

Adventist Schools DO Make a Difference!

From the two *Valuegenesis* surveys, we've learned a great deal about faith, loyalty, orthodoxy, and what seems to work best in helping our young people make commitments to God and to live their faith.

In 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Church explored faith, values, and commitment in Adventist schools. *Valuegenesis*¹ provided us with insights and a base line for future research. More than 12,000 youth in Adventist schools responded to that first study. More recently, *Valuegenesis*², with more than 18,000 respondents across North America, gives us a hint at the change and progress we have in nurturing a rich and growing faith life among the children and youth in Adventist schools.

Christian schools have always provided a line of defense against the negative inroads of society as it attempts to mold the values of youth. America's 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, said, "To educate a child in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."¹

From the two *Valuegenesis* surveys, we've learned a great deal about faith, loyalty, orthodoxy, and what seems to work best in helping our young people make commitments to God and to live their faith. Let's explore the areas that have contributed to changes during the past decade.

A Different Generation

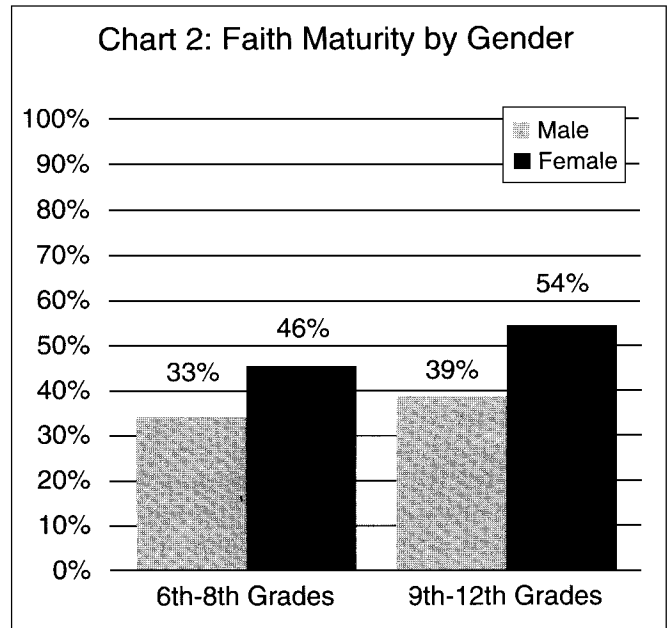
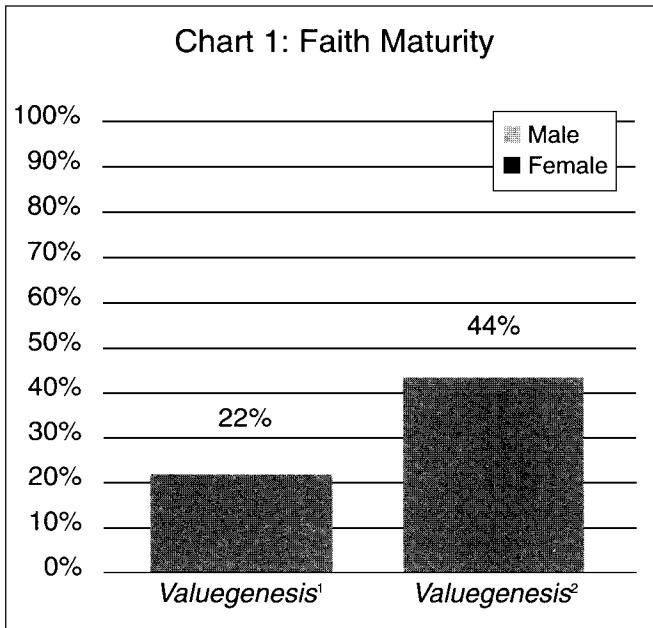
First, *Valuegenesis*² looked at a different group of young people. In 1990, we looked at what is now Generation X. Now, we have a portrait of the Millennial Kids. They have been called Generation Y. The *Valuegenesis*² data sets have given us a clearer picture of this unique group. Here is a summary of some of their characteristics, beliefs, and commitments that we have discovered in our most recent research.

By V. Bailey Gillespie

1. This generation (in grades 6-12 in Adventist schools) is more spiritual than their counterparts in our earlier study—they are more deeply committed to Jesus, a greater percentage feel the need of prayer, and most think they will still be Adventists when they are 40 years old.

