

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN TEACHING
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INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING
IN SDA SCHOOLS IN ZAMBESI UNION:

A Proposal

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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to illustrate the importance of integration of faith and learning in SDA schools in Zimbabwe. First, attention is drawn to the historical development of SDA and how that integration was originally the objective of the system of education.

Changes in the system of education as brought about by government regulations affected our system to a great extent, as teachers were now paid by the government, and the syllabi were also provided.

Integration was no longer easy as the two important elements that made integration of faith and learning possible, namely teachers and syllabi, were no longer our products. This part argues the importance of the teacher in a christian school.

The last point deals with suggestions that can be adopted in order to realize a certain measure of integration within certain constraints imposed by the Single Teaching Service in Zimbabwe. These suggestions are outlined in stages in their sequences of implementation.

Integration of faith and learning in SDA schools in the Zambesi Union:

A Proposal

Historical Background :

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been operating schools in Zimbabwe, ever since the first mission station was established in 1894 at Solusi Mission. The objective that moved pioneers to establish this institution and others before (in America) and later elsewhere, was the realization of the importance of integration of faith and learning in the lives of the younger members of the church. Mrs White was enunciating the objective of christian education, when she said:

True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than the preparation for the life that now is. It has to do 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." (White, 1952)

She continues to say:

"In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one." (WHITE)

Herein, therefore, is stated the objective of operating Adventist schools around the world. This is the integrative element that should run through the system of Adventist redemptive education.

In Zimbabwe, which consists of the Zambesi Union, the church operates over eighty-eight primary and secondary schools. During the initial stages of development of these schools, integration of faith into their day to day learning system, although they did not call it by that name, it was the final objective. These schools had as their broad objective the preparation of the young people to meet the Lord. The teaching materials and the syllabi of the period reveal this fact.

The establishment of a teacher training school at Solusi Mission, which later moved to Lower Gwelo Mission, aimed at preparing teachers who would go out of our colleges

firmly established in the principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to impart these principles in the course of their teaching. Teachers from this college did their work in teaching and implementing the skills they had learned. The christian environment at college helped to create a Christ-centred teaching approach among its graduates, some of whom are still faithfully carrying their task. The closure of Lower Gwelo College in 1978, was a serious draw back in the development of integrating christian approach to education in our schools. From then on, to the present, we recruit our teachers from government training colleges, which are scattered around the country. Government staffing offices deploy these teachers without any regard to their religious affiliation, we have to make special requests for any SDA teachers we may know of among the graduates. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the request will be granted.

These newly trained teachers may be members of the SDA church in good standing, however, they cannot be expected to fully understand and appreciate the integrative principles because government institutions do not have this element in their training. Moreover, the 1987 Education Act of the government of Zimbabwe, classifies the majority of teachers in the country as civil servants, paid by the government, thus rendering their supervision by the church organization a matter for negotiation. As a result, teachers' attitude towards teaching of Bible and toward church authority have been greatly affected.

The following experience may illustrate the point. The EAD, Education Director and the author made an inspection tour of Western Zimbabwe Field Schools, last year, (1989). At one school, after inspection, teachers were called together for our verbal comments. We made comments about teaching the Bible and lack of Christian environment characterized by religious pictures, etc. One teacher stood up and asked why the picture of Christ was so important. Needless to say, we were surprised. I also noticed that one of the Grade 1 teachers had written the names of the days of the week on the board beginning with Monday -- Sunday. When, however, I called her attention to the error, she did not readily see the problem. These and other innuendoes go a long way in distorting the biblical doctrines of the SDA truths as the church teaches them.

Seventh-day Adventist Education can only ignore these red signals at great expense to the church. Urgent steps need to be taken to reverse the situation before the church loses more and more of its youth through its schools. Our schools should be extensions of Christian homes, the two must compliment each other if the child is to receive proper Christian Education.

Teacher's Role in Christian Education :

The role of the teacher in the transmission of these values is, therefore, very important: The teacher's world view is the greatest single factor in a school situation. He is the element that influences the accomplishment (or lack of it) of the purpose for which the church operates schools around the world. He is the vital link between the student and the truth.

