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**THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL STUDIES IN ADVENTIST
SECONDARY EDUCATION**

by

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**Prepared for the
18th International Faith and Learning Seminar
Held at
West Indies College
Mandeville, Jamaica - June 16-29, 1996.**

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INTRODUCTION

Seventh-day Adventist Education is like no other. Yes, it shares many of the goals, strategies, methods and activities of its normative counterparts, but the philosophy on which it is built is such a radical departure from the norm that is revolutionary in its methods and remarkable in its outcomes. The theory and practice of Seventh-day Adventists education is a continuing process of weaving into the total fabric of the developing person a living vibrant faith in God which is central to all human existence. This integration of faith and learning is to be pursued in all aspects of the educational experience with the aim of establishing in the learner of faith to live by. It encompasses the full range of human experience from the womb to the tomb and indeed is expected in principle to assure man's continued development through eternal ages (White 1952:13)

This paper focuses on the importance of vocational training in Jamaican Adventist Schools, its significance in this process of integration and indeed the need to improve educational offerings in this area.

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN S.D.A. EDUCATION

A. Faith

Rasi defines faith as being both a gift of God and a response to the trustworthiness of God. It is an instinctive reaching out for something bigger than one's self and is really a response to a felt need which we all seem to have. It is a trust in God and that grows as a man recognizes the greatness and goodness of God through varied means of revelation; a trust which leads him to acknowledge the lordship of God and yield increasingly to His divine control. It is a basic presupposition for all Christian thinking and it is the driving force and determining factor in the lifestyle of the Christian person.

B. Education

Education is the "harmonious development" of God's children in all their dimensions, preparing them to meet the challenges of living and serving in this world and the next(White 1952:13). It seeks to develop to its fullest potentials their characters and thus to fit them for eternal life; the plan of salvation at work in redeeming fallen mankind. Thus, the work of education and the work of redemption are one and the knowledge of God is the real essence of education.

The philosophy which governs Seventh-day Adventist education is built on this faith. It sees God as Ultimate Reality, the Source and Sustainer of all creation. In Him rests both one's reason for existence and one's ultimate destiny (Col. 1:17). A Knowledge of God is vital and available only as He reveals Himself. This He willingly does. He is Ultimate Truth. All that is true in our request for knowledge points to Him and all who possess truth are mere feeble reflectors of His omniscience (IAD Policy Book 1995:143)

Recognizing that God is all-wise and all-good, ultimate value is seen in His expressed will (Ecc. 12:13,14). His laws are the infallible standards for human living. Adhering to these leads to eternal happiness and fulfillment. Failure to comply results in degradation, death, and eternal loss (1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 6:23). Humanity, though created a harmonious part of the cosmos, governed by Divine law, chose to rebel, thus bringing in the era of decline and destruction for themselves and the natural world. From this they are restored partially and gradually as they choose to realign themselves with the Divine will; and ultimately, when God restores original perfection for those who have made this choice. Though marred by sin, the creation of God, as ordered by his law, presents the best possible standards of beauty and order and point to the One who is Himself "altogether lovely".

C. Integration

At the earliest stages of the educational process the integration of faith and learning ought to begin. In fact, the proposal put forward by White and which finds increasing support in modern psychological thinking (White 1980:255) suggests that the influence of the mind and attitudes - formation of the character, of the child - begins before birth.

The early years are most impressionable. Here the child has no presuppositions to influence its learning. It is important that the information absorbed at this stage is contextualized by good Christian thinking (Ibid 175). Thus the first responsibility for the integration of faith and learning begins at home.

The school also has a great responsibility in fostering a living faith in young minds. The greater portion of each day is spent in school when children at impressionable ages are influenced by peers and role models. Today as more and more homes are being recognized to be dysfunctional, increasing demand is placed on the school to provide early training for the children.

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN S.D.A. EDUCATION

Prominent among the factors that typify Seventh-day Adventist education is a strong commitment to vocational training. Vocational training, also called manual training or industrial arts, in this case refers to the development of manual or physical skills through a planned methodically effected programme. This is important to the accomplishment of a rounded education. Ellen White asserts that labour was designed to be a blessing to mankind and as such is a part of the divine plan for education (White 1952: 214). "So far as possible facilities for manual training should be connected with every school." (Ibid 217).

E.A.Sutherland, pioneer Adventist educator, sees the "industrial feature" as "the essential basis of a true education" and as taking preeminence over learning gleaned from textbooks (Sutherland 1984:375) We are advised to regulate the studies of children and youth to ensure that a significant portion of their time is spent in physical labour. This will lead to better blood circulation, improved physical stamina and superior mental alertness (White 1943:83). The improved state of health which redound from this education is in keeping with the plan of Him who desires "above all things that we prosper and be in good health" (III Jn.2).

