

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**INSTILLING CHRISTIAN VIRTUES IN ADVISING
STUDENT RESEARCHERS**

by

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Introduction

Research as an academic requirement is often dreadful to students. This is true not only in the undergraduate but even in the graduate level. The research angst may be due to its tedious process, intricate procedures, and time-demanding tasks. Davis (2007) found out that students are prejudice towards research because they do not see its relevance to their career preparation. They also find the subject too hard to understand and apply. In my own observation, students' negative attitude toward the subject may be due to their writing incompetence and their unwilling predisposition to try liking it. More so, research competes with their other major requirements. In many instances, a student's intense desire for graduation is hampered by the long and rigorous process of research. Hence, research as a subject and a project suffers from bad reputation based on sad experiences.

But teachers, too, are not immune from such anguish. While teaching the subject may just be like any class lecture, advising and checking the students' papers can be a real torment. Teachers' research-related stressors stem from students' faulty writing, late submission of stage-by-stage requirements, repetitious corrections, and negative attitude, which is sometimes carried on towards the teacher, among others. At times, the red inks imposed on students' papers and students' insistence on the "correctness" of their work can mar the student-teacher relationship.

However, my experience in teaching research methodology and advising student researchers over the years has enabled me to see the research process as a values-transmission and character-formation opportunity. For while the tasks are unavoidably demanding to both students and teachers, the activities challenge the best Christian virtues— which can be enhanced and nurtured throughout the different stages of the

research process. It is my aim that research teachers/advisers can look at the experience of guiding student researchers as a meaningful spiritual journey.

Toward a Christian Research Worldview

An earnest attempt to spiritualize the research process begins from a Christian worldview. In the following sections, a paradigm for Adventist researchers is proposed from a Biblical perspective that may create distinctions in a researcher's attitudes towards the research process, fellow researchers, and research aims.

Biblical Perspective on Research

While research is mostly an academic and scientific activity, it can also be a valuable instrument to build up faith. The Word of God does not disregard or diminish the role of scholarship in the discovery of truth for those who know the truth shall have freedom (John 8:32), and the Holy Spirit will guide into all truth (John 16:13). Moreover, all claims of truth must be subjected to the scrutiny of the Word of God which is the truth that sanctifies (John 17:17). Ultimately, knowing the truth will lead to a saving knowledge of God (John 17:3). It is in this sense that "the pursuit of truth is in some sense the pursuit of God" (Harris, 2004: 32). So the search for truth is not simply a resort but a Christian responsibility!

Such biblical perspective of scholarship is essential since it influences to a great degree a researcher's objectives and ethos in doing research. Corbin & Strauss (2008:32) note that "researchers bring to the research situation their particular paradigms, including perspectives, training, knowledge, and biases; and these aspects of self then become woven into all aspects of the research process." Then it can be expected that any researcher who integrates Bible principles and Christian values into his practice of research will certainly conduct ethical research (Davis, 2007).

A Paradigm for Adventist Researchers

While any research is conducted to generate information that would serve as basis for policy and decision-making, or to prove and disprove beliefs and presuppositions, some differences may be noted between secular and Christian researchers.

For the secular-minded scholar, research can be an occasion to make money, to aim for promotion, or to have a name glamorized by findings that will somehow “shock” and “shake” the world of academia. Under such motives, a researcher may be tempted to distort data to accommodate some desired outcomes or give in to pressures in view of some temporal benefits. The Christian scholar, nonetheless, conducts research to discover the truth and to find solutions for human problems. The difference between the secular-minded scholar and the Christian scholar may affect decisions on the research details because the “scholar’s worldview determines the orientation of his research” (Copiz, 1989: 271). On the other hand, a Christian worldview brings about godly objectives and procedures in research. On it lies the distinctiveness of the objectives, methodology, and uses of Christian research. I am thus proposing the following as essential components of a paradigm for Adventist researchers:

1. **God’s Revelation.** The journey to the truth can go only as far as God has revealed. This is a bottom-line fact to the Christian researcher. He knows that while there is much to know by serious study, his discovery of truth is delimited by God’s revelation. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:29). So the discovery of truth is progressive until truth becomes fully known later in life or in the other side of eternity. “For now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, ever as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

2. **Faith.** At points where the researcher finds it difficult or impossible to understand certain phenomena in his study, he bows in submission to God's infinite wisdom and exercises faith in God's prerogative to reveal or not to reveal. Where his finite wisdom fails, the scholar will move on in faith believing that God in His own time and way will reveal truth more fully. The researcher with this paradigm will be enabled to "see all things in relationship to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Lord" (Holmes, 1987:57).

