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Cover Page Footnote
allan W. Freed, Ph.D., is a retired pastor living at Berrien Springs, Michigan. This article is condensed from his dissertation: arthur Whitefield Spalding: a Study of his Life and contributions to Family-Life Education in the Seventh-Day adventist church.

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Introduction

Leadership always occurs in the context of cultural mindsets and expectations. This article describes the work of Arthur W. Spalding, who was the first family-life educator in the Adventist church. Spalding was born into an era described as a “watershed” in domesticity. With the opening of the American frontier in the mid-1800s came the shift from family to individualism. Urbanization, industrialization, expanded travel, and communications eroded the social and material conditions that supported the traditional patriarchal family system.

The American experience glamorized consumption, gratification, and pleasure. The fad was to reject traditional authority, particularly that of the clergy and the marriage system. Robert Sklar reported that the popular movies and novels, which made a “travesty of marriage and women’s virtue,” paved the way for an individualistic obsession with adventure and sex. The birth-control movement which began before 1920 depreciated the link between sexual activity and procreation, modifying the meaning of marriage. Dr. Prince Morrow, MD, stated that wives were more afflicted with venereal disease than prostitutes due to male debauchery. He estimated that 60% of the male population had at one time or another been infected with gonorrhea or syphilis. With the radical transformation of practically every phase of life after the turn of the century, it became clear to some that something must be done to maintain the social, spiritual, and moral health of the family. An extensive movement into child study and parent education emerged in North America, with about 75 organizations involved in family life education.

Spalding’s Personal Background

Arthur Whitefield Spalding was born on January 24, 1877, in Jackson, Michigan. In the same year, his parents, Florence and Solomon Porter
Spaulding, became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was the fourth child in a family of five: Elizabeth, Louisa, Verne, Arthur (Artie), and Solomon, Jr.14

Arthur’s earliest educational exposure came from his mother and older sister Louisa. On Friday evenings his mother habitually read the children’s stories from the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald to her family.15 Because of Arthur’s strong interest in stories, Louisa taught him to read before he reached his fifth birthday.16 The first books Spalding learned to appreciate were the Bible and an early history of the United States that “happily resorted to personal interest material more than to chronology.”17 These early experiences set the course for his methodology of story in history and education. A perusal of Spalding’s literary work shows that he followed this method throughout his career in teaching and writing.18

**Formal and Informal Education**

Through economic necessity, Spalding’s formal education was often interrupted and augmented by informal learning opportunities. These experiences largely shaped his character and the skills he would need for leadership in family life education. Spalding attended public school in Jackson, Michigan, from age seven to ten. At 11 years old, after his parents moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, he became bellboy in the Battle Creek Sanitarium, working ten to twelve hours each day until age 14. On the side, the office secretaries taught him typewriting, and in 1891, he studied shorthand.19

Since Arthur now had stenographic skills, Elder Robert M. Kilgore, superintendent of District No. 2, employed him as his personal secretary. During the following two school terms, he worked part time for Kilgore and acquired another year of education at Graysville Academy as a charter student under Elder G. W. Colcord. Colcord nurtured in Spalding a high regard for grammar.20 Spalding returned to Battle Creek in early 1894 and took college preparation classes. From May 1896 to the summer of 1898, he worked as secretary to Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, MD, occasionally travelling with him throughout the United States.21 In the fall of 1898, Spalding became secretary to the president of Battle Creek College, Edward A. Sutherland. Here he attended classes part time for the next three school terms. By 1901, he had completed nearly three academic years in English, botany, and “the science of education.”22

Although Spalding was baptized at age 15 in Graysville, Tennessee, it was the spiritual revival at Battle Creek College that profoundly affected his life. After 1897, he spoke of his “crusading spirit” and deep interest in Ellen G. White’s writings, especially as they related to his spiritual life and the character development that Christian education was to accomplish.23

While at Battle Creek, he spent countless afternoons outside the city, “in the
woods and fields and swamps, in pursuit of flowers, birds and all natural objects.” Spalding later stated that this aesthetic study of nature stirred his blood and induced a meditative mental attitude that connected him “with a spiritual realm which . . . broadened and deepened with the years.”

**Family Connections**

On June 13, 1899, Arthur W. Spalding and Maud S. Wolcott were married and started their own home at Battle Creek. The stillborn birth of their first child caused them much sorrow. Shortly thereafter, they adopted little Genevieve from the Haskell Memorial Home. Three children were later born to them: Ronald, Winfred, and Elizabeth.

