AN INTERVIEW WITH JAN PAULSEN
PASSING ON WHAT REALLY COUNTS
SHOULD ADVENTIST COLLEGES REQUIRE RELIGION CLASSES?
SURVEY OF ACADEMY RELIGION TEACHERS
RELIGION TEACHING IN ADVENTIST SCHOOLS
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Enhancing the Quality of Bible Teaching

The best ministerial talent should be employed to lead and direct in the teaching of the Bible in our schools. Those chosen for this work need to be thorough Bible students; they should be men who have a deep Christian experience, and their salary should be paid from the tithe” (Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 431).

Way back when I was in high school in the 1970s, I thought that most Bible teachers were ministers who ended up in the classroom because they were ineffective in their chosen field. While this was obviously an overgeneralization, sometimes perception is reality.

Bible teaching should be a ministry that one desires and is well trained to perform. I believe that religion courses should be the most important part of our curriculum—and yet many times, we assign the classes to part-time people who are not committed to making the classroom a priority, or do not know how to teach Bible effectively. We should always have the most committed and best-trained teachers assigned to our religion classes—people who know what they believe and are able to communicate it effectively and positively to students. However, equally important is for the student to get different perspectives from a variety of teachers. “Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of Scriptures” (ibid., p. 432).

We also need to have a strong, appealing, up-to-date curriculum. The North American Division has updated its Bible curriculum about every 10 years or so. Should this occur more often? In some parts of the world, students do not even have their own Bibles, and instructors have no teacher’s edition or money to purchase resource materials for themselves or their students. This is a tragedy that needs to be remedied.

I believe every Seventh-day Adventist school—from elementary through graduate level—should make religion classes mandatory. For many students who are not Adventists, this provides an unparalleled opportunity to perform. I believe that religion courses should be the most important part of our curriculum. However, we need to make sure we have the correct teachers in the classroom.

Most of our religion teachers are asked to do a lot. Many serve as school chaplains, coordinators for school service and outreach programs, and recruiters—in addition to teaching a full load. Despite all the demands on their time, religion teachers have an unparalleled opportunity and a sacred responsibility to minister to the spiritual needs of their students. This requires a lot of extra time in counseling and just sharing Jesus Christ. Sometimes, the only reward will be Christ’s “well done” within the heart of the teacher.

Principals, presidents, headmasters—make sure that your Bible teachers are the most effective teachers in your schools. It is our solemn responsibility to educate students for eternity, and a vital part of that is both providing students with accurate knowledge about God and inviting them to accept Jesus as their Savior and to walk with Him throughout their lives and into eternity. Yes, all teachers in Adventist schools should be teaching for eternity; however, Bible teachers have a special and sacred responsibility in this area. Don’t just assign whoever’s available that period to teach the Bible class. Make sure the person you choose is on fire for God and is trained to perform. I believe that religion courses should be the most important part of our curriculum.

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Bible teaching should be a ministry that one desires and is well trained to perform. I believe that religion courses should be the most important part of our curriculum—and yet many times, we assign the classes to part-time people who are not committed to making the classroom a priority, or do not know how to teach Bible effectively. We should always have the most committed and best-trained teachers assigned to our religion classes—people who know what they believe and are able to communicate it effectively and positively to students. However, equally important is for the student to get different perspectives from a variety of teachers. “Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of Scriptures” (ibid., p. 432).

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I believe every Seventh-day Adventist school—from elementary through graduate level—should make religion classes mandatory. For many students who are not Adventists, this provides a wonderful opportunity to share Jesus Christ in a positive manner. It also allows us to expand the understanding of students who have been Adventists since birth. However, we need to make sure we have the correct teachers in the classroom.

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Dunbar Henri is Principal of Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Maryland. He has taught secondary-level religion for 23 years, and is a member of the JOURNAL’S advisory board.
Paulien: As far as I know, Dr. Paulsen, you are the first General Conference president with a Ph.D. in Religious Studies. So I want to ask what impact your scholarship has had on you as a Christian and as an administrator in the church.

Paulsen: My studies in theology began at Emmanuel Missionary College back in the late 1950s. Then I came to the [Seventh-day Adventist Theological] Seminary [in Berrien Springs, Michigan] and did a B.D. in the days when we had those. After these studies, my wife and I went to Africa as missionaries in 1962. While I was in Africa, I began my teaching ministry, and I found it appealing. I felt drawn to the wonderful privilege of helping to create the mind of a preacher.