3. **Integrity.** This is the area where the contrast between the secular and the Christian researcher may be more accentuated. The Christian scholar, while observing strictly the intricate and rigid research procedures just like his secular counterpart, is possessed by an overwhelming sense of integrity in the conduct of his research from start to finish. Believing that scholarship is a stewardship in response to God's revelation, he will not resort to any means that is inhuman, dishonest, or cheap in doing his study.

4. **Submission.** A Christian researcher is willing to work in cooperation with other researchers, especially within the community of God. He does not take an unbending posture or arrogant attitude about his findings, but is willing to submit them to the scrutiny of his peers. He is always ready to recant his beliefs and conclusions if they are found to be flawed. Moreover, he will not publish or openly promote his views if he knows it will cause confusion or division in the community of faith.

5. **Research Agenda.** As important as knowing the truth, dealing with issues that help promote human welfare must be the overarching aim of a Christian researcher. Even in the choice of his research topic, his resources are geared towards helping meet human needs. The document "*A Statement on Seventh-day Adventists and Scholarship*" prepared by Rasi, et al. (2004) highlights the distinctiveness of Adventist research objectives:

Through their research, Adventist scholars can make God's world more understandable and improve human life in the present. This can be

by contributing to the beauty of the world, or through investigations that bring health, healing and improvement to human society. By this means scholarship becomes an avenue of service, a way of immediately responding to the challenges of a fallen world.

Thus the Adventist researcher, while observing the same rigid procedures in conducting his studies, can make distinctions within this paradigm.

The Research Process as a Spiritual Journey

The research process is a long, tiresome and lonesome journey. The researcher at times is clouded with doubt and dismay, and quitting is often an inviting way out. But it is in such moments that the best virtues in life are challenged and developed. With dedicated mentoring of the student researcher, the process can also be a meaningful spiritual journey. Below are some virtues that can be enhanced at the different stages of research work.

Research Stages and Human Virtues

Throughout the research process, certain virtues are demanded from anyone engaged in the project. Being demanded, such human qualities are also enhanced. Holmes (1987:17-18) could be well acquainted with such experience when he wrote: “The pursuit of truth... carries with it certain moral pre-requisites: the willingness and determination to learn, intellectual honesty, and a self-discipline that makes lesser and more selfish satisfaction wait.”

Others who have been through the research process also identify certain characteristics that are demanded along the course. Copiz (1989) mentioned such qualities as integrity, open-mindedness, discretion, self discipline, acceptance of vulnerability and humility. Also, a researcher manifests tolerance and respect towards other opinions, and is willing to seek the counsel of peers. Moreover, he practices perseverance, thoroughness and honesty in dealing with data, yet is consistent with his

principles in case of conflict. Furthermore, he is ready to make sacrifices, pursues his search for truth prayerfully, and bows before the wisdom of God.

Ariola (2006:29) points out such virtues as patience, persistence, resourcefulness, deep interest in searching for truth, an analytical and critical mind, and alertness to past and current events; while Corbin & Strauss (2008:13) emphasize curiosity, creativity and imagination, a sense of logic, willingness to take risks, and trust in self and in the value of work, among others, as virtues required in the research task.

Given below are some Christian virtues that are challenged at the different stages of the research process. While practically any or all of these virtues are demanded in all stages, the necessity of each is stressed more in some specific research tasks.

I. Deciding on the Research Problem: Compassion & Practicality

The research journey begins at this stage. While seemingly easy, many students find it difficult to look for a research topic that would be worthwhile and could sustain their interest all throughout. It is at this stage that the adviser/mentor can guide the students in deciding for a feasible and serviceable research problem. The student can be encouraged to deal with a research project that can somehow help, no matter how small, alleviate human suffering.

Moreover, leading the student to see his limitations in dealing with some research tasks, the mentor teaches him practicality. A student is helped to realize that there are certain research projects that he may not be capable to conduct considering personal limitations, budget and time constraints.

II. Reviewing Literature: Respect & Tolerance

This stage requires the researcher to peruse as much materials that are related to his study. While he may not agree with every past writer, he must also exercise tolerance

toward different opinions and respect explanations of certain phenomena or dilemma. Holmes (1987:5) emphasizes that “the educated Christian must be at home in the world of ideas and people”, just as he must exercise critical judgment in interpreting and evaluating information; for rational inquiry is not carried on in isolation but in dialogue with other minds past and present. Further, it is a social undertaking as it builds on earlier works.

III. Conceptualizing the Framework/Variables: Organization & Creativity

In laying out the framework and variables of the study, the student is taught to think in an organized fashion which may be carried on in other areas of life. Moreover, he will be encouraged to think creatively in identifying the positions and interrelations of the variables as well as in writing them in a diagram. The virtues of organization and creativity in how life is to be conducted can also be given emphasis at this stage.

