

*AN ADVENTIST APPROACH TO TEACHING CIVICS*

*by*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the Finnish educational system CIVICS consists chiefly of political science, economics and social policy. The curriculum is very much informative by nature giving basic knowledge of the society and the world in which we live. In Finland like in the other Nordic countries the society is highly secularized, yet society and the culture are based on a long and strong protestant, Lutheran tradition. More than 90 % of the population belongs to the Lutheran state church.

As in many cases in Western Europe my school is part of the national educational system and is accredited and subsidized by the government. So one might say that in some sense we are serving two masters: the SDA-church and the state. On the academic level our task is to prepare our students for public examinations and university entrances.

You may even say that the curriculum will sometimes take a direction in which we do not want to go, e.g. our students may have to study some literature or political theories which some might consider undesirable or useless. On the other hand the demands of an externally imposed curriculum might be such that there is no time or too little time to include activities we might think desirable. It may even be so that the amount of time devoted to Christian teaching and intergration of our faith to learning remains too small.

However there are a lot of possibilities to offer spiritual emphasis on the subject and such should also play a central role in the formulation of the objectives and methods for teaching civics.

## 2.WHY TEACH CIVICS?

### 2.1. Rationale

First of all we must ask ourselves, why do we teach civics? What do we want to accomplish ? It appears to many that civics is quite a secular discipline. Putting politics and religion together seems to be a risky business. However, religion needs to be made an integral part of the educational process in order to achieve objectives as follows: (1) to inform the student properly and accurately about the world and the society in which he lives, about himself, about the point and purpose of life, and about what can be accepted as true, good, and beautiful: (2) to help the learner develop the capacity to understand, to think, to value, and to behave Christianly and to learn dutifully about "cause and effect", (3) to help each student to become a child of God, for "the earth is the Lords, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1).

Integrated studies of civics will enable students to develop a life-style in harmony with man's origin, nature, and destiny based on the biblical world view presenting God's involvement with human beings and also with the life of the nations. Secular education reveals only what can be learned through reasoning, observation and analysis, concerning the what and the how of things. But it cannot disclose the why or the what for life and the universe. It cannot provide the hidden answers to questions related to origin, value, and purpose. It can only provide theories. These are the real questions man needs to answer to make sense out of the world in which he lives and to find meaning, purpose, and direction in his life.

Man's basic problem stems not from his ignorance but from

his sinfulness. More than <sup>213</sup>knowledge, more than being informed, he must be transformed. Secular education has no solution for this problem; it has no answer to this type of question because such questions belong to the spiritual dimension of man and answers can be found only through a deeply personal religious experience. Human beings are inherently religious creatures. The Bible teaches that man was called into existence by the Creator and was made in the creator's image. In view of this, religion must be seen as an irreplaceable partner in all education and in every discipline, also in civics, and the Bible as a revelation of God must be the ultimate criterion by which we judge our world view. Paul tells Timothy that the scriptures have a purpose; they are "to teach, reprove and correct us, and to train us in righteousness so that we may be equipped for life of good works" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

## 2.2. Values

In every society there are varying sets of values, most of which are derived from different world views that the citizens might have. One of the most important duties of civics is to enable students to understand and respect diverse religious, social, ethnic, and cultural values and also to develop a personal set of values for themselves. The values are very important to us, because we are valueing beings. Any human exploit develops from the values that its originators deem most important. Based on their values people choose methods that they think will meet their goals. If their values change, then their goals, methods and deeds also change. Consequently, we should create an active, integrated program to teach values which we want to convoy to young people and review the present curriculum in order to help students to make Christian choices to guide their lives as Christians.

Teaching civics offers a lot of possibilities for the study of social choices. It does not consist simply of facts or statistics, but would also require students to

analyze and evaluate the underlying values and dilemmas in social choices, to see and understand the broader application of the principle of "sowing and reaping". All our choices have consequences.

Many of the issues in the subject lead to the study of human morality and dignity. There are a lot of situations when students must take either a negative or a positive view of the matter. Then it is an excellent opportunity to make references to the Bible and to try to find a Christian solution to the question. For example when we study programs of different parties, we may refer to the text Isa 58:6-8, where the Bible declares that true worship involves setting the oppressed free, sharing our food with the hungry, and clothes to the needy and then make comparisons, how a certain party is going to deal with these vital human matters. This is one way how students could get to value the life in the light of God's word.

### 2.3. Knowledge and Skills

Studying civics will enable students to learn and understand the structure of the society and its economic life and to develop and also practice a variety of intellectual valueing, self-direction, and social participation skills.

