

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

**“SINGING THE LORD’S SONG IN A STRANGE
LAND”
THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATING CHRISTIAN
VALUES IN SCHOOLS IN A NON-CHRISTIAN
ENVIRONMENT**

by

Job Dondapati
Metas Adventist College
Surat, Gujarat State, India

**734-16 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

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INTRODUCTION

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs and our tormentors’ mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’. How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” – *Psalms 137: 1-4*

The children of Israel in bondage in Babylon were asked to sing the Lord’s song in a strange land. Whether it is singing the Lord’s song or teaching the Lord’s Word or transmitting the Lord’s values in a strange land, surrounded by non-Christian religions and secularism is indeed a challenge. Such a task inevitably raises the question. How? Since more and more Christian schools are located in an alien culture, how will we transmit biblical values? How can we focus on values in our schools with the best results even as we teach in an environment that provides little or no room for the Bible?

The purpose of the essay:

The purpose of this paper is to show the integration of faith and learning in the midst of a non-Christian environment. The basis for such an endeavour is to comply with the first angel’s message urging us to “worship Him who made the heaven, and the earth, and sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7) and also Jesus Christ urging us to “Go ye into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (*Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19, 20*) These commands are central to Seventh-day Adventist educational system.

This essay attempts to describe three basic approaches of transmitting values in the particular context of a non-Christian environment. The end results of these approaches would be:

1. To remind and motivate teachers of the Adventist higher learning institutions of this accountability in conveying Biblical beliefs and the Adventist values to non-Adventist students in the educational Institutions.
2. To admonish that soul winning is a solemn responsibility and important work of the believers, especially those who claim to know the truth better and yet are failing to practice it.
3. To lead men and women to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour through direct participation in all the activities of the institution.

The definition of values:

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word value is defined as “that which is worthy of esteem for our sake, that which has intrinsic meaning”. Our definition of *values* anchors God as the ultimate source of Christian values. (*2 Peter 1: 5-8; Gal. 5:22-23*)

Raths and others, in their value clarification model suggest seven steps that must be present, so a value system can be considered valid. These steps are:

- Choosing freely
- Choosing from among real alternatives

- Choosing after attentive reflection of the consequences of each option
- Prizing and cherishing what has been chosen
- Being willing to affirm the choice publicly
- Acting upon the choice
- Repeating the action so that it becomes a part of one's life pattern

The above steps are well defined; nevertheless from a Christian perspective I think we should include two additional aspects; one, all the above steps should be considered under the spectrum of a God-centered worldview; and two, there should always be a praying spirit before making a choice.

The positive character values list, designed by *Kreps (1970, pp.53-57)* was the questionnaire used. As an index of validity, the instrument was submitted to a panel of eight family life specialists in order to determine the degree of agreement among the judges concerning the importance of the listed values as components of positive character development. The following sixteen values comprise the final list:

1. Determination and perseverance
2. Responsibility in performing tasks
3. Self-respect
4. Friendliness
5. Appreciation
6. Spiritual Development
7. Intellectual Inquisitiveness
8. Feeling genuine concern and responsibility toward others
9. Seeing each person as having dignity and worth
10. Moral courage
11. Honesty and integrity

- 12. Loyalty
- 13. Initiative
- 14. Self-discipline
- 15. Cooperation
- 16. Self-reliance

Christian View of the Values:

The values found in the Bible are innumerable. The Christian views a human as a person who is totally dependent upon God and cannot achieve goodness by his own free will or intelligence. His goodness is due to the grace of God.

Christian values are stated in the Golden Rule, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do ye also to them." Christians ought to love their enemies: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." But the true essence of the scriptures expresses, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." (*Math. 7:2; Math. 5:44; Math. 22:21; Math. 22:37*)

Christian values are beautifully brought out in the love chapter of the Bible, which is found in 1st Corinthians 13.