Ellen G. White emphasizes this point further when she says:

"Great is the responsibility of those who take upon themselves the guidance of human souls."

She continues and says:

"The teacher shares the responsibility, (with parents) and needs constantly to realize its sacredness, and to keep in view the purpose of his work. He is not merely to accomplish the daily tasks, to please his employers, to maintain the standing of the schools; he must consider the highest good of his pupils as individuals, the duties that life will lay upon them, the service it requires, and the preparation demanded. The work he is doing day by day will exert upon his pupils, and through them upon others, an influence that will not cease to extend and strengthen until time shall end. The fruits of his work he must meet in that great day when every word and deed shall be brought in review before God. (WHITE)

We cannot, therefore, ignore this inspired counsel in relation to the prevailing situation in our schools in the Zambesi Union, without surrendering our God-given responsibility to the enemy of our faith.

Walsh and Middleton (1984) state that faith is an essential part of human existence. Our world view is determined by the kind of faith we hold. Human emotional crisis, he goes on, is basically religious as our world view rests on faith commitment.

"When our faith is settled, then we begin to see reality in some sensible pattern. Out of faith proceeds a world view, with out which human life simply cannot go on." (WALSH & MIDDLETON)

Thus it can be observed that such faith in a school situation cannot develop in a vacuum. It needs a model pattern - the teacher's acts as a model or pattern of christian

behaviour.

The teacher's role as a model towers above other components of a christian school environment in integrating his faith in his teaching. When he realizes that the work of education and the work of salvation are one, integration of what he believes and what he teaches takes place.

How can the church serve the Lord in earnest with the knowledge that its youth are under the influence of non-christian teachers? Frank E. Gaebelein stresses this point and says:

"Yes, the crux of the matter lies with the teacher. The fact is inescapable; the world view of the teacher in so far as he is effective, gradually conditions the world view of the pupil. No man teaches out of philosophical vacuum. In one way or another, every teacher expresses the conviction he lives by, whether they be spiritually positive or negative."(GAEBELEIN, F E)

This is what is happening in our schools in Zimbabwe. Our schools cannot accomplish their well stated objectives unless this situation is honestly addressed. We need to find a formula that will help us inject into the existing structures the principles of integrating faith and learning.

"The church" states H.R. Kim in his ICT paper " cannot proclaim to its young people an infinite God who is concerned for all life and learning, and then shut Him off in an isolation booth for six days a week." (KIM, H R)

Proposed Remedy :

It must be accepted, however, that the situation as it obtains in Zimbabwe, cannot be transformed overnight, as political issues are at play. However, it is proposed that certain strategies can be adopted to infuse the concept of Integration of faith and learning within the structures, although there are limitations imposed by government policy of the Single Teaching Service.

To ensure that these strategies succeed, clearly stated objectives should be drawn which all teachers teaching in our schools should know and accept to work towards their realization. The following extract from the Education Code for the Columbia Union

Conference School System which includes the Philosophy of Adventist Education and general objectives that would be included, will serve as examples:-

Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy :

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes God, the creator and sustainer of the earth, and entire universe, is the source of knowledge and wisdom.

In His image, God created man perfect. Because of sin, man lost his original estate and christian education, by professing faith in Christ, restores in man the image of His maker, nurtures in man a practical preparation for conscientious service to his fellow men.

A true knowledge of God, fellowship and companionship with Him in study and service, likeness to Him in character development, are to be the source, the means, and the aim of Seventh-day Adventist Education.

The educational programme of the church gives primary emphasis to character building and to the spiritual foundation of the life of its children and youth. Moreover, it makes a abundant provision for the acquisition and interpretation of that which is appropriate from the store of knowledge, and skills for mental, social, vocational, and physical development.

Objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist :

The Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to save its youth and prepare them for the service of the gospel by providing for all its children a general education within a framework of the science of salvation. The fundamentals and common branches of knowledge are to be studied so that proficiency is achieved and a high quality of teaching is maintained.