Not only did Spalding show love and support for his immediate family but also for his extended family—caring for his invalid father and sister and opening his home to his mother and Maud’s parents. The experiences of Spalding’s personal life afford a glimpse into his family values. Also, it is clear that his many associations with church leaders as their secretary provided some insight into the inner workings of the church.

**Spalding’s Career as Educator and Writer**

Starting in 1901, Spalding taught two years of commercial courses in the Southern Training School at Graysville, Tennessee. He spent the next two years teaching English foundations from the Bible instead of from the classics while chairing the English Department at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC) in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He also demonstrated his belief in a work/study program by managing the small fruit farm at EMC, working side by side with the students. By now his career had clearly shifted from secretarial work to education and writing. While at Berrien Springs, he wrote *Man of Valor* and published 23 magazine articles and one poem.

In 1906 Spalding moved to Bethel Academy in Marshfield, Wisconsin, to be teacher and principal while ministering to the community's spiritual needs. The Wisconsin Conference of Seventh-day Adventists ordained him to the gospel ministry in 1908.

Early in his life, Spalding pioneered the art of storytelling and practiced on his nephews. Later he studied the subject when books appeared in the libraries and stores. Seeing the value of the story as an educational tool, he incorporated narration into his teaching and writing methodology for religion, history, and nature. He later published some of these stories in *Pioneer Stories*. When he began parent education, storytelling was a large part of his curriculum, and in 1928, he published his own textbook on storytelling.

While at Bethel, Spalding and his staff studied the principles of Christian
education from the writings of Ellen G. White. He published these findings in the Review, stating in various ways that the ideal school must be patterned after the home. He concluded that “the school, in its plans for the training of students, must conform to the plan of the home in the relative number of students, as well as in work.” Without this arrangement, Spalding argued, the teacher is not working for the good of the individual student, but for the mass, and the teachers become not fathers and mothers, but taskmasters.

Spalding held that mass training provided nebulous, uncertain notions of truth and morality. The results of oratory before a congregation or the enthusiasm of a teacher were “nothing more than a temporary stirring of dry bones.” The students must have intimate companionship with their instructors in order to assimilate a practice of truth and morality. This, Spalding maintained, could be done only by the “adoption of home methods.” He implemented what he learned by taking students into his home; his family became their family.

**Spalding’s Focus on Parent Education**

In August 1911, Spalding wrote to W. C. White, “My heart aches for our young people . . . and for parents who need and want to be taught.” Here is an early indication of Spalding’s appreciation for parent education.

We may continue to educate in secular and religious matters in the church school and training school; but unless we look into the home life we shall fail to find the secret of that instability. . . . Unless we reach the home life and train right there in Christian principle and living, we shall fail to find the most comprehensive remedy.

This statement contains the embryo of Spalding’s philosophy of parent education. Within one year, he published nine comprehensive articles in the Review on the importance and methodologies of parenting. These articles expanded his theme of teaching first by example, then by precept.

**Ellen G. White Encourages Spalding in Parent Education**

Ellen G. White was cognizant of Spalding’s interest and work for the education of parents, as revealed by his letter to her son, W. C. White, concerning the work for families in the South. Moreover, his character and qualifications attracted her attention. Just a few weeks before he came to Elmshaven to assist in manuscript writing and editing, his nine articles on the home, “Come Let Us Live With Our Children,” appeared in The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald. Then, in July of 1913, when Spalding was about to leave Elmshaven, White encouraged him to use his talents for educating parents in child training. Her words remained “graven” upon his mind throughout his life. After reminding him of the importance of his work as a father and teacher, White said:

Oh, how I wish . . . that I could go out as I used to do, and stand
before the people. I would teach them of the great importance of training their children for God.

But, Sister White, [he said,] you have taught them. You have coun-
seled them, and they can read it in your books.44

Yes, I know, she answered, it is written there. But I am afraid our people don’t read it. I am afraid they don’t understand. And it is so impor-
tant that they understand and do, more important than anything else.

[He said to her], Do you mean to say that teaching parents how to train their children is the most important work we have?