Benefits of Vocational Training

The benefits of vocational training are not limited to physical advantages, however. The body normally rest better after a period of manual work. The invigorated body then lends strength to the brain and the student learns more in less time (Moore 1976:95). Vocational training, therefore, contributes to academic excellence.

There are other benefits too. In keeping with the realization that education is more than the acquisition of knowledge but also the gaining of basic living skills, we note that vocational training teaches the student to think and to plan: to execute daily task in a systematic manner: to properly utilize leisure time: to be better home-makers: and to make practical, considered Christian judgements (Houliston 1990:24). It teaches the dignity of labour: that work is of far greater value than earning a living, but rather should be an offering to God, a service to man and a means to ones personal growth and dignity (Holmes 1994:24).

Whether training takes place in the home or at a school it brings teacher (or parent) and learner together, thus promoting harmony and family togetherness. There are increased opportunities for the development of both cognitive and affective skills in a setting where the psychomotor is

emphasized. The teacher/parent find innumerable opportunities to model desired character traits for the children.

FAITH AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN S.D.A. EDUCATION

The integration of faith and learning is a meaningful, fruitful exercise when practiced in the context of vocational training. This area of discipline lends itself readily to the integrative process. One reason perhaps, is that the experience of active labour is not only a mandate from God (Gen. 1:28, 2:15) but typifies the very nature of God. God, the Creator and God the Redeemer set an example of industry for us to follow (Gen. 1 and 2; Jn. 9:4). This need to follow the Divine example is a first lesson of faith to be imparted in this process. Obedience to His instructions is another.

The fact that these subject more readily accommodate demonstration, participation and group activities allows for greater modelling of Christian values by the teacher and for the development of Christian virtues as the students interact with each other. Individual subject areas lend themselves to varying expressions of faith. Agriculture is an excellent example:

A. Agriculture as an Example

Agriculture is an important subject area and one highly recommended for study in Adventist schools. Ellen White says: "No line of manual training is of more value than Agriculture... in [its] study let pupils be given not only theory but practice." It was the first line of work given to man (White 1952:219). Below is an example that demonstrates how matters of faith can be imparted in the teaching of Agriculture.

INTEGRATING FAITH IN THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURE
(A sample)

TOPIC OR AREA	CONCEPT OF FAITH AND VALUES
1. Subject overviews - Agriculture is seen as the cultivation and care of plants and animals.	This study is a response of Stewardship to the Edenic mandate to care for the earth (Ps. 24:1).
2. Responsibility of the Agriculturist in the care of dependable animals (providing food and care).	We all depend on God for sustenance. We need to trust Him (Ps. 23). We need to pattern His faithfulness and kindness.
3. Dealing with diseased animals	Meat was not a part of our original diet - and is not God's plan for us. (Gen 1:29)
4. Specialized biological structure of animals (eg. digestive system).	We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We need to - glorify God as Creator.
5. Careful preparation of beds and furrows for crops.	God is a God of order. (1 Cor. 14:40)
6. Growth and development of the seed as it germinates and grows though unobserved and unsupervised.	Principles of the kingdom grow inexplicably in mankind under guidance of the Holy Spirit. He brings them to fruition.
7. Preparation of soil. Process of sowing, siting, of beds...	We need to properly plan the activities of life, so as to ensure optimum results to the glory of God.
8. Varieties of crops growing on same plot.	God allows such wonderful variety in His children even when they share common backgrounds and environments.
9. Working with classmates and teachers to accomplish the task.	The importance of the individual in working as a team. Responsibility to each other.
10. Reaping	Concept of judgement and ultimately seeing the result of labour.

B. Additional Examples

Other vocational subject areas also provide rich soil for the integration process: Woodwork, Construction, Art and Craft, Food and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Home Management, Computer Education - just to name a few. They open to the minds of students important things about the work and nature of God and His relationship to us. Students are lead to develop added depth of thought and more sobriety of character.

C. Reasons for Poor Response

Considering the many blessings of vocational training and its potential for fostering a living faith in our students it is natural to expect that Adventist educators have enthusiastically embraced this rich educational resource as we seek to fulfil the mandate of Christian Education. Unfortunately, this is not the case. To a great extent Adventist educators have focussed mainly on academic offerings and have by-passed the challenge of vocational education.

At all levels there is little interest in vocational training. It is reported that at the 10th Faith and Learning Seminar held in Lincoln Nebraska, it was discovered that out of 14 colleges and universities present, five no longer practised vocational training. The main reasons given were inadequate financing and problems of scheduling (Muze 1992:24). A recent survey, by this author, of fifteen S.D.A. preparatory and high schools in Jamaica showed that eight of these schools offered no vocational training at all. Of the eight post-preparatory schools only three offered any vocational course other than Food and Nutrition. (See Appendix). For these schools also the main reason given for poor vocational offerings was finance.

