



It was early in September 1977 when Patrick Basalirwa was admitted to the electrical installation program at Elgon Technical Institute (now Uganda Technical College-Elgon), where I am a lecturer. I was happy to meet Patrick because he shared my Adventist faith. We became good friends. Every Sabbath, we would travel to the local church, whose members nicknamed us "Timothy and Paul." A few weeks after the beginning of school, the Ugandan government declared 27 religious groups banned, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of course, Patrick and I were very saddened by this news, but we continued worshiping the Lord on His day.

At the close of the first school term, Patrick learned that he had ranked second out of the 54 students in his class. This good news was overshadowed by the government's declaration that Friday was

meantime, I continued attending church and faithfully recorded my absences in the duty master's report book: "I did not attend as a duty master on Saturday because I went to church as is ordered by the fourth commandment."

During the school holiday, a colleague and former classmate of mine who taught mathematics and engineering science at the institute did not report to work for several days. Since he was an active member of the Native Anglican Church and I of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, my colleague had been christened "the deacon" and I "the archbishop." Part of the mystery was cleared up when the director received my friend's letter of resignation. The director called me into his office and asked me what else I knew about "the deacon." I replied that I knew nothing more than he did.

"I suspect you will be the next one to leave us," he added, "if you refuse to lecture on Saturdays."

"I have been recording my absences," I replied, "and I am willing to leave today if I am forced to lecture on the Sabbath."

The director hastily assured me that the school could not afford to lose another instructor, and thus my work schedule was rearranged. I praised God for His goodness to me.

When Patrick returned to school in January 1978, we discussed the effect of the government's decrees. Patrick told me that he had determined not to attend any Saturday classes, regardless of the consequences. I congratulated him, but warned him that his decision would not be an easy one to maintain. Two of Patrick's final exams that semester fell on Saturdays. He notified his teachers of his planned absences and did not take the exams. Upon returning for the third term, however, Patrick learned that he had placed ninth out of his 52 classmates, despite having missed two of his final exams. Even more surprisingly, there was no indication on his report form that he had failed to take any of the final exams. We praised God.

During the summer term, the school administration realized Patrick was not attending his Saturday classes. He was summoned to appear before his teacher, the director, and several other administrators. The director began by asking Patrick to explain why he refused to attend classes

Your Religion Has Been Banned!

by
John J.
Washagi
Masolo

to be observed as a holiday and Saturday was now to be a workday. Friday lectures were moved to Saturdays and I was informed that I would have to work from 8:00 to 10:00 Saturday mornings, after which I would be free to do as I pleased. I could do nothing more than pray for a solution to this difficult problem. In the

on Saturday, adding, "The government has decreed Saturday to be a workday. Your religion has been banned!"

Patrick replied, "Isn't our nation's motto 'For God and My Country'? I'm sorry, sir, I really cannot in good conscience attend, for God has commanded otherwise."

His teacher then suggested that Patrick suspend his Sabbath observance until after completing his studies. Again, Patrick held his ground and stated that this was impossible. The meeting was adjourned. Patrick continued to observe the Sabbath despite continued pressure from the administration.

One Saturday, when Patrick and I had gone to church, Patrick's father met with the school's director. The director explained the situation to Patrick's father.

"We have tried to reason with your son," he said, "but he will not listen. I'm sure you're aware that if he is caught worshipping at his church, he'll be automatically imprisoned. We cannot allow him to remain here while he insists on worshipping on Saturday."

Upon hearing this, Patrick's father became angry. "Of course I know he could go to jail! My son doesn't listen to me either!" he shouted. "You can tell my good-for-nothing son that as soon as he gets home for his vacation, I'll lock him up until he changes his mind!"

At the end of the term, Patrick was told not to return to the Technical Institute unless he attended Saturday classes. At home, he faced constant pressure to give in, but he held firm. Despite the letter of dismissal, he returned to school in the fall.

During the first few days of school, he met another Adventist student, Samuel Gamutambuli. During the opening assembly, as if directing his remarks to the three Sabbathkeepers in the audience, the director emphasized the importance of attending classes on Saturday. After the assembly, Samuel and Patrick came to my house. We talked, prayed, and resolved to follow the example of Daniel and his companions by standing firm.

Patrick also became friends with another student, Ndawula Semei. Ndawula attempted to dissuade his new friend from his course of action regarding the Sabbath, but failed. Because Patrick continued to disregard the letter he had been sent, he was dismissed from the institute only two weeks after the term had begun.

Shortly after Patrick's dismissal,

Samuel was called before the director and other administrators. After being questioned, Samuel testified that working on a Saturday would be like going to a workshop with neither overalls or a pair of shoes on: simply unthinkable. The director sent him out with the instructions to consider his decision very carefully. After Samuel left the room, I was summoned by the director, who asked me what I advised him to do about Samuel—"another young man who shares your faith."

"The Sabbath was established by God," I stated. "It is our responsibility to observe it, sir."

"You haven't helped me at all," the director said, and he dismissed me.

In a final attempt to resolve the problem, Samuel was called back to the director's office, where he was asked what he had decided. Again Samuel declared that it was impossible for him to attend Saturday classes. Hoping to bring some familial influence to bear on Samuel, the director asked him to whom he was closely related. Samuel mentioned Stephen Kakidi, a church member and an employee of the Uganda Electricity Board. The director telephoned him, hoping that his relative would persuade the stubborn student. Stephen told the principal that he himself did not appear for work on the Sabbath because it was the Lord's day. The exasperated director hung up the phone and expelled Samuel.

The expulsion of Patrick and Samuel created quite a stir among the institute faculty. They calculated that "the archbishop," that is I, would be the next one to go. However, God's plans did not include my dismissal. In an unexpected development, a new government speedily replaced the former oppressive regime. The workweek assumed its previous Monday-Friday configuration and, happily, the ban on religious organizations was lifted.

The principal approached me shortly thereafter and observed, "Someone told me

that you people knew how to pray, but I didn't know that it included the overthrowing of a government!" He added, "Please contact Patrick Basalirwa and Samuel Gamutambuli and tell them to return to the institute." You can be sure that I happily did so!

I learned that Patrick and Samuel were working at the Buwenge Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, and they were overjoyed to return to school. Patrick completed his electrical installation program and joined the Bugema Adventist College staff. Samuel worked in the industrial sector in Jinja upon completing his advanced craft courses.

When Patrick returned to the technical college to continue his studies, he was again confronted by the specter of Sabbath examinations, but again was victorious with God's help and the support of the members of the Nampanga Seventh-day Adventist church who fasted and prayed during his trying times. I am happy to say that Ndawula, the schoolmate who had tried to convince Patrick to disregard the Sabbath, became convinced of the need to obey God in everything and was baptized during an evangelistic crusade in 1989.

Looking back, we see God as our sovereign Lord, for He knows no failure. It is really an honor to be on His side and to experience the true joy of putting Christ first in school, in work, and in everything. □

John J. Washagi Masolo is a lecturer and an examination secretary at Uganda Technical College in Elgon, Uganda. He also serves as regional coordinator of the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Association (SEDAWA) in the Eastern Uganda Field.