1st Corinthians 13

	Values
Love is patient	Patience and perseverance
Love is kind	Compassion and kindness
Love does not envy, love keeps no records of wrong	Contentment & thankfulness
Love does not boast	Humility
Love is not proud	Humility
Love is not self seeking	Putting others first
Love is not rude	Respect

Love is not easily angered
Love does not delight in evil
Love rejoices with truth
Love always trusts
Love always protects
Love always hopes
Love always Perseveres

Self control
Integrity and Honesty
Truthfulness
Trust
Responsibility
Assurance and Beliefs
Perseverance

A Seventh-day Adventist Christian administration acquires scholastic administrative training to be utilized in uplifting, propagating and preserving God's teachings, family and church. Through divine aid, God is determined to help the church educate and prepare its members to meet Christ, and to live a lifestyle which is in accordance with His divine will in spite of the world's sophistication and modernization.

He wants to be an agent in strengthening God's people to continuously cling to His saving grace, invigorating the youth that serve as the church's future backward, reflecting god's banner of salvation and radiating His love.

Integrating Christian Values in METAS Adventist College:

Moses' instruction to Israel is applicable to our responsibility to our young people. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength; these commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your

hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates." (*Deut. 6: 4-9*)

The total population of India is in excess of one billion. These statistics indicate that 80.50% of the Indian population are Hindus, the Muslim population comprises 13.4% of the population. Christians of all denominations i.e. Catholics, Protestants, Methodists, Lutherans, and Adventists are 2.3%. Of this the Seventh-day Adventists and Protestants form a minuscule 1.25%. In the overall Indian context, the Adventists form 0.03%. These demographic statistics will reveal how challenging the task is in "Singing the Lord Song in an alien land."

Transmitting Christian values to students at METAS Adventist College, especially at a place like Surat, is a hard and challenging task because of secularism that prevails in India, in particular in the state of Gujarat. In this competitive world, when modern man is going astray from God, it is the duty of the Adventist Educational system to re-establish the religious values through modern education.

We are beautifully made, we reflect God's glory. "We have God-given, God preserved, God-restored potential to be developed, disciplined and invested in response to God. Such development discipline and direction are the Christian's responsibilities and stewardship. To educate the person, to encourage disciplined learning and the quest for excellence is a sacred trust. The Christian should give himself fully and committedly to looking around him to think the exploration of nature and to the transmission of cultural heritage, as

well as teaching Christian beliefs and values. An Adventist Teacher's task is to inspire and equip individuals to think and act for themselves." (*Arthur. F. Holmes, "The Idea of a Christian College", Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1999) pp.15-16*).

Any student who walks through the portals of METAS Adventist College should know and practice Christian Values right from the point of student recruitment and admission through freshmen orientation into the various courses, the curriculum, chapel, temperance and extra curricular activities. All the activities are focused in transmitting Christian values. These Christian values that are being taught are like catalyst transforming ordinary students into extraordinary ones. We have been given the promise, that He will give us power and strengthen us to guide us into truth.

Approaches of transmitting values:

Integrating Faith and Learning through the Curriculum:

The curriculum should be planned with the purpose of accomplishing the aims and objectives of education. "Every human being created in the image of God is endowed with a power akin to that of the creator, individual power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of others men's thought." (*Ellen G. White, Chapter 1, Source and Aim of True Education*)

The curriculum can be defined as the entire body of courses offered in teaching in an institution. Through the college curriculum, integration of faith and learning can be achieved. Therefore, it should be planned very prayerfully, because the destiny of the students is in its curriculum. The curriculum should be composed of four dimensions. In Luke 2:52, it states that Jesus Christ developed in four areas: in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. In essence every aspect in the Christian educational program must be Christ-centered, Bible based, student-related and socially applied. (*John Wesley Taylor V, "A Biblical Foundation for the IFL" Paper Presented at the 27th IFL Seminar, Muak Lek, Thailand, Dec. 6, 2000.*)

Careful planning should be done in choosing the subjects. Unnecessary subjects should not be included. All unnecessary matters should be weeded from the course of study, and only such studies placed before the students will be of real values to Him. The curriculum should necessitate physical, mental and moral training in order that all the powers shall be fitted for the best development, to work for the uplifting of humanity. (*White, E.G. "Fundamentals of Christian Education", Tennessee: Southern Publishing, 1923*)

There are many ways to impart values. The question of sequence, narrative or explanation to transmit values should be familiar to the Adventist teacher.