Of course, there are also other reasons than financial. One very real reason is a low perception

of the value of vocational training. Despite a sustained and highly effective campaign by the government of Jamaica, over the past fifteen years or so, to promote and facilitate technical/vocational education, it is still seen by many as an undesirable alternative to academic pursuits and the domain of the academically backward student. Sadly, this perception is held even in S.D.A. institutions where vocational education has been a part of our philosophy for many years. Increased difficulties in time tabling, higher security demands, unavailability of adequate space and skilled teachers were other important factors in vocational training considerations.

STEPS TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

We need to bear in mind as we plan our curriculum that "students who have gained a book knowledge" without gaining a knowledge of practical work cannot lay claim to symmetrical education. The account books may show that the school has suffered some financial loss in carrying on industrial work; but if in their lines of work the students have learned lessons that will strengthen their character-building, the books of Heaven will show a gain far exceeding the financial loss"(White 1943:307-316).

"As far as possible manual training should be connected with every school...No other work committed to us is so important as the training of our youth and every outlay demanded for its accomplishment is means well spent"(Ibid 1952:218-219).

In seeking to provide better vocational education in our schools there are still a few things we might try:

We need to promote again the study of foundation principles of education in our churches. Local congregations should be sensitized to the need for vocational education and be asked to give

financial assistance.

Skilled church members can provide much of the needed human resources through voluntary work.

Administrators and financial controllers need also to be convinced of educational imperatives.

The private sector, government and international agencies are sometimes willing to provide funding for development and education projects if well-presented proposals are made.

Institutions can pool resources and thus share the burden of financial demands.

Assessment ought to be done to determine the most relevant and cost-effective programmes.

Careful work must be done to maximize the potential of vocational education in the integration of faith and learning.

One must also bear in mind that many vocational programmes are capable of generating a considerable portion of their required recurrent expenditure. Limited commercialization can sometimes off-set the cost of vocational training.

Lastly we sometimes need to simply go forward utilizing the limited resources available and, as we earnestly seek to do God's will, He will open the necessary doors to success.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The principles of S.D.A. education are as unique as the doctrinal principles of the church itself. In fact, there is a common purpose for existence: the redemption of God's children and the restoration of the Divine image in them. This is accomplished as their lives are characterized and governed by a living vibrant faith (Eph. 2:8; Hab. 2:4). As principles of living are taught to our students the principles of faith should also be imparted; that is, the integration of faith and learning. This is the preparing of a character fit for eternity.

Vocational education is a basic component of S.D.A. education. Consequently, it is biblically based in the word and example of Christ, and strongly supported by church pioneers and inspired thinkers. It lends itself beautifully to the integration of faith and learning. Educational leaders in Adventism seem to have lost the vision of the essential nature of vocational education and it is not practised as widely as it should be. If the integration of faith and learning is to be achieved this area of training cannot be omitted from our educational pursuits. We are urged to give it its deserved emphasis as this thrust is most needed now.

Lessons of faith to be learned from vocational training are so many and so meaningful that the recommendation for vocational training is strong. Not only students gain from these exercises, but staff benefit also as they heed the instruction to work daily side by side with their students (White 1909:24). The institution also benefits as the skills reposing in its halls increase. These skills are also available in the community as the school reaches out to its constituency.

Finally, the wider community and the nation benefits by having more skilled workers available. In difficult times unemployment does not pose such a problem as citizens are not limited to "white collar" job potentials. The students thus trained will not only possess necessary manual skills but will

have the sterling character needed to make their community a better place since vocational training has not merely spoken to what they can do but, more importantly, to who they are (Houliston 1990:22).

As we move towards more effective integration of faith and learning we need the character building potentials of vocational training. The effect of a move to resuscitate and promote this area of education will redound to our lasting benefit.

APPENDIX

SCHOOL	POP	STAFF	VOCATIONAL OFFERINGS
1. Buff Bay Academy (Junior High)	189	6	None
2. Harrison Memorial High	385	20	Food and Nutrition
3. Kingsway High	360	19	Food and Nutrition Clothing & Textiles Technical Drawing Art & Craft, Computer Education
4. Portland High	135	10	Food and Nutrition
5. Port Maria High	139	16	Woodwork, Agriculture Food & Nutrition Clothing and Textiles Welding, Computer Education
6. St. Ann's Bay High	130	9	Food and Nutrition
7. Willowdene High	209	19	Food and Nutrition Clothing and Textiles
8. Savanna-la-mar High	140	15	Food and Nutrition
9. West Indies College High	405	19	Food and Nutrition Computer Education, Clothing and Textiles

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Working Policy - Inter American Division of the General Conference 1995 - 1996