

# Religious Potential

## Can We Expect Spirituality in Our Students?

By Edwin Gallagher

**E**dward VI was only ten years old when he came to the throne of England in 1547. He died at the age of 16, but during those youthful years he had become skilled in languages and the sciences. He knew all about fortifications, the Mint, and the harbors. He often took notes in Greek so those around him wouldn't know what he was writing. However, he was no intellectual snob. Merciful to the poor, faithful in business dealings, he possessed a tender conscience inspired by the love of God.

Through teachers' eyes, teenagers often appear to be as far removed from the potential of Edward VI as the twentieth century is from the sixteenth. There is sometimes little evidence of the present school-age generation's being much more than thrill-oriented, disinterested, careless, unthinking. We ourselves, of course, were far closer to Edward VI in *our* school days. Not quite as skilled as he, to be sure, but we remember ourselves as being studious, eager for knowledge, striving for excellence. That's why we have become successful in our work, after all. This art of selective recall sustains our self-image, enabling us to forget that in fact we can never see ourselves quite as our teachers saw us, and that we owe an enormous debt to those teachers

who believed in us against the odds.

A glance at the successful people in the Bible indicates that many such youths had parents or some other parent figure who, though perhaps seeing the worst, expected the best. Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, the disciples, and Timothy all enjoyed the powerful love-force of an elder who *believed* in them, who discerned potential through weakness. Those who read the history of the Israelite kings are usually struck by how frequently there is an alternation of good and bad monarchs. Could it be that some of the good kings became so "good" that disgust at their children's faults superceded encouragement of their strengths? Could it be that some of the bad kings, being much disgusted with themselves, learned to rely on the strengths of their children and to hope constantly for *their* success? Perhaps we need a measure of self-disgust, a certain sense of our own inadequacy before God, if that is what it takes to make us perceive potential rather than fault in our students.

The spiritual dynamics of teacher-student relations apply in every classroom and are of special concern to the Bible instructor. Dealing overtly with the divine-human relationship, the Bible teacher has an enormous opportunity to impart to students the ideas of spiritual success or spiritual failure. Out-of-classroom contacts hold

similar opportunities for every teacher.

Adults are inclined to think in terms of "giving the young people a few years," of "letting them grow up a little," before expecting spiritual lessons and impressions to have an effect. In the social-cultural-intellectual area as a whole, youth is the time of greatest sensitivity and formation. Surely spiritual influences should be no less significant. With the power of the Holy Spirit added to normal teen-age sensitivity, we must conclude that it is "in youth that the statutes and commandments of God are *most easily* inscribed on the . . . soul."<sup>1</sup>

How shall we approach this opportunity? Teachers and par-

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**Out-of-classroom contacts can provide opportunities for teachers to impart ideas about spiritual success.**

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ents are usually aware that most of what settles into a young person's mind can be identified more in terms of feelings, attitudes, and perceptions than in rational conceptualization. In general I find my students more ready to express their emotions about certain things than to explain or analyze those things intellectually. After a test covering a unit of study, facts and details are quickly forgotten; only impressions remain. Is this a failing or deficiency? I think not. First, it is more of a *human* characteristic than an exclusively youthful tendency; second, feelings and attitudes are *conditioned* or *modified* by the process of intellectual analysis and instruction. These are both learning domains and may be employed to complement each other for balanced growth.

The practical outcome of this is that although emotional expression may predominate among students, the teacher's job is *not* just to be there, "loving" the students, imparting nice feelings, and creating good vibrations. Perceptions, attitudes, and feelings must have a firm base, or they will be as easily molded by evil as by good. That firm base must derive to a large degree from intellectual understanding. The Master Teacher, Jesus, not only went around showing genuine love and kindness; He also spent a great deal of time teaching the truth and exposing error in a decidedly intellectual (though not snobbish or complicated) manner.

Max Rafferty, in his analysis of the Summerhill experiment, wrote: "The aim of education is to give young people the intellectual tools which the race over the centuries has found indispensable in the pursuit of

truth." The goal, he says, "is the equipping of the individual with the arsenal he will need throughout life in his combat against the forces of error. Happiness is a byproduct of education, not its be-all and end-all. Education does not guarantee happiness. It merely enables one to be more discriminating in its quest."<sup>2</sup>

It is possible, of course, to make that quest dull and boring by overintellectualization, ignoring the affective learning area. The feelings and emotions of students are not antagonistic to intellectual growth. Our students, like ourselves, are *feeling* people, emotional human beings. Feelings may be wrongly founded or expressed, but the solution is not to crush feelings.

The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments. By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged and a hard heart is no infallible protection against a soft head.<sup>1</sup>

The emotional and intellectual sensitivity of young people is the very opportunity and challenge the Christian teacher needs. There is immeasurable *spiritual* potential to be derived from this sensitivity. To deny this potential because of youthful fault or folly is to yield the potential to the adversary of souls.

The application to classroom teaching is expressed in a grandiose but challenging way by Rafferty:

The educator should approach his class not as the chemist appraises his retorts nor the astronomer his nebulae but rather as the conductor confronts his symphony orchestra. . . . There is a mingling of moods, an elusive interplay of spiritual counterpoint implicit in the teaching process which marks the closest human approach to the phenomenon of symbiosis. In its highest form it approximates creation. . . . We must train our teachers as a sculptor is trained, not a physicist. They must think like poets, not like statisticians. For they are dealing not with things like

the chemists, nor with bodies like the physicians, not yet with minds alone like the psychologists. To them is reserved the splendid privilege of fashioning and nurturing those coruscating and iridescent entities called personalities, transient as glancing sunbeams but more lasting than the granite of our hills. It is at once the most precious and most dangerous duty entrusted by mankind to men.<sup>4</sup>

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1958), Book 1, p. 318. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>2</sup> Max Rafferty, in *Summerhill: For and Against* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 10-25.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Rafferty, *Op. cit.*

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## The Academy Principalship Today

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Less than half of the principals reported membership in the Association of SDA Educators, which was established in 1970 to serve as an umbrella group for various SDA educational associations. It was impossible to determine if more than half of the principals really did not belong to any SDA professional organization, or whether they did not understand that the group(s) to which they belonged were part of the association.

### Professional Growth Activities

The 1980 principals participated in a variety of professional growth activities. Between 1975 and 1980 more than half attended SDA educational meetings, took professional courses, participated in special conferences or workshops, attended national educational meetings (e.g., NASSP), and presented educational talks to civic or professional groups. In terms of regularity of reading and the perceived importance of professional journals, 1980 principals relied most heavily on the *NASSP Bulletin*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION*, *Educational Leadership*, and *Educa-*