, and high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ² and to restore human beings into the image of their Maker.³ Coupled with this mission is a Christ-centered educational philosophy that defines the quest of reality, truth, and ethics that shapes the teaching processes and course content. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature.

2. Its whole-person development within a framework of faith. Other educational systems offer excellent academic programs, have wonderful resources, and have achieved high levels of prestige. But the uniqueness of Adventist education is located in its wholistic framework—the harmonious balance between the spiritual, mental, social, physical, and moral dimensions of learning.

3. Its faith perspective. Because of our belief that knowledge and truth come from God's revelation, Adventists hold that truth is absolute and unchanging, and the reference point

of knowledge is God. Hence, “if you listen to the words of God and search for understanding and knowledge, you will be given wisdom and discernment; because these come only from the Lord.”⁴

4. Its academic excellence. Embracing a faith perspective does not undermine academic excellence. The Christian doctrine that God created humans in His image (Genesis 1:26), includes the idea that God has shared with human beings His creativity, and implies that they possess a capacity for rationality. The goal of honoring their Creator and Redeemer means that Christians are held to a higher standard than secular educators and researchers. Says Ellen White: “All who engage in the acquisition of knowledge should strive to reach the highest round of the ladder. Let students advance as fast and as far as they can; let the field of their study be as broad as their powers can compass.”⁵

5. Its emphasis on moral and ethical values. Adventist education’s core values demand student outcomes that are broader and deeper than simply achieving academic excellence. Character development, integrity, knowing and practicing right from wrong are critical to Christian living and preparation for God’s kingdom.

Ellen White’s statement is foundational to Adventist understanding of character development: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”⁶

6. Its emphasis on service as a vital component of academic life. In an Adventist school, curriculum does not stand alone. It goes hand in hand with unselfish service to God and humanity. Students are encouraged to serve while still in school, with many provided opportunities for international relief efforts and for local community service

7. Its enduring anchor is God. Students who pass through Adventist portals of education learn that God is the sure and certain anchor in life. They discover that the strongest and most reliable currency in life is not gold or silver, not dollar or euro, but an unshakeable, enduring trust in God and responsibility to Him. They learn to “trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6, KJV).

As long as these seven components remain the core of Adventist education, its stability is certain, and its future is full of hope.



C. Garland Dulan is world Director of Education for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

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