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# Turning Education on Its Head

*If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all.*

Mark 9:35



▲ George R. Knight

“Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come” (*Education*, p. 13).

Thus read the opening words of the book, *Education*, one of Ellen White’s most important contributions to Adventism. It is no accident that the book came off the press in 1903. After a decade of thinking and writing on the topic of education, she was ready in the early years of the new century to develop a book that would give direction to one of the denomination’s most important sectors. *Education* provides the Adventist school system with its philosophical marching orders. And in the process, it sets forth ideals of education quite at odds with traditional programs.

Whereas traditional education aimed at preparing people for a successful life here on earth, *Education*, while not denying that important function, claimed that such a preparation was not enough. More vital yet was preparing students to live with God for eternity.

Whereas traditional education tended to focus on developing the mental aspects of its students, *Education* called for the improvement of the whole person.

And whereas traditional education prepared people to position themselves advantageously for getting ahead in the world, *Education* argued for the goal of service to God and others. The service theme brackets the book. On its last page, we read that “in our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found . . .” (*ibid.*, 309).

The book *Education* turned traditional education on its head. And in the process, it put forth a philosophy of education and life that we need both to understand and to live. It is a philosophy that puts into practice the values of the One who said, *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.* ■

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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 311. Reprinted with permission.

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