2. They spend more time in prayer and attend church more frequently than those in our earlier study.

3. They have a significantly more mature faith, with a balance between a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with the world around them (44 percent of participants in *Valuegenesis*² had a mature



faith, compared with 22 percent in *Valuegenesis*¹).

4. The young people in this generation see their church as more friendly, warm, and interesting than the earlier group we surveyed.

5. This generation has family worship at about the same rates as those who participated in *Valuegenesis*¹. Both in 1990 and in 2000, an average of 48 percent participated in family devotional activities. This continues to be a significant factor in building rich, growing faith life.

6. This generation has a clearer understanding of salvation and is more committed to a relationship with Christ. Their insight into God’s grace grows as they mature, while at the same time, their belief that behavior saves them diminishes.

7. The *Valuegenesis*² survey respondents are committed to the high standards of the church, especially those that deal with healthful living and drug abuse, as well as traditional Adventist beliefs such as Sabbathkeeping, morality, and avoiding at-risk behavior.

8. They are significantly orthodox in almost all areas of Adventist theology, responding that they “definitely believe” almost all of the doctrines included in the 27 basic beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Let’s look more closely at four areas of improvement—the Faith Maturity; Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religion; Religious Piety; and Loyalty, Grace, and Works. This may help us to understand why there has been such a change and what Adventist schools can do to nurture greater growth and commitment to God and loyalty to the Adventist message.

Mature Faith

We found a number of evidences of a growing faith in this generation. The Index provides a close look at how faith is formulated. It scores both spiritual and devotional life, as well as response to that commitment in the lives of youth as they relate to others in witness and social issues. Comparing these items to the results of the previous survey, we see evidence of significant change. (See Charts 1 and 2.)

There has been 100 percent improvement in the past decade in mature faith. In order to measure this area, the *Valuegenesis*² team asked questions relating to the formation of a “mature faith”—that is, a deep, personal relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others.² Adventist schools have helped to bring about a powerful improvement in the balanced faith life in their students.³

Survey Question: “Once a week or more”	Valuegenesis ¹	Valuegenesis ²
Prayer, other than at church or before meals	54%	72%
Family worship	49%	48%
Watch/listen to religious programming	19%	25%
Read the Bible	39%	29%
Read Ellen G. White’s writings	13%	6%

This conceptual scheme does not measure only right beliefs, although it does include this concern. Instead, the team looked more at a way of life, a set of priorities, disposition, and behaviors that reveal whether faith is deep, vibrant, and life-changing. People of mature faith integrate eight core dimensions of faith into their lives. These include: (1) trusting in God's saving grace and believing firmly that Jesus Christ is both divine and human; (2) experiencing a sense of well-being, security, and peace because of their connection with Christ; (3) integrating their faith into their lives; (4) seeking spiritual growth through commitment, devotion, and discussion; (5) being part of a community of believers (church) who give witness to their faith; (6) holding life-affirming values and standards, including commitment to racial and gender equality; (7) advocating social and global change to bring about justice in the world; and (8) serving others—consistently and personally, through acts of love and care.⁴ Since *Valuegenesis*¹, there have been significant improvements in every area of the faith maturity index. And, consistent with other national research regarding religious experience, girls have higher faith maturity than boys. This suggests

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that extra effort should be made to explore ways that boys can live their religion and experience faith.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religion

One unique measure in the most recent research is that of the Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious scales (I/E scales). This measurement, routinely used in religious research, helps define our understanding of religious experience. First, a definition: The intrinsic religious person "lives" his or her

religion, in contrast to the extrinsic person, who typically "uses" religion. Extrinsic religion is often defined as turning to God without a turning away from self. It often describes a person who is prejudiced and dogmatic, has low self-esteem, and often suffers from poor psychological functioning. By contrast, intrinsically religious people are more open and have a deep devotional or spiritual approach to their religious life and world. So we were eager to see the results of using this scale to measure Adventist students. Chart 3 shows the results from grades 9 through 12 in the area of intrinsic and extrinsic religious worldview.