Oh, yes, she answered emphatically, it is the very most important work before us as a people, and we have not begun to touch it with the tips of our fingers.45

Spalding’s Philosophy of Parent Education

Although Spalding was articulate in the philosophies of the great philoso-
phers, he developed his own philosophical thought through observation, rea-
son, and revelation. In Spalding’s writings, the technical terms of philosophy cannot be found, yet he explains the principles of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology in terms that may be understood by the common person. The one fundamental truth that gave meaning and purpose to all ontology for Spalding was the simple statement that God is love. God’s loving relationship to His cre-
ation was the foundation of all knowledge. Unless this truth was central in the discovery of knowledge, that knowledge was only a portion of truth.46

Because of God’s love, Spalding found the good and the beautiful only in God’s order of things. Consequently, he maintained that parent education and child training must be rooted in the revealed will of God. As Jesus modeled His teachings in His own life and being, in the same way “the father’s and moth-
er’s own attitude . . . [would] chiefly affect the child.”47 Therefore, companion-
ship was the main methodology Spalding recommended to the parents for child training. In 1912 he wrote, “If we come out of the high, thin atmosphere of theory, and seek for solid practical causes of failure and disappointment, we shall find . . . that . . . we have not learned to live with our children.”48 He carried these concepts with him throughout his career while others were addressing “problems that arise from our having to live with children.”49

The natural environment of God’s creation became the most valuable classroom, with art, music, and ethics following God’s natural order of things. Through companionship the children could experientially assimilate the ways of life and truth from their parents. In so doing, the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 and 6 (the turning of the hearts of the parents to the children and of the child-
dren to their parents) would be fulfilled.

Establishing the Home Commission

Garnering excerpts from his previous writings, Spalding presented a paper,
“Building the Foundation,” at a Home Missionary Convention in January 1919, and then again at church headquarters in Washington, DC, in August 1919.50 As a result, the Fall Council of October 1919 voted to establish a Home Commission composed of the secretaries of the five departments most directly related to home interests, namely, Sabbath School, Home Missionary, Young People’s Missionary Volunteer, Department of Education, and the Medical Department.51 These departments were instrumental in fostering Home Institutes in the conferences, along with parents’ meetings at the yearly camp meetings, and providing articles for publication through the church papers.

In less than three years, Spalding emerged as the leader of the Home Commission. Although the actual purpose of the Home Commission was to coordinate the home interests of the five departments, the Young Mothers’ Societies and then the Mothers’ Societies, with monthly Mother’s Lessons (mimeographed in 1923 and printed thereafter), became prominent. At first several authors contributed to these lesson pamphlets, but after one year Spalding became the principal contributor as well as the publishing editor. Spalding’s time became more and more occupied with organizing societies and providing them with lessons and literature.

Because of the interest and suggestions from the field to accommodate the fathers, in addition to the Mothers’ Societies, Parents’ Councils started in 1925; the lessons were retitled Parent’s Lessons. The completed lessons led to certificates, and to diplomas for more advanced studies.52 Thus Spalding led the Home Commission largely through his writing and his vision for small groups of parents studying together.

The need soon became apparent for a more lasting form of resource materials for parent education. To make the lessons durable, between 1927 and 1931, Spalding and Dr. Belle Wood-Comstock co-authored the five volumes of the “Christian Home Series.” Its central philosophy was teaching and formation of character rather than correction. This pedagogy remained consistent with Spalding’s stated philosophical beliefs to accentuate positive action motivated by love rather than outlining a list of prohibitives and dangers. The content of each volume harmonized with the developmental stage of the young person.53 Spalding’s works demonstrate a fidelity to his relevancy of purpose in safeguarding the family, as well as training the children for God through character development and providing workers of integrity for the church.

However, after the Home Commission Advisory Committee approved the manuscript for *Makers of the Home*, it again spent two hours in further study of the manuscript on May 3, 1927. Milton E. Kern, chairman of the Home Commission Advisory Committee, later explained that the manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association objected to Spalding’s treatment of
sexual relations in marriage. Consequently, the Parents’ Lessons continued throughout 1928. In the spring of 1928, Makers of the Home went to press at the Pacific Press Publishing Association in Mountain View, California. The remainder of the volumes proceeded more smoothly.

As the books came off the press in the early 1930s, the nation sank deeper into economic depression. At the same time, lack of conference organizational flow for fostering parent education reduced the effectiveness of Spalding’s efforts. Moreover, Spalding’s health failed to the extent that initially he was given six months to live. As a consequence, the work of the Home Commission declined throughout the early 1930s. When Spalding recovered, he spent most of his time at Adventist colleges, where he found his prime target audience: young people who were just married or who were contemplating marriage. With limited resources, Spalding believed this was the best return for his efforts.

The years from 1935 to 1937 were filled with anguish and pain for Spalding and others who were interested in the success of the Home Commission. The parents were interested in the work of the Home Commission, but the confusion in union and local conference organizational structure continued to prevent the wealth of parent-education material from reaching the membership of the church. Spalding was unable to keep pace with the demands of the colleges and the societies. Nevertheless, available statistics indicate that by 1937, the Home Commission had granted 3,043 certificates and 189 diplomas. That represented 203 certificates each year since the Commission began, and 13 diplomas each year from the first five-year period of study. By 1947—when the Home Commission files were destroyed—4,422 one-year certificates and 276 five-year diplomas had been issued.

