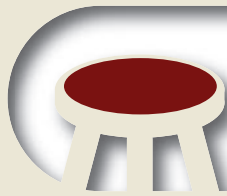




Julián Melgosa



## The Three-legged Stool

I grew up in the inner city of Madrid, Spain. Only occasionally could my family take me to experience the blessings of nature available in the country. I must have been five years old when I first saw a real cow, which seemed much larger than I had imagined based on pictures and toys. Next to the cow in the pen, I distinctly remember seeing a three-legged milking stool. Someone explained that this tripod stool provided the necessary balance to milk the cow, regardless of the irregularity of the terrain. Later, in school, I learned that three points determine a plane (as long as they are non-collinear), which explained the suitability of that unique chair design. Furthermore, the three-legged milking stool could suffer from imperfections, such as one leg being slightly longer or shorter than the others, and still provide reasonable stability.

How fascinating, it seemed to me, that one could sit stably on a three-legged chair, yet all the chairs I knew about had four legs! Years later, I observed that many principles, theories, or ideologies were founded upon three elements. And this leads me to the point of this editorial: Christian education has been built upon three pillars: *the home, the local church, and the school*, each representing one leg of the stool.

The first—and often the most important—source of learning is the home, the family. It is the place where children learn their primary language and the basics of social interactions, where they first have an opportunity to receive and give love and affection. Soon they are introduced to the church congregation, typically years before they enter formal schooling. The local church is a great source of religious/spiritual knowledge. It provides a setting to learn about the love and saving power of Jesus presented in an attractive way to children in Sabbath school, in clubs such as Adventurers and Pathfinders, as well as in special services for children and opportunities to serve the community. These provide opportunities for positive interactions with peers from the earliest stages of development and often go beyond the Sabbath day, as many friendships develop in the church setting. Last, children go to school and learn the necessary knowledge and skills to adjust to their particular culture and society. There, students can follow sophisticated curricula and experience a replica of the

greater social world that will prepare them for life.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long and firm tradition of education. Abundant counsel from an inspired source has been given from its early history about the influence of home, church, and school and how these three sources influence student development:

- “In His wisdom the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life—lessons of respect, obedience, reverence, self-control.”<sup>1</sup>

- “God has appointed the church as a watchman, to have a jealous care over the youth and children, and as a sentinel to see the approach of the enemy and give warning of danger.”<sup>2</sup>

- “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.”<sup>3</sup>

Ellen G. White received inspiration to put in writing hundreds if not thousands of pages of advice to develop Christian education, knowing that given the complexity of each institution—family, school, and local church—intentional effort must be put into nurturing and supporting interaction and a harmonious relationship among them.

For this reason, I like the metaphor of the three-legged stool. A child may come from a dysfunctional family, but school and church may compensate for that deficiency. Or he or she may attend a church that lacks a loving atmosphere, but the local school and family may provide sufficient nourishment. Or a school may struggle to fulfill its responsibilities, but the church and the family might step in and provide the resources necessary to build up the school. The metaphor allows for variations in the home, the church, and the school while seeking to maintain a stable educational experience.

Undoubtedly, God has appointed multiple sources to enhance learning and education and ensure that the good news of salvation through Jesus reaches every child. I have known adults who had had a mediocre church and school

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experience but flourished mentally, physically, and spiritually because of a strong family influence. Others have been judged and mistreated by their local church, and a caring family and school have compensated for the negative influences. As educators, we have a sacred responsibility to strengthen the leg of the stool for which we are responsible in our schools, classrooms, and interactions with the home and church. The ultimate goal, however, is to produce a stool with three robust and unwavering legs so that students have the best opportunities to grow in connection with God and their fellow human beings.

In conclusion, parents, pastors, teachers, and students must work faithfully and in a coordinated manner to support children's spiritual, mental, physical, and social growth. Only in eternity will we find out how many souls of young people have been saved by the intervention of home, church, and school.

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**Recommended citation:**

**Julián Melgosa**, "The Three-legged Stool," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 85:1 (2023): 3, 44. <https://doi.org/10.55668/TSUR7544>.

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1913), 107.
2. *Ibid.*, 165.
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