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Mihai Stoicescu \*

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*Article*

# Adventist Education Values and Romanian Individualism

Pastor Mihai Stoicescu

Prof. LTA Ștefan Demetrescu, Bulevardul Metalurgiei, nr. 89, sector 4, București, Romania; [mihaystoicescu@gmail.com](mailto:mihaystoicescu@gmail.com)

**Abstract: Adventist Education Values and Romanian Individualism.** Societies develop based on values adopted over time. The Enlightenment was the one that produced the change from collectivism to individualism, which marked the transition from agrarian to industrial societies. Individualistic values favored economic development, but they also brought with them a series of shortcomings. Although some studies place Romania among the specifically collectivist countries, some of the values that underlie the Romanian education system are typically individualistic. Like any education system, the Adventist one is based on a series of values. Its challenge in Romania is to have an answer to the shortcomings of individualism.

**Keywords:** education; education values; educational values; Adventist; Adventist educational system; individualism; religious freedom; human rights; freedom

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## Introduction

The first half of the 20th century was ravaged by two major world wars and the greatest economic crisis. In the second half, the world tried to rebuild itself, in the context of another war, the Cold War. The world was divided not only between capitalist and communist countries, but also between developed and poor countries. Capitalist countries developed from many points of view: economically, socially, culturally, etc., but they began to experience a moral-religious regression. Freedom, misunderstood, led to the abandonment of Christian values, morality, and even to discrimination against Christianity. Communist countries were generally underdeveloped, poor, and faced a lack of freedom and individual rights, and even a lack of religious freedom, despite official declarations and documents that facilitated these freedoms. All these deprivations favored the preservation of moral-religious values among Christians, especially within Protestant communities.

## Current Educational Values

Value can be defined as something that is worthwhile, cherished, or desirable. Many things are worth the effort to achieve or have, from education and morality to the development of healthy relationships. Also, a whole series of things have been and are valued by society, such as truth, integrity, patience, kindness, honesty, or courage. Also, many things are desirable to have, from health and physical fitness to a life partner and children. Therefore, values can be cultural, social, moral, religious, etc. Throughout human history[1], education has recognized the importance of pursuing values in the formation of the pupil, student, or adult. [2]

On March 29, 2019, the Ministry of National Education of Romania launched the document "Education unites us", in which it proposed structuring the Romanian education system on five fundamental values: trust, equity, solidarity, effectiveness and autonomy. Trust is seen as being given by the attachment of all actors involved in education to the vision of education. Thus, students will gain confidence that participation in the educational act is valuable for them, while the family will invest trust in teachers, viewing them as professionals in the field of education. Equity considered the right of each student to have equal opportunities in education, regardless of socio-economic

status, abilities or mental and physical characteristics. Solidarity involves teamwork of all factors involved in the educational process to improve learning outcomes, using the most appropriate communication channels. Effectiveness implies achieving the desired impact of education, which means that each student will learn and progress towards their maximum potential. Effectiveness is closely linked to the establishment of clear objectives, the constant measurement of each student's level against the level they need to reach and the correction tools. Autonomy implies the freedom of action, decision and development of each actor involved in the educational process, by respecting the law and the specific regulatory framework for education. The document also specified that all these values must be found in five principles: student-centeredness, flexibility, measurable quality, collaboration, subsidiarity.[3]

As will be seen later, the Romanian education system is built on individualistic values, values that have favored the development of Western societies.

## **Adventist Educational Values**

Adventist education focuses on moral-religious values that honor God. Thus, moral conduct includes upholding the truth, integrity, honesty, kindness, loyalty, patience, forgiveness or tolerance, not destroying, not stealing, not deceiving, not judging, and not killing. In other words, moral education has a biblical basis, aiming to redeem the student and restore biblical principles.[4]