#### 2.3.1. Politics

Adventists have traditionally been apathetic or negative towards politics. It is considered that Christian message is rather spiritual than social or political. And, as Ellen White indicates, His mission on earth was not to liberate the Jews from the Romans but rather to free them and whoever believes in Him from sin. But what is politics? There are many definitions, such as the authoritative allocation of values in a community, the

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striving to share power or the striving to influence the distribution of power. In spite of these different definitions the essence of politics remains the same: the making of rules and regulations that have a binding effect on a significant group of people on a given society. In a broad sense, politics or political processes exist whenever group decision-making takes place. Thus we may also speak of financial politics, corporate politics, environmental politics or even church politics. But normally the term refers to the decision- and policy-making processes of local or national government. In most countries political parties are the vehicles through which decision-makers are selected. The term party-politics conjures up images of influence peddling, corruption, and behind-the-scenes deals. That's why many people regard politics as a dirty play. However, it is important that the students understand the basic concepts and operations of political process as well as biblical teachings concerning e.g. church-state relations. Furthermore, it is of importance that the students get to know the main political and economical ideologies in relationship to the intergration of faith and learning. Civics like social sciences generally is an excellent tool to train young people to citizenship as christians. We must learn to respect different views of people and to be tolerant to others who might have a different world view and also that the difference between men is possible to be approached with christian love.

The relationship between politics and religion is also of special importance to Adventists where a guaranty of religious freedom is concerned. This should be especially emphasized to the students.

The question of justice in the society also offers a good opportunity for the integration religion into politics. At creation God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day, that means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all 'very good'. But now we see, at least on TV, problems like the discouraging

effects of nationalism, even wars, mass poverty, urban blight, ecological catastrophes etc. As Christian educators we also face the question that students sometimes ask. What can we do or should we do for all this? What is our responsibility? Is it only a private matter that does not concern us at all?

Discussions of the Bible's teaching of the Bible concerning justice eventually turn to a consideration of the relationship between justice and love. It should be obvious that in some sense love and justice are closely related. Of course, the relationship of love and justice seems questionable in cases where justice is viewed as a necessary trait of governmental action, e.g. of governmental control over the distribution of a certain good or burden. In the Bible there is also a text, which gives us certain guidelines for 'active' involvement in the political sphere. In the words of the message which the Lord gave to the exiled Israelites - "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7).

On the other hand some dualists regard that, when the society is secular, Christians should not be involved in politics and they refer to Jesus' own statement: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's" (Matt.22:21). Dualists forget that Christ is both Saviour and Judge.

It is important that our students understand the basic concepts and operations of political processes as well as biblical teachings concerning church-state relations. Furthermore, it is of importance that the students get to know the main political and economic ideologies also in the relationship of the integration of faith and learning. Civics is an excellent tool to train young people to citizenship as Christians.



### 2.3.2 Economics

In the western civilization the economic values are regarded highly. It seems that today profit maximization and economic growth reign the world. One might say that economism is the chief idol of the economic consumer society. While we teach principles and theories of economics to our students, there is great opportunity to remind students about the responsibility of people and especially of Christians towards nature. Modern society cannot continue endlessly to enjoy "good life" and to waste natural resources without serious consequences of which we can already see a lot of signs around us. Christians should live in harmony with nature created by God. Furthermore questions like the exploitation of poorer countries greed and selfishness, or the morality of advertising etc. should be stimulated. In the biblical philosophy of competition there are no winners or losers like in some economical systems, but true Christians take care of their neighbours. So there are many current interests in these matters and reasons to fruitful debates.

### 2.4. Social Participation

We are sociocultural beings. Jesus Christ himself asks a man to love his neighbour as he loves himself. That is to say that we are all equal and under an obligation to cherish love and concern for other human beings. Although we are individuals, we all belong to the society around us. Though we are not of the world, we live in the world. Civics will also encourages to demonstrate the acceptance of the Adventist world view by participating in activities in the society as individuals and as members of the group spreading good Christian influence around us.

### 3. HOW TO TEACH CIVICS?

#### 3.1. Familiarity of Objectives

At the beginning the teacher reviews the curriculum to identify the objectives and skills to be included in the course.

#### 3.2. Resources and Teaching Aids

There is a multitude of resources that can be used when teaching civics. These include textbooks, library books and other books of reference, newspapers, journals, films and videos, slide programs, maps, statistics, charters, radio or TV news and other programs of actuality interviews and, when talking about integration the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White must be included, too.

#### 3.3. Teacher-directed Class Periods

The teacher-directed class period is quite a usual and practicable method in the highschools. This is normally a lecture, but quite often it also leads to a discussion. It is of great importance to make a lot of relevant and challenging questions, not only by the teacher, but to let the students be promoters in the classroom as well. The Christian teacher has frequently good opportunities to introduce Christian dimensions and aspects to conversation, to raise questions on values, principles and to try to find solutions together with his students. That's why the teacher must be spiritually aware, a person to whom the personal study of the Word of God is very important, because in reality a lot of integration takes place through the very Christian teacher.