“True education does not ignore the value of scientific knowledge or literary requirements; but above information it values powers, goodness; above intellectual requirements, character. The world does not so much need men of great intellect as of noble character. It needs men in whom ability is controlled by steadfast principles.” (*White, E.G. “Education & Character”, Page 225*)

As an example, three major subjects that are taught in the school are presented here with suggestions of how faith is integrated into learning in these subject matters.

1. English:

Can Christian values be taught and developed through the teaching of English? It has now become evident for the most English teachers that teaching literature the way we always do study the genre, structure, language style, character sketch and themes etc. is not satisfactory because the works are based on certain theories which conflict with the Biblical worldview. As Christian teachers how do we approach the teaching of English literature? As authors Gallagher and Lundin state, “How does literature look when seen through the eyes of faith by some one informed on the theoretical issues?” Here the teacher has a double duty in interpreting literature. The secular themes on which the work stands as written by the author, which the teacher cannot ignore nor avoid discussion on, and at the same time interpreting the same work bringing in Christian values the “message” of the work for unless we understand the thought and value systems of our age and

also the Biblical revelation, we will be limited in our efforts in bringing an integration of Christian values into the subject matter.

2. *Geography:*

A geography teacher with a Christian background who has mastered his discipline and carefully tried to understand the interrelationship between the physical earth, humankind, culture and environment is in a better position to explain the intricacies with the touch of Christian perspective. The problems facing mankind, such as political unrest, refugees, natural calamities and natural crises, the unpredictable global climatic patterns, threats of famines and floods, disasters over land and sea, and many others can be explained from Biblical predictions as found in the books of Daniel, Matthew and Revelation and many others.

The field of geography and environmental studies apply the affective and cognitive domains which can be merged to show the relationship between Christianity and living. As Adventist educators, we should value and promote environment responsibility and concern for humanity in our daily life, so that the students will be able to learn, appreciate and comprehend as part of their educational program what is said and done.

The Bible is rich in both geographical and environmental lessons. For example, in the New Testaments, a lot of geography appears in the accounts of Jesus' journey as He moved from one place to another. The record often presents the length and breath of His movement, and

with this background, the geography may add the depth. Geographical regions, places, locations interactions, and spatial dimensions are discussed in the Bible. All these are good examples that an educator may use to explain the relationship among human history, the natural environment and present or contemporary, events and compare the Biblical examples with what is happening today. In fact, geography illuminates the scriptures, as Hendrix has noted (1990).

3. *History:*

The study of history offers innumerable possibilities for the study of critical social choices and the quality of life they may have engendered. The course would not simply be a running commentary on events, but would require students to analyze and evaluate the underlying values and dilemmas in social and cultural choice. This focus on values would provide an overarching theme that would give to a subject the clear focus that is so often lacking in the “textbook-wired-for-sound” approach.

Many of the issues in history naturally lead to the examination of democracy and of human morality. Student might pursue the questions regarding race and human identity. They might look at the connection between social conditions and human dignity in response to the positions they might adopt on the specific cases they are studying. Students could be led to investigate their own values for consistency, congruity and authenticity in terms of their profession of Christianity by asking some questions: what issues arise from considering race as a definitive human characteristic? Can racism be

justified through a consistent Christian position? What might happen if legal rights were a function of race?

The study of values in a specific case leads naturally to wider questions. To study the issue of racial discrimination cannot but lead to the exploration of the meaning of human dignity, which in turn will lead eventually to fundamental questions of the nature of man. In this way, value education can also provide a bridge to various other disciplines such as sociology, law, psychology and theology.