IV. Stating the Questions/Objectives: Critical Thinking

This is the stage wherein mentors can instil critical thinking on novice researchers as they work through the task of breaking down the research problem into specific research objectives/questions. Catane (2000:6) notes that dissecting the problem out of a generalized situation is intellectually demanding. So the adviser can encourage the student to think critically to be able to formulate research objectives/questions.

V. Delimiting the Study: Self-Awareness & Acceptance

In laying out the parameters of the study, the neophyte researcher can be led to an honest assessment of his strengths and limitations since not all research types may be feasible for him. He will be guided into research projects in which his capabilities can be maximized, and wherein the prospect of success is certain. Ariola (2006:5) identifies three factors that are a must in realizing research objectives: men, money and materials.

In setting the boundaries of his study, the student must be led to look at his resources in these areas.

VI. Defining the Key Terms and Word Constructs: Candour

Here the student is taught to write with clarity the terms that play a significant role in his study. Usually, such terms and word constructs are operationally/technically defined. So the student must be precise so that such key words are well delineated in providing pivotal understanding of the research issues. Such clear thinking and candid writing are parallel with a Christian's earnest concern and forthright dealings with fellow humans.

VII. Planning the Methodology: Foresight & Resourcefulness

At this stage the researcher must identify the participants of his study, determine how they will be chosen, and decide on the instrument/s for gathering the necessary information. Utilizing inappropriate and questionable methods to gather data undermines research credibility, and could result to a research fiasco. In this particular task, the student is encouraged to exercise foresight and resourcefulness in his plans for collecting the data for his study. Hahn (2008:17) suggests that careful planning is needed for a successful research project, and one must think through his resources and the tasks required. With good foresight, one can avoid waste of time and other resources.

VIII. Gathering Data: Rapport & Stewardship

Data collection is the task that differentiates empirical research from mere common sense judgment or opinion-based understanding of certain phenomena. Walsh (2001:2-3) points out that the distinctive value of empirical studies lies on its being based on evidence that comes from observation and experience of the real world.

To gather credible data, it is important that the student exercises rapport with people who will give permission and help in the conduct of his study. It is even more necessary that he relates well with his respondents because their willingness to participate in his project and the earnestness with which they perform the procedures are enhanced by the researcher's positive relationship with them. Moreover, the student must know that the information gathered must be treated with care and confidentiality. Here a sense of stewardship can be inculcated.

IX. Analyzing/Interpreting the Findings: Patience, Determination, Justice

In analyzing the results, the researcher needs to brainstorm as he seeks to identify patterns in the data from which he can make interpretations. It is at this stage that his patience and determination to complete the project are seriously challenged. Moreover, his objectivity and sense of justice are also tested in how he reports and interprets the data. Durrant (1988) observed that "how one interprets data is generally determined by one's educational experience and values". A student's objectivity in interpreting the data also gives justice to the responses given by the participants or yielded by the experiment.

X. Drawing Inferences/Implications: Honesty, Faith, Sensitivity

From an objective analyses and interpretations of data, the researcher can draw conclusions or implications. It is here that honesty will truly be demonstrated. The results may be different from what was expected, and might even be disappointing, yet they must be respected. Along with honesty, the interpretation is facilitated by one's sensitivity to the underlying factors behind the data revealed.

Moreover, it is remarkable that the way a researcher makes conclusions is affected by his worldview or perspective. Again, Durrant (1988) noted that a Christian student draws out conclusions and implications from a Christian perspective in that he

allows the truth to prevail no matter what. Davis (2007) suggested that at points where he cannot understand,— faith in divine wisdom supersedes reason. Hence, the adviser's Christian worldview can inspire honesty and faith on the student researcher.

XI. Linking Results to Needs: Concern & Sense of Community

It is at this stage where the student identifies the relevance of his research work in its milieu. The entire research process will be useless if the researcher cannot see any point of connection between his findings and the community needs. After all, it is where research endeavours find a rationale and, perhaps, immortality. Thus, a student researcher's concern for humanity and sense of community is enhanced at this stage.

XII. Presenting/Defending the Project: Self-Confidence, Humility, Obedience

After going through the ordeal of the research process, the student gains confidence. He knows his research project better than anyone else! The adviser can strengthen such optimism by giving a detailed orientation on how he would present his study before the panel, what questions may be asked, and how to answer them. The student can be encouraged to practice proficiency in the use of words since much of the panel's evaluation depends on how well he presents his work through clear and articulate language.