The church-related elementary school will assist each child to develop; (1) a love and appreciation for the privileges, rights and responsibilities guaranteed each individual and social group and (2) a wholesome respect and attitude for each unit of the society - home, church, school, and government. The elementary school will offer an organized program to ensure adequate development leading toward total spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health and a basic core of skills and knowledge for every day living.

The church-related secondary school, predicted on the results obtained through the elementary school with a character building as an under girding structure, will endeavour to operate realistically for each student in up grading of health, in command of fundamental learning processes, in the teaching of worthy home membership, practical skills, civic education, worthy use of leisure, ethical maturity. The secondary school, implementing the church philosophy, will seek for objectives of spiritual dedication, self-realization, social adjustment, civic responsibility, economic efficiency.(Office of Education: Columbia Union Conference)

In order to facilitate the acceptance by all concerned of the idea of integrating faith and

learning in a school system where SDA influence is gradually, but surely being eroded; I propose that a gradual introduction of an integrated program be undertaken in stages along the following lines.

STAGE ONE : Heads and Education Directors` Council

This is where all the headmasters (principals) of our schools and the Field Education Directors will meet to agree to implement the program. This is the most important group; where the report of this seminar will have to indicate the direction our schools should be heading. This is the group that will plan and map out the strategies as they should be exposed to the material from this seminar.

It is hoped that after a thorough brain-storming of the issues, the Head`s council will make a commitment regarding the implantation of the program of the integration of faith and learning in our schools. After that commitment has been made and details of the program have been also made, the issue will be taken to the Board of Education for recommendation to the Union committee, and that is stage two.

STAGE TWO : Board of Education

This will take the convening of the Board of Education, which consists mostly of the heads involved in stage one, plus the Union Officers. Any other issues not finalized in stage one can now be completed. The Board of Education will take any action to recommend to the Union, the implementation of the program. This will then be taken to the Union Committee for an action, and then become official Zambesi Union Policy for all our schools, thus preparing room for the next step, the Convention.

STAGE THREE : Teachers' Convention

This convention will include as many teachers as possible in order to disseminate the ideas of integration of faith and learning in our schools. This will be where they will be exposed to a variety of speakers on the theme. They will be given the opportunity to hear how they accomplish what governments expects of them and at the same time doing

what the Lord wants them to do - helping them in cultivation and development of Christian characters in their students.

As the Convention will only be for a few days, only broad issues can be discussed at this stage, the purpose being to sensitise teachers on the needs of the program, in our schools. There will be group discussions, where heads, already oriented, will lead these groups to facilitate wide participation and involvement. It will be desirable that at this stage, too, a commitment by the teachers be made to implement the plan.

STAGE FOUR : Field Conventions

After the convention, the heads of secondary schools and Field Directors will know be expected to organize and ran their own seminars in their areas. Each headmaster will draw up a plan of action to indicate how he plans to implement the program he perceives it in his school or group of schools for the Field Directors.

Finally, all new staff members will under go an orientation process and there will be an on-going staff development program in each school, to ensure continuity. The convention could be convened after a period of two years to examine and assess the success or the failure of the program. Should this program be successfully implemented, not only will it improve the religious standing of our schools, but all other aspects of our education will be gained a great deal, as Dr Rasi says:

"As a result, upper-secondary and tertiary level teachers may no longer be viewed as exclusive providers of knowledge and information, but as experienced guides in the development of student skills and attitudes required for self-directed inquiry through out their lives." (RASI)

CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, mention should be made of a dwindling number of old teachers trained in our colleges, who are still playing their faithful part as teacher-evangelists. Forgoing discussions did not take aspect into consideration, as teachers are now in minority, overwhelmed by new recruits from government teacher`s colleges.

The successful implementation of this program will lend support to these teachers and help them not only to gain new confidence in their teaching, but also establish them, as teachers, firmly on the Rock of Christ.

Not only will this happen, but church members may again begin to have confidence in the Adventist system of Education as being guided by the Holy Spirit.

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