Integrating Faith and Learning through the Teaching Staff:

The Role of a Teacher

The role of a teacher plays an important role in integrating faith and learning through the teaching staff. Biblical values can be expressed by the teacher through his attitude, his intellectual integrity and also the content of the course which he teaches. As Frank Gabelein points out that the most effective way to integrate the subject of study with Christianity is through the teacher who has a genuine world view. No man teaches out of a philosophical vacuum. In one way or another every teacher expresses the convictions he lives by whether they be spiritually positive or negative.

The teacher plays a major role in integrating faith and learning, it is the teacher's responsibility.

"Teaching is not an insignificant, irrelevant, paper shuffling kind of job. It has meaning, worth and value. It gives you the opportunity to

touch a young and impressionable life and make it better.” *(R.C and I.C Hawley, “Human Values”, New York Hart Publication, 1975).*

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, world’s greatest Teacher showed compassion, kindness, power and life in His teachings. Ellen G. White says, “As the highest preparation of your work, I point you to the words, the life, and the methods of the Prince of Teachers. I bid you consider Him. Here is your ideal. Behold it, until the spirit of the divine teachers should take possession of your host and life. *(E.G. White, “Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students”, California Pacific Press, 1943)*

What a challenge is placed before the Adventist Teacher. Every single one should have Jesus Christ as their role model. Teachers are sharpening and directing the delicate minds of the youth. It is very important and practical for the teacher to come down to the level of the students, the teachers should be able to identify with the students. We are told that Jesus, in teaching He came down to their level. He, the majesty of Heaven, answered their questions and simplified His important lessons to meet their childish understanding.

“The Teacher is the key to the climate of learning. His teaching is His ministry. His enthusiasm about idea, His scholarship and the importance he places on teaching provide model. *(Arthur F. Holmes, “The Idea of a Christian College”, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing company, 1999)*

The teacher as a Mentor:

Many students are confused disoriented. They seem aimless in life when the world around the student is crumbling a good teacher seeks to arouse hope and aspiration in the youth and to make them realize their potential and possibilities. If every Adventist teacher can become a mentor, many problems can be solved, and a Christian atmosphere will prevail in the college campus.

While transmitting Christian values, the teacher should have focused aims. I recommend five aims of a Christian Adventist Teacher:

1. The teacher should attempt to develop the Christian characteristics in himself and his students.
2. The teachers should try to reach the pedestal of excellence.
3. The teacher should motivate the students with noble qualities to be valuable in the community.
4. The teacher should encourage the students to be civic minded. They should contribute to the peace and harmony of the community/society and be a blessing to the world at large. "It should be the teachers aim to prepare every youth under his care to be a blessing to the world." (*E.G White, "Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students", California: Pacific Press, 1943*)
5. The teacher should direct the student's life to the ultimate goal, which is eternal life. "Train the youth, mould the characters, and educate the future immortal life. (*E g White, "Testimonies for the Church", California Pacific Press, 1948*)

Integrating Faith and Learning through the Administration of Discipline:

To achieve organizational goals, administrative orders are directed to particular cases and are used to correct existing inequalities and infractions. Pittnor and Presthus observed that rules and regulations are general prescriptions designed to meet future needs. They further stressed that the advantages of rules in an organization such as a school are that they are easily amended and permit rapid adjustment to rapid changes in our society (1967, pp 482).

Rules do not serve the interest of the administration but give guidelines for students to know their limitations and the expectations of the administration. As a guideline, rules should be stated in a positive manner that is clear and meaningful to all students. (SPD Edset-114, 1996)

Not only should they be clear, but also be stated in a positive language that establishes clear expectations of behaviour (SPD Edset 11, 7). To reinforce this argument, Wood and Nicholson added that in order to insure more effective implementation of rules and regulations, those affected by the rules and regulations must be involved in their formulation. Teachers and students will more willingly accept rules and regulations to which they are committed (1979, pp 224). The SPD code went further to say that where possible, students and parents should be involved in the process of the development of school rules

so that there is a community ownership of the standard of behaviour expected (*SPD Edset 11, 4*).