Let us take one example; when we speak of politics or economic growth, we normally deal with the improvement and development of the society. Secular education limits man's "redemption" to the here and now, but a religious educator recognizes the eternal dimensions of redemption and knows that in order to achieve it, man needs a power other than a political power of his own. He needs God's grace and power. The students should come to the conclusion that real improvements in modern society can only take place, when people's hearts change first. They need to become new creatures.

#### 3.4. Independent Activity Periods

The teacher-directed class periods ought to be alternated with independent activity periods. A variety of methods and approaches should also be utilized to vary independent activity periods. For many years many of us have relied on lectures, note-taking, facts and dates. Using a broader variety of techniques can help maintain a high student interest level. The class should include not only content but more skills. Independent studies will strengthen the ability of mastering skills. These skills also have to transfer value to other areas of life. In learning skills, students should go beyond rote memorization to higher skills such as comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This will help students achieve the Adventist ideal of being "thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts"(E.G. White, Education, p. 17).

Civics class could be practical. Students are able to find answers to some of the big questions that they face in life. During independent activity periods supplemental resources are assigned to reinforce the objectives and skills. These activities can facilitate decision-making, problem solving, and critical thinking. They include special group activities, prepared discourses, speeches

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and essays on the actual topics, they may include summarizing or categorizing the major topics for review and evaluation. Students can interview some person who has a key position in the community, they can edit the daily newspaper of their own or even "radio or TV news". Role playing sometimes gives a variety to learning. Role playing provides students with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with a specific problem or social dilemma. Through this technique students learn to think through the consequences of an action and improve their decision-making skills. Once the problem has been introduced, the students act out various ways of solving it. Then they discuss the positive and negative consequences of each decision and action.

#### 4. WHO TEACHES CIVICS?

As noticed before a lot of integration takes place through the Christian teacher, whose true intellectual and spiritual home is in the Word of God. So when he teaches a so-called secular subject like civics, the Christian teacher should enrich his instruction by natural communication of Christian allusions and attitudes, flowing from a mind and a personality steeped in the Bible. When dealing with any matter either political, economic or social, he should be on the alert for the effective integration within the entire curriculum, because there are constant opportunities to make allusion to the religion for example emphasizing a man's responsibility for other human beings according to his Christian world view. But I am afraid in most cases it is still true as Frank E Gaebelein notices in his book *The Pattern of God's Truth*, that "like small islands of spiritual truth, they stand in the midst of a secular curriculum". Thus Gaebelein concludes: "To this end, I suggest a plan designed to make Christianity and the Bible the living center of the curriculum."

Finally, the Christian teacher ought to be a real value maker, whose personal experience in life should be communicated in the christian school. So when leaving the school or college the student ought to be able to answer the questions which every one has to face in his own life: "(1) Who am I? Or, (2) Where am I? Or, (3) What's wrong? Or, (4) What's the remedy? In other words, how I find salvation" (Walsh, Middleton, The Transforming Vision, p. 35).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Teaching civics should help students to create a natural integration of their faith to modern society. That means that they should grow into mature citizens who carry their responsibilities not only as good citizens, but above all as 'missionaries' sent by God to the world of today. Studying this subject will help them to develop a sense of where they fit in as christians socially and sometimes even politically. So it tries to help them to live as citizens of both a local and a global community as they prepare themselves for God's eternal Kingdom. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught: "Do to others what you would have them do to you." (Matt. 7:12) This contains a great guideline for human relationships that are so often touched in teaching civics.

To a certain extent, as mentioned earlier, in a discipline like civics curriculum should include an emphasis on the work of the SDA church. Relating to the subject one could debate upon possible denominational problems and possible solutions as well. In my opinion this kind of instruction would produce graduates who support and lead the church toward the accomplishment of its divinely appointed mission in the world.

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## APPENDIX:

SOME EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATION IN THE CLASSROOM; TOPICS OF DISCUSSION, ALLUSIONS TO BIBLE ETC.

CURRICULUM	RELIGION
EX. 1: COURT - judge - the accused - lawyer	JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH -God -Man -Jesus
EX. 2: CONSTITUTION - laws, rules	TEN COMMANDMENTS -Christian norms (the Sermon on the Mount)
EX. 3: PARTIES	CONGREGATIONS
EX. 4: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (e.g..UN)	SDA-WORLDWIDE CHURCH
EX. 5: CITIZENSHIP	CHRISTIAN CITIZENS
EX. 6: GOVERNING MODELS	"Do to others what you would have them to do to you"
EX. 7: STANDARD OF LIVING	QUALITY OF LIVING
EX. 8: INFLATION	"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt..."