Adventist education began in 1853, when Martha Byington opened the first school in the church in Buck's Bridge, New York. A few years later, in 1872, Goodloe Harper Bell opened the first school supported by the Adventist Church, in Battle Creek, Michigan. In the same place, two years later the first Adventist college was inaugurated, in which both boys and girls were enrolled. In the same year, the General Conference organized the Education Society to oversee its new educational program. In 1881, the same Bell produced the first Adventist textbook. The educational system expanded rapidly, and two years later the first nursing school was established at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. In 1888, the first institute for Adventist teachers met in Battle Creek. The first teachers' convention will be held in Harbor Springs, Michigan, in 1891. On this occasion, the approximately 100 participants initiate the first reforms in education, deciding that the Bible should be at the center of the curriculum. Two years later, the first Adventist educational institution outside the United States opens, the college in Kenilworth, South Africa. In 1895, the first Adventist medical school is established, also within the Battle Creek Sanitarium. In 1899, the first Adventist educational institution, the Friedensau Adventist University, opens near Magdeburg, Germany. In 1901, the education system had developed to such an extent that the decision was made to establish the Department of Education at the General Conference level.[5]

Today the Adventist educational system is one of the largest Christian educational systems in the world, present in approximately 150 countries, comprising 7,500 schools. The purpose of education is to restore the image of God in human beings, only through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Adventist educational system encourages the balanced development of the student, intellectual, physical, social-emotional and spiritual, a process that lasts a lifetime.[6] Among the values pursued in Adventist schools are respect (valuing oneself and others through one's words and actions), responsibility (making wise choices and being accountable in all situations), effort (working hard, without giving up), compassion (practicing kindness, being understanding of one another), service (helping, putting the needs of others first), integrity (performing tasks even when no one is looking), hope (remaining positive even when things are not going well), humility (maintaining a balanced image of oneself, treating others with dignity), discernment (making wise decisions, being aware of the consequences of each action), and justice (affirming what is right).[7]

At this point a question arises. Is the Adventist education system found in the values of the Romanian education system? The answer is found in understanding the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Knowledge is the basis of any education system. The individual's desire to know should not be dimmed by any education system, because otherwise, he loses interest in the educational act. Information (truth) is

the star, considering that it is the answer to the individual's search. It can be said that education is effective when it provides answers to the individual's searches. But things do not end here! Information (truth) has the role of freeing the individual from superstitions (which arise when the truth is either not known or is partially known), but also of providing him with the necessary confidence that comes with knowledge. This is the positive side of knowing the truth, but there can also be a negative one. The truth can give birth to monsters or, better said, the confidence that the individual gains with the possession of information can transform him into a critical, cynical, contemptuous person towards those who have not come to know the truth. In other words, if education only means achieving values, this does not mean that it has achieved its goal. Knowledge should not be the only goal. It can give birth to monsters if it is not accompanied by a relationship with God. Values can shape the individual externally, but the interior remains rigid. Values in themselves have no power of internal transformation, only God does. Therefore, values such as trust, equity, solidarity, effectiveness and autonomy, pursued by the Romanian education system, do not represent something that is at odds with the Adventist education system. Pursuing these values without God means failure, as does pursuing any other values. Therefore, Adventist education should not produce monsters, but people transformed by the truth from within, people in whom the image of God has been restored.

### Everyday Individualism

Regardless of the values pursued by the education system, it will face several challenges that it must face, one of which is individualism. Conceptually, individualism focuses on the moral value of the individual, the importance of self-reliance and personal independence. Contemporary individualism emphasizes freedom, self-expression and autonomy of the individual.[8] Some authors have considered individualism to be the most important factor in cultural psychology throughout history.[9] For others, individualism is one of the dimensions of national culture[10] or the degree to which a society's population is integrated into groups.[11]

Individualism emerged during the Enlightenment, as a philosophical and cultural movement. During this period, there was a change from the traditional collective mentality in which society had functioned, to a mentality in which individual rights and freedoms and autonomy took precedence. John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are the ones who laid the foundations of modern individualist ideals. This shift from collective authority to individual autonomy led to the development of modern society, with the Industrial Revolution being the one that accelerated the rise of individualism. The agrarian economy was replaced by the industrial one, emphasizing individual labor and entrepreneurship. This paradigm shift led to the emergence of capitalism, which was based on individual initiative, meritocracy, and personal achievement.