How Should An Adventist Teacher Administer Discipline?

Views on Discipline:

Ellen White was a well known Adventist writer on educational matters, including Christian discipline. Listed below is the essence of her views on discipline.

1. The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government and should be taught self-radiance and self-control.
2. Disobedience leads in the end to disaster and suffering. Any effort to break the will of a child is a terrible mistake.
3. The true object of reproof is gained only when the wrong doer himself is led to see his fault and he will enlist for its correction. When this is accomplished point him to his source of pardon and power.
4. Seek to preserve his self-respect and to inspire him with courage and hope.
5. Teachers are to avoid, so far as possible, making public the faults or errors of a pupil. He will seek to avoid giving reproof or punishment in the presence of others.
6. He will not expel a student until every effort has been put forth for his reformation. But when it becomes evident that the student is receiving no benefit himself, while defiance or disregard of authority tends to over throw the government of

the school, and his influence is contaminating others, then, his expulsion becomes a necessity.

7. Yet with many the disgrace of public expulsion would lead to utter recklessness and ruin. In most cases, when removal is unavoidable, the matter need not be made public. By Counsel and cooperation with the parents, let the teacher privately arrange for the students' withdrawal.
8. Every school should be a city of refuge for the tempted youth, a place where their follies shall be dealt with patiently and widely.
9. Love and tenderness, patience and self-control, will at all times be the law of their speech. Love and compassion will be blended with justice. When it is necessary to give reproof, their language will not be exaggerated, but humble.
10. Every true teacher will feel that should he err at all, it is better to err on the side of mercy than on the side of severity (*Ed 1903, 287 – 97*).

Ellen White's list is emphasizing the heart of redemptive discipline. Above all she is saying that genuine love and justice together create a foundation for discipline. There is also a strong emphasis on helping students see their faults and develop qualities of self awareness and self-discipline which include self control. Through all her work she upholds love and mercy as being above stern justice.

Within its Christian haven, METAS Adventist College, Surat must also maintain discipline within the Christian perspective. It should be love

oriented. When Jesus met the women brought to Him taken in adultery in the very act (*John 8:4*), He did not condemn her but said "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more" (*John 8:11*). The woman felt the love radiating from Jesus and her repentance and transformation could be assured. Discipline should be love oriented.

Discipline in Adventist Colleges should also be redemptive not punitive as Jesus demonstrated in the parable of the lost sheep. "When he found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing in love". Jesus concluded the parable, "So like wise there will be joy in heaven over one sinner that responded" (*Luke 15: 4, 7*). The purpose of discipline is to redeem, not to desire a punitive reward that might harden the offender. The primary purpose is to bring him or her back into the fold.

Discipline should also reflect the abundant grace of God for man, as Tucker stated "God never compares us with others! He only compare us with Him and says believe in me and you will be saved". He sets the standards in stone, as high as can be, and then He says, believe in me, and I will get you there". (1998, 10)

Conclusion:

Singing the Lord's song in a strange land wherever we are can be a challenge. We are called by God and should fulfill our mission. As administrators three approaches can be looked at: the curriculum, the teaching staff and the administration of discipline. In a non-Christian

environment it takes creativity and commitment to continue passing on the Christian values. The scriptures declare that teachers are one of the chosen people to declare God's glory and to encourage their students to climb... the higher ground.

"When these values permeates through the entire system of the college, then the Christian education embraces the total sum of a man's activities: Physical and Spiritual, intellectual and moral, individual and domestic and social; not with the view to attenuating that activity, but in order to enable it, guide it, and perfect it according to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ." (W. F. Connell & R L Debas, *"Reading in the Foundation of Education"*, Sydney, Ian Norak.)

Therefore, responding to God's call of joining Him in partnership is an obligation as well as a privilege. The Christian higher learning community that includes Christian faculty plays a central role as model of the Christian graces and professional competences.

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