The Dissolution of the Home Commission

Spalding encountered considerable difficulty in carving out a niche for the work of the Home Commission within the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist church. He calculated that the main reason parent education was not generally accepted was that “the traditional work of the church is evangelism, and social education, while it . . . [had] received some recognition . . . [was] regarded askance by a good many.” To Spalding, the logical forum for the promotion of parent education was the local church pulpit. But it was here that the work of the Home Commission continued to bog down. Until the pastors were trained in the importance and methodology of parent education, Spalding felt parent education would never become a popular item in the church.

His textbook of social relations allotted four chapters to a philosophy of love as the foundation of all social relationships. It also included instruction in self-care, personal growth, adolescent relationships, preparation for marriage, mar-
ital relationships, family planning and adjustments in marriage, dual-career families, and social relationships in the home, church, community, and nation. Yet, Spalding was concerned over the scarcity of teachers who evidenced emotional stability and scientific attitude to reverently present the subjects of conjugal love and marital adjustments.63

In 1937, Spalding stated that he was doing all he could in teaching social relations in the colleges. Both faculty and students were grateful. Union College agreed to continue Spalding’s work; others solicited his services for the next year. His hopes ran high that this aspect of homemaking and parent-education might take hold and flourish. He wrote to the newly elected General Conference president, Elder J. L. McElhany: “This is the one bright spot in my experience, to think that the spark I have kindled in this college may grow into a flame, and be permanently cherished.” Spalding continued to believe that building the foundation of society and church life began with Christian education in homemaking and social relations for the youth.64

Nevertheless, in the fall of 1938, the Officers’ Meeting questioned the nature of the material that Spalding gave in his lectures.65 Here he ran into much difficulty. By request of the officers of the General Conference, Spalding, along with officers of the Missionary Volunteer Department, appeared before the Officer’s Committee to respond to questions concerning his teachings on the subject of sex in the colleges. Twice he volunteered to omit this subject from his course on social relations if so advised. After a candid discussion, favor was recorded for Spalding’s qualifications and handling of the topic. Nevertheless, the committee agreed to advise Spalding to leave out any discussion of sex in his college lectures on social relations. If the need arose, however, he was to counsel with the young men and Mrs. Spalding was to advise the young women.66

Mixed reactions from the church characterized the response to Spalding’s work in parent education. Some leaders stood firmly in favor of his work, while others ridiculed it. Starting in 1930, he appealed for the development of leadership to take his place when he would retire. Although the minutes of official actions consistently reflect support of parent education, enthusiasm for parent education may be measured by the struggle Spalding had in finding someone to succeed him in his work. The sporadic implementation of official action demonstrated a lack of personal commitment on the part of many. The Education Department of the General Conference was reluctant to assume responsibility for parent education. When it did, it placed it in the correspondence school of the Home Study Institute.

By 1950, the work of parent education, having been absorbed into the Department of Education in 1941, slipped through the cracks and found little support in that department. Nevertheless, the five volumes of the “Christian
Home Series” went through a second edition and were still being used by the Home Study Institute of the Department of Education in parent education in 1949. Most of the work, however, was through correspondence and literature rather than study groups in the Home and School Association. Not until 1975 did the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists again specifically set up a ministry for family-life education.

Conclusion

The end-stage of the life cycle of the Home Commission and Spalding’s leadership may be attributed to several reasons. First, the breakdown of the Home Commission started with the Depression, when the “Christian Home Series” needed a wide circulation to pay for its publication. Second, Spalding’s illness and inability to vigorously promote the Home Commission near the end of his career continued the slump. Third, sex education was a “hot potato” in the Adventist church at the time Spalding was seeking a successor. Spalding took the brunt of pioneering this aspect of family-life education in the Adventist church; it was not an enviable position for anyone to follow. Finally, the Home Commission was unable to develop a solid organizational structure through which to promote and maintain parent study groups.

Regardless of the end result of the Home Commission, Arthur W. Spalding was a visionary who accomplished much for the parents and young people living through times of tumultuous cultural change. His leadership was focused and consistent, an example for all who face a culture of changing values.

Notes

1. Until 1916 Arthur Whitefield Spalding spelled his surname “Spaulding.” Upon discovering his ancestry in a book entitled SPALDING, he thereafter dropped the “u” from his name. See Arthur W. Spalding to his granddaughter Benita, 17 April 1949, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan (AHC), C10, Bx 2, fld 1. This article uses the spelling “Spalding” except where correct reference indicates “Spaulding.”