Individualism has been at the heart of modern society, shaping its structures, aspirations and values. In this society, individualism encompasses key concepts such as self-reliance and autonomy. Self-reliance emphasizes the importance of independence and self-sufficiency, encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own lives and well-being and not to rely on others or external forces. Self-reliance allows individuals to make decisions, set and pursue their own goals, without feeling constrained by societal expectations or norms. Autonomy emphasizes self-governance and freedom of choice, i.e. the right of individuals to make decisions based on their own values, beliefs and desires, without any external influence. Autonomy allows individuals to express their unique identity and pursue their own paths in life. Modern society's adoption of these concepts specific to individualism has fostered innovation, creativity, personal development and fulfillment. Critics of individualism point out that these same concepts have led to increased social alienation and disconnection. The pursuit of self-interest and autonomy can lead to a lack of concern for the well-being of others, feelings of isolation and loneliness, a loss of shared values, and a decline in social capital. It can also affect trust in others and cooperation.[12] Individualism has favored economic development, but also indifference to secular values such as religion, gender equality, high living standards, or political correctness towards sexual and ethnic minorities.[13]



Considering all these elements that define and describe individualism, the question arises whether Romania is or is not an individualistic society. A series of studies conducted in the last 20 years have concluded that Romania is more of a society based on collectivism than on individualism.[14] However, individualism is increasingly present, with both its strengths and its weaknesses. Self-confidence and autonomy have stimulated creativity and private initiative. However, the pursuit of one's own interests and autonomy has also led to isolation, loss of trust in others, or impaired cooperation.

## **Individualism and Adventist education**

In this context, we must note that by launching the document "Education unites us" in 2019, the Romanian education system builds on individualism, given that two of the values[15] that underlie this system are values specific to individualism (trust and autonomy). As such, it is expected that soon, Romanian society will be an individualistic one.

How will the Adventist education system respond to these challenges? How will it exploit the strengths of individualism and counteract its weaknesses? Conceptually, the Adventist education system fits seamlessly into both collectivism and individualism. Values such as self-reliance and autonomy, specific to individualism, can undoubtedly be considered moral-religious values encouraged by God, but under certain conditions.

From a biblical perspective, self-reliance or taking responsibility for one's own life, making decisions, and pursuing one's own goals are encouraged by God, but in relationship with Him. The individual is encouraged by God to develop in all aspects, to be "the head, and not the tail," and even encouraged private initiative, but only by respecting divine principles (Deut. 28:13,44). In this framework, man is invited to communicate with divinity through study and prayer, so that he can make the best decisions for his development (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9; John 15:7). Self-reliance can lead to isolation and lack of cooperation only when the individual gives up communication with divinity, distancing himself from it (Gen. 3:8). In fact, sin meant man's alienation from God. Thus, the Adventist education system can counteract this shortcoming by insisting not only on adopting values, but also on living these values, which can only be achieved by maintaining a living, personal relationship with God (John 15:4-5).

Autonomy emphasizes the freedom to choose based on one's own values, beliefs, and desires. Biblically, man was created with free will (Gen. 1:27), but sin perverted man's ability to choose good, predisposing him to make wrong choices (Gen. 6:5). Divinity respects man's freedom of choice, constantly inviting him to a process of re-education to re-adopt the values, beliefs, and desires he had before the fall into sin. In other words, the divine purpose is to restore His image in the individual, an objective that can only be achieved through a personal, active relationship with Him. As with self-confidence, only a relationship with God can counteract the shortcomings of this individualistic value.

In its pure form, individualism is unbiblical and that is exactly what was wanted, a revolt against religion, against God. However, the values of individualism are built on biblical values that can be exploited by Adventist education. Individualism leads to the isolation of the individual from others, because it started from the idea of the isolation of the individual from God. The role of Adventist education is to promote the restoration of the relationship with divinity. In this way, the strengths can be exploited and the shortcomings counteracted.

## **Conclusions**

Individualism emerged through the Enlightenment, producing a change in the mentality of society at that time. Collectivist values were replaced by individualistic values such as self-confidence and autonomy. The emphasis was placed on the individual, favoring private initiative, creativity and personal decisions uninfluenced by other people or external forces. The new mentality led to the development of Western, capitalist societies. Contemporary individualism, however, also faces shortcomings, with a tendency towards isolation of the individual and cooperation. The current

values of education in Romania are based on individualistic values, to educate generations to produce well-being. In this context, Adventist education will have to not deviate from its goal, that of restoring the image of God in man, as a measure to counteract the shortcomings of individualism.

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