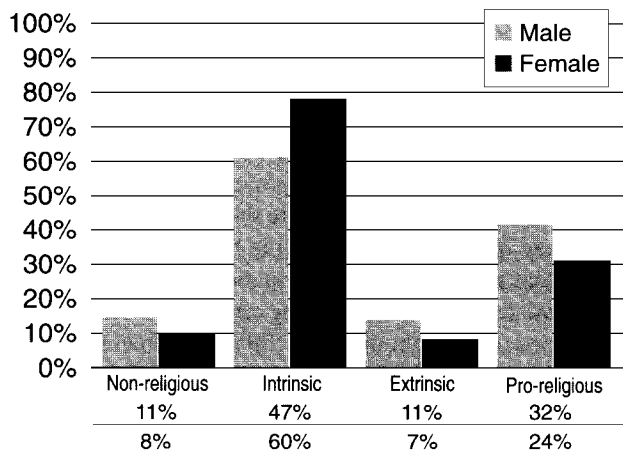
Notice that more than 60 percent of the girls in our study had an intrinsic religious worldview, with only 7 percent of them having an extrinsic orientation. In addition, some 32 percent of the boys and 24 percent of the girls had a pro-religious attitude toward life. While their attitudes do not yet reach the intrinsic level, they are open to being influenced by positive environments and approaches. This emphasizes the "mission field" that we have in our schools and among our youth in the church. Our schools have helped nurture a positive religious outlook in a majority of both boys and girls.

Religious Piety and Loyalty

*Valuegenesis*² suggests that this generation is more religious than the one we surveyed in 1990. When we examined some issues relating to personal piety, we discovered that there have been improvements in Adventist students in our schools with regard to their personal devotional lives. For example, the results in the area of personal piety are more positive than in our previous study.

Although there have been increases in the areas of personal spiritual life, when it comes to reading the Bible and exploring Ellen G. White's writings, there has been a falling off in the percentages over time. Perhaps this is due to today's more media-

Chart 3: Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religion by Gender



Survey Question	Valuegenesis ¹	Valuegenesis ²
To be saved, I have to live by God's rules.	85%	74%
The gift of salvation is free, yet you must keep the law to be worthy to receive it.	65%	53%
The way to be accepted by God is to sincerely try to live a good life.	72%	45%

oriented generation having little interest in reading; however, this has significant implications for the church. If we believe that understanding God's will comes through exposure to His messages to us in Scripture and that Ellen G. White's writings provide special insight into Christian living and thought, then we must take steps to increase the percentages of students who read these materials over the next few years.

While this is only one scale in the personal religious life of youth, it does reflect important findings with the potential for a long-term impact on the church. On the positive side, other scales that indicate involvement and loyalty to the church are stronger than a decade ago, so the overall effect is that this generation is more spiritual. Only four doctrinal beliefs in the total Adventist universe of doctrines fell significantly below the 60 percent "definitely believe" category. They are: definitely believing in Ellen G. White and her prophetic role in the church (42 percent, down from 51 percent in *Valuegenesis*¹); the Adventist Church as the remnant church (27 percent, down from 45 percent in *Valuegenesis*¹); and the sanctuary message of 1844 (47 percent, down from 61 percent in *Valuegenesis*¹).

As you can see, our most recent portrait of Adventist youth in Adventist schools shows them to be more spiritual, but somewhat less Adventist. We should explore ways to instill love and commitment to the church in our youth as they grow toward God. Being a part of a religious community is an important part of understanding the role of religion in one's life.

Grace and Works

One of the most interesting results of the *Valuegenesis*¹ research was in the area of young people's understanding of grace and righteousness by works. Adventist teaching is thoroughly Protestant in this regard. We believe that salvation is by grace alone through the substitutionary life and death of Jesus Christ. We don't do good works to *get* saved; we do them because we *are* saved through Christ's death on the cross and want to re-

spond to this gift.

Our earlier research revealed some confusion about the way grace functions in salvation. Using a rather small scale to explore young people's understanding of salvation, we found that almost 75 percent of the youth surveyed for *Valuegenesis*¹ and many of their parents were confused in this regard. Because of this, the research team of *Valuegenesis*² decided to ask a much larger set of questions about this topic to get a clearer profile of students' beliefs. The results were gratifying, compared to the previous survey:

There had been some criticism about the methodology used in this area in *Valuegenesis*¹. So, to avoid controversy, in constructing *Valuegenesis*², we decided to ask a number of questions that would help clarify this area. We split off some questions into a "Love Scale." The responses show that it is clear to more than 95 percent of the students, in all grades, that God loves them—even when they sin.

