

# Christian Education

By Jerry A. Stevens

The material in the following necessarily brief outline was prepared for a thirty-minute interview on July 23, 1986, when Ken Campbell invited me to appear on his radio talk show, *Christian Lifeline* (KUDY-AM 1280, Spokane, Washington). At the time I was principal of the Spokane Valley Seventh-day Adventist School.

## I. Brief history

Most religious education, from its very beginning in Eden with Adam and Eve, was family-centered, in later times often taking place at the mother's knee. Infidel sentiments, however, crept into these home schools even prior to the Flood.\*

The prophet Samuel (judge of Israel c. 1079–1050 B.C.) was the founder and president of the "schools of the prophets," whose students were called "sons of the prophets." The original two locations were Samuel's hometown of Ramah in Benjamin and at Kirjath-jearim in Judah.

In Elijah's time two more schools were established in the territory of Benjamin at Jericho and at Bethel. Later a fifth and sixth school were added at Samaria in Ephraim and at Gilgal in Benjamin.

### A. Purposes

- (1) To provide a barrier against widespread corruption and idolatry in Israel
- (2) To provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth
- (3) To provide for the future prosperity of Israel by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders, counselors, teachers, and trained youth

### B. Curriculum

- (1) Scriptures (the law of God, with instructions given to Moses)
- (2) Sacred history
- (3) Sacred music
- (4) Hebrew poetry
- (5) Hebrew language
- (6) Devotions, including how to pray, how to have faith, how to follow the Spirit's teachings
- (7) Various industries: husbandry, tilling of the soil, etc. (ignorance of useful labor being considered criminal). In New Testament times, such skills were exemplified in the lives of Jesus as a carpenter and Paul as a tentmaker.

### C. Impacts

- (1) King Saul prophesied under its influence, despite his dogged pursuit of David to take his life, once near Bethel (see 1 Sam. 10:1–16) and later at Ramah (see 1 Sam. 19:18–24).
- (2) On David's character and his monarchy
- (3) On Solomon's early life and reign
- (4) Elijah reestablished the schools following widespread apostasy.
- (5) Elisha fostered their upbuilding.

- (6) Ezra taught in such a school following the Babylonian captivity.
- (7) The Temple school at Jerusalem in Christ's day was imitative of such schools, but had become corrupted.

## II. Origins of public schooling

- A. The Greeks originated the idea of "education for life," which was both student-oriented and unrestricted.
- B. Scotland instituted the first national educational system in the Middle Ages.
- C. In America, compulsory public education existed about 1800 in most of the Colonies, having originated in the Massachusetts Colonies.

## III. Legal implications

The Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution cedes the supreme right to regulate education to the individual states.

The First Amendment reads, in part: "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This guarantees noninterference by the federal government in religious affairs—the famous wall of separation between church and state.

## IV. True education

What about today's church schools? In this day of rampant promiscuity, it is well to examine education in light of eternity. For Christians, the true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. Seventh-day Adventists believe in educating the *whole* person: mind (mental), soul (moral), and body (physical). Nothing short of this approach promotes fullness of character.

The Adventist system of education began in a small way in 1853, with our first informal church school at Buck's Bridge, New York. In 1872, our first denominationally recognized church school opened in Battle Creek, Michigan. We have taken as our pattern, or model, the biblical "schools of the prophets" mentioned earlier.

Crucial to the success of education is a harmony and mutual cooperation existing between home and school. We must be "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9).

## V. Personal note

Public school education, even at the university level, was nearly my undoing:

- a) Reading Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* resulted in my drift into agnosticism.
- b) Reading Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* led to my being sidetracked by the theory of evolution.

Skepticism, agnosticism, secular humanism, and the *theory* of evolution are rampant in public education today. Most public educators seem to be under a spell cast by the secular-minded scientific establishment, which seems to have forgotten that *true science* is but an interpretation of God's handwriting in the natural world. If we are to properly understand science, our thoughts should be directed upward from nature to nature's God.

## VI. Parting words

“The impressions now made upon their [young children’s] developing minds will remain with them all through life. Parents should direct the instruction and training of their children while very young, to the end that they may be Christians.”<sup>†</sup>

### Sources

Ellen G. White, chap. 58, “The Schools of the Prophets,” *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), pp. 592–602.

White, “The Schools of the Prophets,” *Education* (1903), pp. 45–50.

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### Endnotes

\* Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, May 21, 1903.

<sup>†</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 244.