




Robert Egbert

Spirituality: RITUALS AND RELATIONSHIPS

 It may seem curious that we are coupling the words *education* and *spirituality* in this special issue. There seems to be a growing movement toward embracing the term *spirituality*, which has more personal and psychological connotations, rather than the term *religion*, which connotes the institutional.

But how does this relate to the goals of Seventh-day Adventist education and its hallmark, the integration of faith and learning? If our schools are to be distinct and “value added,” then it is essential that there be something that sets them apart from all of the others. What is this singular rationale for the existence of our system of education? Presumably it is to share with the next generation the faith we live by and the relationship we have with God, which includes our religious beliefs as defined by the church.

However, genuine spirituality requires more than just teaching doctrine by inserting it into the various disciplines and asking children to “behave in a Christian way.” To effectively teach and model spirituality, we must demonstrate a spiritual lifestyle and provide our students with experiences that enhance their spiritual growth—and that lead to a life of personal joy and fulfillment, as well as a commitment to serve God and humanity.

A case in point is the children of many people reading this guest editorial, who attended Adventist schools K-12 or even K-20, but after growing up, came to view the church and its beliefs in very different ways as adults. Many of them now shun anything labeled religious or spiritual, even though they attended Adventist schools during a period when the teachers sought to integrate faith and learning in their classrooms.

These young adults say that church is irrelevant and offers nothing that is meaningful to them. If our schools had helped them to develop a personal connection, a relationship with the spiritual, a depth of meaning that would allow them to feel the need, the love, and a sense of hope for their lives, then perhaps the body of Christ would not continue to experience the loss of young people who choose not to stay connected. I’m not blaming our schools for this problem; it seems to be a chronic part of how young people see our faith lived out at home and church as well.

This is not an easy discourse because the definitional and practical edges are blurry. What is spirituality? How do people acquire an interest in spiritual things and live a spiritual life? The description of spirituality seen in most of the literature reflects values and practices many Adventists view as dangerous, even mystical. It is difficult to separate religiosity and spirituality, although research is searching for common denominators between the two. Both spirituality and religion seek the sacred, and both participate in creating the doctrine, beliefs, and rituals that bind believers to religious organizations and to one another. It would seem that one cannot exist without the other. However, it also seems that in many cases, the emphasis has been on ensuring young people’s indoctrination into the church’s doctrines and rules, which has often come at the expense of emphasis on helping them to develop a vibrant relationship with God.

It is the hope and prayer of the coordinator, authors, and Editor that this issue will renew the vigor of teaching to ensure the distinctiveness of our schools, create in our students the desire for a personal relationship with God, and help teachers to make spirituality attractive and meaningful for their students.

One of the best ways for this to happen is through observational learning. Albert Bandura’s research shows that we learn to do what we see and experience. The teacher must model and teach how to have a spiritual relationship with God. Spiritual development is a process of transcending to something greater than ourselves. It propels us to search for connectedness with God, purpose in life, and meaning through service. Romans 8:6 (last part) states that to be spiritually minded is life and peace. What a gift to share with our students—to help them embrace Jesus as their Friend and Savior, and to seek His guidance in choosing the best paths throughout their lives.

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