The new questions on grace reveal that our students' understanding of God's actions in salvation grows as they progress through the school years. The older they are and the more Adventist schooling they have had, the more clearly they understand God's gift of grace and salvation. In addition, they begin to understand that human beings' good works—which we all want everyone to have—are acts of worship that occur as we internalize God's gift in our hearts. Now, more than half of our students understand grace in a clearer way. That is an increase of more than 25 percent in 10 years. In every question where we asked for clarification regarding God's actions in our salvation, we found that students have a more mature understanding than those participating in our earlier research.

Apparently, focusing on God's grace does not negatively affect students' acceptance of standards. As young people spend more time in Adventist schools, they grow in their understanding of grace. Below are some of the questions in this new scale, with students' responses broken out by grade level.

<i>Survey Question Valuegenesis</i> ²	<i>6th-8th Grades</i>	<i>9th-12th Grades</i>
Salvation is God's free gift to us that we don't deserve and cannot earn.	46%	69%
We can do nothing to deserve God's gift of salvation.	33%	57%
We show we are worthy of being saved by doing good to others.	49%	32%
The gift of salvation is free, yet I must keep the law to be worthy to receive it.	60%	46%
Salvation is God's way of rewarding us for obeying Him.	56%	43%
My good works are a response to God's gift of grace.	33%	65%

What Is Valuegenesis?

In 1990, the North American Division Office of Education completed a major research study called Project Affirmation. This was the beginning of a close look at Adventist education in the 1990s. The church looked at quality, marketing, financing, and religious life.

Valuegenesis was the research component of the Taskforce on Faith, Values, and Commitment. *Valuegenesis*¹ studied more than 13,000 young people in Adventist schools to create a profile and explore what makes a difference in three venues: family, school, and church.

*Valuegenesis*² continued that research 10 years later (in 2000) on a new generation of youth. More than 22,000 questionnaires were sent out to students in grades 6 to 12, with a return of over 75 percent from every union in the North American Division (United States and Canada). A total of 32 conferences assisted in co-sponsoring this research study—again, one of the largest in North America. This article looks at the responses of self-identified Adventists in Adventist schools.

So What's Next?

It is always hard to talk about what “might be.” The research team working on the first book on this research hope that you will be creative in using this data. Here are some questions that may be helpful:

1. What impact should this information have on my teaching?
2. How can I improve emphasis on areas where weaknesses seem to appear?
3. How can our school system continue to encourage both personal piety and church loyalty?
4. How can I incorporate into my daily lessons, worships and school chapels, and in my personal devotions ideas that will both benefit my students and enrich my own spiritual life?

What's Next?

- **Articles.** Watch for insights in the *Adventist Review*, more here in the *Journal of Adventist Education*, and *Ministry* magazine.
- **Ten Years Later.** A new book based on this research, from the John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry at the School of Religion, La Sierra University.
- **Reports.** Asian, African American, Hispanic, Non-Adventist in denominational schools, and a North American Division report will be available soon.
- **Keeping the Faith: A Guidebook for Spiritual Parenting** (with CD-ROM) is now available from AdventSource and the Hancock Center.
- **Valuegenesis² UPDATE.** A bi-monthly newsletter with the latest research finding is available online at www.lasierra.edu/centers/hcyfm/, where you can download PDF files of previous *UPDATES*.

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We hope that you are using the North American Division project *Potentials* for classroom use as you build worship, identity, faith maturity, and other important potentials in your students' lives. This curriculum material was based on the early research of youth in the church.

Watch for more articles and books from the North American Division as well as from the Hancock Center as the months go by. If you are interested in seeing your own local union reports, contact your director of education for copies. Plans are for *Valuegenesis²* to be administered in other parts of the world in the near future.

We hope you are receiving the bimonthly *Valuegenesis² UPDATE*—our newsletter about research based on the *Valuegenesis²* questionnaire. If not, send your E-mail address to us at hcyfm@lasierra.edu, and we will include you in our mailings of the latest information about this research, which you can use in your religious programming. Or you can go to our Web site and download back issues of the *UPDATE*.⁵

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cited in <http://www.americanpresident.org/>.
2. Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992), p. 59.
3. The *Valuegenesis²* research data sets used in this article are from Seventh-day Adventist students in Adventist schools grades 6-12. They were surveyed in 2000, 10 years after *Valuegenesis¹* research.
4. Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Faith in the Balance*, p. 60.
5. Our Web site is <http://www.lasierra.edu/centers/hcyfm/>.