However, while the student can be inspired to develop self-confidence for the presentation of his work, he must be advised to maintain a humble and teachable attitude before the panel members. While he should prove to the members that he did the project himself and he has reasons for his procedures, and that he understands the results and implications of his study, he must be ready to submit to the suggestions of the panel. Here, a student's willingness to be humble and submit to the guidance of the panel can have a lifetime effect on the development of a cooperative attitude and behaviour in life.

The table below shows the research stages with the corresponding virtues that are challenged and can be enhanced in the research process.

RESEARCH STAGE	VIRTUE/S
Identifying the Problem	Compassion, Practicality
Review of Literature	Respect, Tolerance
Conceptual Framework, Positioning of Variables	Organization, Creativity
Stating the Questions/Objectives	Critical Thinking
Setting the Scope & Limitations	Self-awareness, Acceptance
Defining the Key Terms & Word Constructs	Candour
Planning the Methodology	Foresight, Resourcefulness
Gathering the Data	Rapport, Stewardship
Analyzing & Interpreting the Findings	Patience, Determination, Justice
Drawing Inferences & Implications	Honesty, Faith, Sensitivity
Giving Recommendations	Concern, Sense of Community
Defending the Project	Self-confidence, Humility, Obedience

Ethics for Advisers and Panellists

It is also relevant to look into some attitudes and behaviours of research advisers and panel members that model Christian virtues on student researchers. Perhaps, not much interest has been given to this topic for it is assumed that professionals already know, so it is not necessary to deal with this issue. But my own experiences in doing academic research, in advising students, and my observations during oral presentations tell me that it is not so. Thus, I am proposing some guidelines for advisers and panellists to professionally observe. Keeping these “*10 Commandments*” in mind and acting them out may inspire the same professional virtues on students.

1. ***Be committed to your advisee.*** Do not accept advisees more than you can handle. If in case you see later that you can no longer work with an advisee for some reasons, you must tactfully communicate such concern as early as you can.
2. ***Possess the heart of a mentor.*** You set for your advisee a “protected time” for checking his work and for consultation. Moreover, inspire, rather than criticize, a student’s work even if it is crude. Remember, the failure of the student researcher is also the failure of the adviser.
3. ***Refrain from giving advice to someone else’s advisee even if the student asks you for it.*** Often, it breeds confusion of styles and competition of ideas between you and the other adviser.
4. ***Be always conscious not to give comments that tend to discredit other advisers.*** It manifests an unprofessional character, if not, arrogance and a bloated ego.
5. ***Avoid imposing your own style on a student or on the panel.*** Cooperate with the panel’s decision as to how the research project should proceed. Be aware of the demarcation line between your personal preference and corporate decision.
6. ***Let the oral defense be a presentation time for the researcher.*** Often, because of the eagerness of the panel members to help, or to impress, they take much time showing off their “research know-how” so that instead of the student answering questions, he becomes a spectator of the war of ideas/words of the panellists.
7. ***In asking questions or giving comments during the presentation, say only what can earnestly help*** in the refinement of the paper and what can inspire the student instead of words that can dampen the student’s aspiration. It is well to remember that a *PhD* of a panel member must also mean *Preserve Human Dignity*.
8. ***Refrain from asking or insinuating a student researcher to quote your own research or other literary works,*** even if you feel they are relevant. At most, you may just guide the student to more available sources— including yours, perhaps.
9. ***Avoid offering “extra helps” with the clever aim of receiving additional fees.*** Any student struggling through the research process would likely accept the offer of a “short cut”; but it is bad education and offends moral sense. “Extra helps” in research can be in the form of typing the draft, printing, editing, etc., which could easily slide to doing the entire research work.
10. ***Do not abuse your power as panel member.*** Abuse of power by a member could be in the form of threatening or refusing to sign the student’s paper for approval due to his non-compliance with your personal imposition that was not part of the panel’s requirements or his unwillingness to grant you some personal favors.

Conclusion

This essay ponders on the research process in the biblical perspective and in the context of a Christian paradigm. Moreover, it considers some virtues that are demanded as well as developed in the different stages of the research process. Through committed teaching and dedicated mentoring, Christian virtues can be instilled and nurtured in student researchers. Some virtues that can be enhanced through the research tasks are practicality, tolerance, organization, creativity, critical thinking, acceptance, candour, foresight, resourcefulness, rapport, stewardship, justice, patience, determination, faith, sensitivity, honesty, concern, humility, and obedience.

Furthermore, while the adviser ought to be aware of the virtues that can be nurtured in a student researcher, he must also be conscious of his influence on his advisee. Some guidelines for research advisers and panel members are proposed to ensure that they become models of the virtues that they want to see in their advisees.

Ultimately, the research experience now and the Christian attitudes that can be developed throughout the research process may prepare one to continue doing research in the earth made new where grand eternal themes are the subject of the study of the redeemed.

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