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# The Rise of Adventist Elementary Schools — 1

*And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children. Deuteronomy 6:6, 7 RSV*



▲ George R. Knight

One of the most exciting developments in Adventism education in the 1890s was the elementary school movement. Up through the middle '90s, Adventists had largely neglected elementary education except at localities where they had a college or secondary school. That indifference would change by the end of the decade, and Adventists have ever since supported a strong system of local church (elementary) schools.

The General Conference had called, in 1887 and 1888, to begin a system of elementary schools, but nothing had come from the resolutions.

In 1897, however, Ellen White challenged the church with a renewed demand for elementary schools. The Australian situation had alerted her on the topic. “In some countries,” she asserted, “parents are compelled by law to send their children to school. In these countries, in localities where there is a church, schools should be established if there are no more than six

children to attend. Work as if you were working for your life to save the children from being drowned in the polluting, corrupting influences of the world.

“We are far behind our duty in this important matter. In many places schools should have been in operation years ago” (6T 199).

Again she wrote: “Wherever there are a few Sabbathkeepers, the parents should unite in providing a place for a day school where their children and youth can be instructed. They should employ a Christian teacher who, as a consecrated missionary, shall educate the children in such a way as to lead them to become missionaries. Let teachers be employed who will give a thorough education in the common branches, the Bible being made the foundation and the life of all study” (Ibid., 198).

Those words proved to be some of the most important and most influential counsel in all of her long ministry. In the next few years Adventist churches around the world established schools, even if they had only five or six children to attend. Their salvation and future became a focal point of Seventh-day Adventism as the church took seriously its evangelistic responsibility to prepare its own children for God’s Kingdom.

From such a perspective, education was evangelism. That is an insight that we dare not lose. ■

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*George R. Knight is a retired professor of Church History at the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This article is from his book, Lest We Forget, a daily devotional, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, page 308. Reprinted with permission.*