13. The surge in parent-education and child-development research in America during the 1920s was directly attributable to funding by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, established in 1918 and merged with the Rockefeller Foundation in 1928. Support for child-development programs began in 1923 and amounted to more than $55 million. These included national organizations, university-based research centers, teachers’ colleges, women’s colleges, state departments, public schools, private schools, nursery schools, social agencies, child-guidance agencies, health agencies, and religious organizations. Ralph P. Bridgman, “Ten Years’ Progress in Parent Education,” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 151 (August 1930), 33; Orville G. Brim, Jr., *Education for Child Rearing* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959), 327-29.


15. Commonly referred to as the Review.


17. Arthur W. Spalding, “Autobiographical Sketch,” Typewritten Document (TD), 5, Record Group (RG) 29, Biographical Files, General Conference Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland (GCAr). As deduced from the contents of this document, it was written about 1926-27.

18. Arthur W. Spalding wrote thirty books and published more than seven hundred articles and one hundred poems. His philosophy of writing was that one must be of service to humankind in some elemental occupation, and then out of the actual experiences of life produce one’s message. Spalding, “Sketch,” 5.

19. Spalding, “Sketch.” The poverty of his family compelled him to enter the workforce. See also: Arthur W. Spalding to H. H. Cobban, 30 Dec. 1941, AHC, C10, Bx 1, fld 2; and McFadden and Spalding, 23.

20. Sustentation Records, RG33 (Sustentation) Spalding, A. W., GCAR; McFadden and Spalding, 24; Spalding to Cobban, 30 Dec. 1941; McFadden and Spalding, 24; Spalding to Cobban, 30 Dec. 1941; Spalding, “Sketch.”


22. McFadden and Spalding, 21-34; see also: Spalding, “Sketch”; A. W. Spalding to Dr. Keld J. Reynolds, 9 May 1950, AHC, C10, Bx 2, fld 3; Spalding to Cobban, 30 Dec. 1941. Spalding expressed deep appreciation for the privilege of private tutelage from Goodloe Harper Bell in English composition and literature. He said that Bell followed most closely E. G. White’s philosophy in the teaching of these subjects.


25. This is the earliest orphanage of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It was founded in Battle Creek, MI, in 1891, through a donation from Mrs. C. E. Haskell. See *Seventh-Day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1976 ed., s.v., “Orphanages.”


27. Spalding, “Sketch,” 3. During this era, Spalding’s lack of a degree was not significant as degrees were not issued by the college. See, Vande Vere, *Seekers*, 121.


29. Spalding, “Sketch,” 3. His published articles and poem are in the Youth Instructor and RH.

30. Spalding, “Sketch,” 3; 4; McFadden and Spalding, 94.


Ellen G. White Research Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland (EGWRc-GC) William Clarence White (WCW) Files. See also: Spalding, “Sketch,” 5; and McFadden and Spalding, 63.

33. McFadden and Spalding, 43-60; see also: Spalding, “Sketch,” 3-5.


38. A. W. Spaulding to W. C. White, 21 Aug. 1911, EGWRc-GC, WCW files.


40. A. W. Spaulding to W. C. White, 21 Aug. 1911.


43. A. W. Spaulding to R. L. Hammill, 3 May 1953, AHC, C10, Bx 2, fld 3.


51. General Conference Committee (GCC), General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists (Washington DC), Oct. 8-19, 1919, minutes of Oct. 12, 1919.

52. A certificate represented the completion of one year of study and a diploma five years of study.


54. The nature of the objections centered around three issues: (1) open discussion of sex, (2) the function of sex in marriage as more than procreation, and (3) the use of birth control. Spalding was judiciously in favor of all three. See Spalding, *Makers*, 82; id., LA, Mar. 1929, 3-4; April 1929, 4-5; Aug. 1929, 4-7; and Arthur W. Spalding to Ada E. Chappell, 31 Dec. 1941, AHC, C10, Bx 1, fld 2.


60. T. Rose Curtis, to Ex-Boss [A. W. Spalding], 23 January 1948. C10, Box 1, Folder 5. Arthur Whitefield Spalding Papers, AHC.
62. A. W. Spalding to J. L. McElhany, 24 April 1940, Presidential Correspondence, GCAr.
64. Spalding to McElhany, 27 Feb. 1937.
65. Officer’s Meeting Minutes, RG2, GCAr, (OMM), Nov. 13, 1938.
66. OMM, Dec. 4, 1938.