

WHAT'S UNIQUE

ABOUT ADVENTIST EDUCATION

By JOHN M. FOWLER

Seventh-day Adventists often define education as a harmonious development of the physical, mental, and spiritual faculties. We not only take pride in this definition, but also tend to assert that it was originated by and is unique to us.

This is simply not true. The definition of a balanced concept of education did not begin with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is as old as the human quest for knowledge.

Socrates, in dialoguing with his followers, stressed that education must

promote the balanced development of the hand, the head, and the heart. To accomplish this goal, Plato and others who systematized Socrates' thought, developed a very intricate system of education: complex gymnastic and athletic programs; continuing emphasis on logic, philosophy, and mathematics—in the quest for knowing eternal truth; and a kind of religious experience that seemed to build a workable mean between the unknowable God and the known experience of humanity. This gave way to the school of humanism that has plagued—or challenged—humankind ever since.

In the East as well, from ancient times, education has meant to care for the body, the mind, and the soul. Sometimes this involved the denial of the body; at other times, a celebration of the body. In the Hindu concept of education the mind takes preeminence. Often the distinction between the mind and the soul is only peripheral. The mind and the soul play and interplay in the *Vedas* (the most ancient sacred literature of the Hindus); the gods and the mortals keep their eternal dialogue in the *Gita* (pronounced "Geeta," the supreme devotional scripture of Hindu India); thus

giving us a concept of education that takes into account body, mind, and soul.

Even nonreligious educators have stressed the need for a balanced education. The stress on development, balance, and purposiveness has always been there. A look at the trends of our own time discloses that secular authorities recognize the need for the growth of body, mind, and spirit within the parameters of an acceptable educational program.

So let us dismiss the notion that the Seventh-day Adventist definition of education as the harmonious development of the essential three areas of human experience is something original or unique.

But yet, in a sense we do have a right to claim originality. In light of what we have said above, how can this be so?

I believe that our concept of education is unique not because it calls for balanced development, but because it *shows how this can be accomplished.*

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It is not the *goal* that contributes to our uniqueness—that goal is proclaimed from the hilltops by every humpty-dumpty in the history and practice of education. What is unique to the Seventh-day Adventist concept of education is the *means* by which ultimate balance and complete development can be achieved by the pupil within the educational system.

Means. That's the magic word. The Greeks said, "Sharpen your brains; get yourself the sword of reason, and then you can cut down every hinderance to

your progress. Think, and you will be the master of your body, mind, and soul."

The Romans said, "You need law, order, and civilization. Given the right environment, the seed of development is sure to produce the desired crop of fulfillment."

The humanist would say, "What are you talking about? The seed is within you. Every person has all the potential of growth inside himself. Discover it and use it. The mountains tremble as you reach for the skies."

These and other voices dominate the world. Educational systems have taken one or a mixture of several in their search for a balanced education.

Seventh-day Adventists have said No to such philosophic babble. In formulating an effective philosophy of education that would give them the desired balance and harmony, they did not look to a system, pattern, or school of education. They did not search for the oasis of identity in the

desert of history. Instead, Seventh-day Adventists look to a *Person*, and find in Him the integrating factor of their educational system.

That Man is not a fiction; He is real. He is not an accident; He is the answer. He said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." In that truth, in that way, in that life, Seventh-day Adventists discovered not only their central purpose for existence, but also their basis for mission, ministry, and hope.

One of His followers introduced Him to us as "the Word" by whom all things were created. The Creator in the classroom. Adventists must stress that in their education.

Jesus is also the Liberator. The One who freed human beings from superstition, fear, hunger, injustice, social oppression, and above all, sin. With that Liberator as the fountainhead of all education, what else could one need or desire?

No wonder Seventh-day Adventists do not refer to a liberal education as the solution of society's ills. Others may, but we cannot. For others, a liberal education is the key to balance and growth. They believe providing a wide variety of knowledge covering a broad spectrum of educational concerns will produce people well-

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equipped for the demands of modern life.

Seventh-day Adventists also seek that spectrum; but they do not stop at a liberal education—they stress a *liberating* education: liberating the body from the clutches of sin through our health message, liberating the mind from the limitations of human perception and bias through a study of the science of redemption, and liberating

the spirit from the preoccupations of everyday life through our emphasis on sanctification and witness.

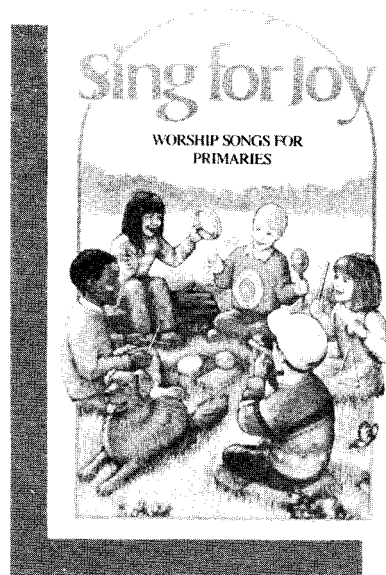
The Liberator and the liberating education—this is the spiritual dimension of education, the factor that distinguishes our philosophy of harmonious development from other approaches. Hence we should ask ourselves several questions:

1. Is the Liberator the all-pervasive force in our educational system?
2. Is the Word of the Liberator—the Bible—integral to the teaching and curriculum of our classrooms?
3. Do we project a liberating education in the activities of our schools—in the dormitories, classrooms, teacher-student relationships, the curriculum, ethics, and culture?

The SDA educational system is under siege today; the battle lines have been drawn; the issues have been defined. Its success or failure depends upon its faithfulness to the Man who has given us the ministry of teaching. In Him we find the spiritual dimension of our education. "Into His likeness" must ever be our supreme objective. □

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