

Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Office of Education

WHY SUPPORT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

A Personal Testimony

By: John M. Fowler

I squeezed myself into the overcrowded bus. With one hand holding a briefcase and the other hanging on to the railing, I was not exactly enjoying the ride that summer afternoon in Bangalore, India, not far from my native village. The driver swung the bus at a sharp corner. I spun with the bus and made a 360 degree turn. In that singular moment, I saw that face so familiar, so distant...and yet not so sure.

Was that my childhood friend, Jaya? I had not seen him for years, ever since we parted ways, he to a local school. I to a distant Adventist school. I was about to call him by name, but time has a way of playing tricks, and I was not sure if he was indeed my friend.

My mind reviewed the distant past, and one flashback solved the identity puzzle. Once we were returning home after a long day of school, and a soccer game, and I pressed the group to walk faster. "I'm hungry," I said. Within moments we heard Jaya's screams. We rushed to find him with a bloody face. He had heard my cry of hunger and decided to do something about it. He sneaked into a road-side bungalow, climbed up a guava tree, stuffed as many guavas as he could in his pockets, and as he was coming with the smile of mission accomplished, the guard saw the intruder and gave him a chase. Jaya ran as fast as he could, jumped over the fence, but fell on barbed wire and cut his cheek. He paid for his adventure with sixteen stitches across his face and a permanent scar.

That's it! Scars! I knew the answer to my identity puzzle. I leaned across and saw the scar on his right cheek. "Jaya," I called out in all excitement, but there was no response. I told him who I was, but he stood like a frozen statue of ice—cold and mean. No smile, no sign of joy in seeing a childhood friend after decades of separation.

The bus was signaling a halt. I told Jaya to get off at the next stop, where we could go to a restaurant, sit across a fine meal, and let all the years gone by set the agenda for our talk. But Jaya shook his head, rushed to exit, suddenly came back to me, thrust something in my hand, and got off the bus, and vanished into the crowd. I looked into my hand, and to my amazement and wonder, I saw my wallet. Sometime between the moment I boarded the bus and the 360 degree turn I made, Jaya had picked my pocket.

That was years ago. But the wonder and the question still lingers with me: Why? Both of us had much in common—same environment, same misfortunes, and same opportunities. But one becomes a pick-pocket and the other a pastor?

I could say, "But for the grace of God, there go I." That would be answer enough, but I had the greatest fortune in my life—God taking me in my mid-teens, as unshaped, wobbly clay, and molding me according to His will. And that took place in the Adventist school I went to as a teenager.

What did Adventist education give to me? Three things.

First, Adventist education made me conscious that I am not an accident here in space and time. I learned in the Adventist school that there is a God who loves me intensely, who has made me in His image, and who wants me to be His own. The reality of God overwhelmed me in the classroom, in the hostels, in the poultry where I worked to earn my fees. When God grasps an individual, He holds him or her for good with tender chords of love and care. Life takes a new turn.

Second, Adventist education made me aware that life has a meaning and a destiny. Within the campus of the Adventist school, I learned that education is more than the mastery of information—be it Bible, English, history, math or science. Education is to be life Jesus, to walk like Him, to relate like Him, to work like Him—and above all to get ready to be with Him. That last dimension—the eschatological dimension—of Christian education provided a destination point in life’s journey, regardless of its many contours.

Third, Adventist education provided me a distinct world view. Before I came to the Adventist school, my world consisted of climbing the professional ladder and living a decent life. But Christian education brought a more holistic world view—I am not alone. Above me and within me is God. Around me are human beings just like me. A vision and mission link us all together, bidding us to march toward a kingdom.

The march toward that kingdom, fellowship with Christ here and in the hereafter, and reaching out and touching another constitute the passion that Christian education provides to more than a million young people today. Supporting such a venture is part of our gospel commission, and a compulsion of Christian stewardship. I do not guarantee that Adventist education can do to all what it did for me, but I do believe having that Adventist advantage can make a lot of difference in the life of the young. That’s reason enough to support Christian education.

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