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What Makes a School Adventist?

HUMBERTO M. RASI

Someone wittily defined a school as “a building with four walls and tomorrow inside.” This highlights education’s formative role and its powerful impact on the future of society. We can expand the definition by stating that a school, college, or university is a community of learners who come together to discover and cultivate their talents in order to know their purpose in life.

Most Christian educators would subscribe to that description, adding a religious dimension. What sets apart Seventh-day Adventist education from other systems? What can we provide to students in this complex, deeply troubled world?

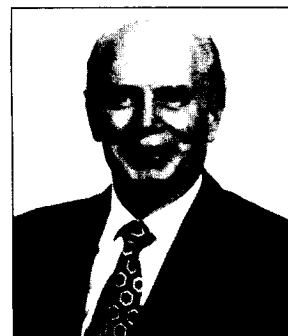
The following factors can help us focus on the primary and unique features of our approach to education.

God. Adventist education’s fundamental premise is this: God exists and is the source of all true knowledge. He created and sustains everything in the universe, including the students who come to our schools. Because each of them is unique and endowed with inalienable dignity, teachers treat them with respect and courtesy. And since humility before God is the beginning of authentic wisdom, grateful acknowledgment of His goodness and power is an integral part of school life. Together, teachers and students learn how to understand the vast complexity of the cosmos from the perspective of the Creator, who invites us to discover and to invent. And since God is perfect, we seek excellence in all we do.

The Bible. As the revealed and authoritative Word of God, the Scriptures provide the basis for the Christian worldview to be conveyed to students and the framework for all our teaching. Indeed, we first believe in order to understand. Bible study, therefore, is integral to every discipline. In the Scriptures, we find God’s character revealed, as well as His guidance for our daily life. Since both creation and the Scriptures share the same Author, there is an underlying harmony between them, which is reflected in a unified school curriculum. Faith and knowledge come together on the Adventist campus.

Christ. Although created in the image of God, both teachers and students are fallen beings in need of salvation and restoration. Human brokenness is reflected in our ways of being, thinking, and doing. Left to our own resources, we are lost and destined to oblivion. But God came to our rescue through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who invites us to accept Him not only as Saviour, but also as our model and friend. God’s grace is reflected in how students and

Humberto M. Rasi



teachers relate to one another on campus, including the discipline of those who err. Through Christ, we can achieve a harmonious relationship with the Lord, our selves, our fellow human beings, and our earthly home.

Wholeness. God created human beings as integrated units of mind, spirit, and body. True education involves the balanced development of these dimensions through study and worship, work and recreation, within the context of wholesome human relationships. Learning to acquire a healthy lifestyle and a positive outlook on life form an essential part of our curriculum. Thus, Adventist education is both theoretical and practical, conceptual and applied, as it prepares students for a useful life that reflects their individual calling in the world.

Character. At Creation, God endowed human beings with His divine image, which includes the power of choice. We exercise this freedom within a cosmic controversy between good and evil, truth and falsehood. True education teaches students to make decisions based on informed moral principles and permanent values, regardless of the circumstances. Thus, our campuses offer the

Together, teachers and students learn how to understand the vast complexity of the cosmos from the perspective of the Creator, who invites us to discover and to invent.

ideal setting to examine safely the deepest questions about life's meaning, purpose, and destiny. Together, teachers and students seek the Holy Spirit's wisdom in learning what God wants done in and through us.

Service. God created us to live in a loving relationship with our fellow human beings, but our fallenness makes us naturally selfish. To love as God does means to plan and act for the benefit of others. True education prepares students to enjoy serving others through their talents and vocations. The practice begins in school, as they learn to

bring hope to others and to lessen the suffering in this world.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the 12th-century monastic reformer, wrote: "Some seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity; others seek knowledge that they may themselves be known: that is vanity; but there are still others who seek knowledge in order to serve and edify others, and that is charity."

Eternity. The Bible depicts as the culmination of human history Jesus' return to this earth, an event that will forever end alienation and sin. Adventist education conveys to students our shared religious history, along with a sense of anticipation. It also prepares them to apply this heritage of thought and practice to the realities in which they will live and work. Students and teachers are immersed in the great moral issues of our time as they prepare for the promised New Earth, where throughout eternity, they will explore the entire universe under the tutelage of the Master Teacher.

Adventists share with other Christian educators some of these features, but our integrated approach to learning makes it distinctive and uniquely valuable as our world enters a new century. ☞

Picture
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The General Conference Department of Education staff, March 2000: Front row, left to right: John Fowler, Associate Director; Humberto Rasi, Director; Enrique Becerra, Associate Director; and Garland Dulan, Associate Director. Back row, left to right: Beverly Robinson-Rumble, Editor, *Journal of Adventist Education*; Linda Torske, Secretary to Enrique Becerra and Garland Dulan; Chandra Cooke, Secretary to Beverly Robinson-Rumble and John Fowler; and Silvia Sicalo, Secretary to Humberto Rasi.