After four years in Africa, I made contact with three or four universities in Europe to see if I could be accepted into a doctoral program. I was very open about being a Seventh-day Adventist minister. If anybody wanted to accept me, they needed to know what they were getting. I applied to Edinburgh, but in my heart I really wanted to go to Germany. I come from a country where the Lutheran Church is the state church. So I wanted to study the German language, and I wanted to study theology with a faculty based in the Lutheran tradition. I didn’t know then that you would not be accepted into a theology program if you came from a church that was not a member of the World Council of Churches.

Because of this, two of the German universities I applied to immediately rejected my application. But I heard nothing from Tübingen for a couple of months. Then I got a letter from Professor Peter Beyerhaus, the professor of missions and ecumenical theology. He himself had served in Africa for a number of years, so he wrote: “You have made a submis-
sion here to the faculty of Systematic Theology, but since you live in Africa now, would you be interested in doing a study that is related to Mission Theology? Since you have a certain touch with the African reality, you could explore some aspects of the Christian witness in the African tradition.”

So I thought about it and thought, “If I can do it on the basis of biblical theology instead of anthropology, I might like to do that.” So, we worked it out and I did my studies under Beyerhaus at Tübingen. It was an interesting time, and I used the opportunity to do courses in dogmatics under Jürgen Moltmann and in the Book of Romans under Ernst Käsemann (the last year he taught at Tübingen before he retired). So it was a very fascinating period of my life. I finished at Tübingen in 1972.

How did it impress me? I think primarily in the sense that a systematic and comprehensive study of theology shapes your mind. It is a discipline. It’s not so much a question of what you learn as what you become as a thinker and as a person. It teaches one a certain generosity of mind and hopefully also some humility along the way. You don’t know everything, and what you think you know you might have to acknowledge as wrong. I think it has given me a broadened mind without becoming a threat to who I was and where I belong.

I would probably not recommend that a young graduate go to a school such as Tübingen. I had been in ministry for 10 or 12 years when I went there. My strong background in ministry conditioned me for the challenges. It was probably the one period in my life when my wife and I had almost all of our social life with people who are not members of our church. It was wonderful to associate with people who did not share our theological convictions, yet to have respect and mutual acceptance of each other as people.

Paulsen: That’s very interesting to me because I’ve noticed in various committees that you don’t seem threatened when somebody differs with you. You have a capacity to say, “I have to re-think this.” I don’t see that in every church administrator. But in today’s world, one has to have a certain flexibility with many issues that we face. Were you an Adventist all of your life?

Paulsen: I was. My mother was baptized when she was carrying me, 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Norway. Finding a job there is challenging when the Sabbath begins at noon on Friday! But I grew up in a wonderful Seventh-day Adventist home. My father was a shoemaker, and my mother was at home. It was a simple life, but it was a wonderfully secure Christian home; there was a lot of joy.

Paulien: From a cobbler to Tübingen! That’s quite a leap. Are you having as much joy being General Conference president, or is that a bit more stressful than growing up in northern Norway?

Paulsen: Well, an assignment such as this is a very serious thing. It takes a lot of thought and prayer. You really need to feel in your heart that this is the best way you can serve God. You wouldn’t want to do it otherwise. Having said that, people are sometimes surprised that I don’t feel a great burden—I actually enjoy what I’m doing. It’s a weighty assignment, but I feel that things don’t depend on me. I don’t go to bed at night and stay awake. The Lord is going to look after His church.

Paulien: I wonder if the security you felt growing up in Norway has something to do with your ability to handle pressures now.

Paulsen: Yes, maybe it has. I think my life has been shaped by a wonderfully strong faith that my parents had. They allowed space for us to grow, to make mistakes and move on, and I’m sure that had an impact of the kind of person I am today.

Paulien: I feel that I know you a little better from some of these experiences you have shared. I’d like to turn to some challenging topics now. Let me begin with a tough one. Most Adventist scholars recognize that the church’s International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education was well intended. But many of us feel that the harm it could cause outweighs the good. Could you help us understand your strong support for this initiative?

Paulsen: Let me comment on two different perspectives. First of all, this was voted on by the church at Annual Council before I became president. I have a strong conviction

Dr. Jan Paulsen and Dr. Jon Paulien.
that if the church sits in council, with leadership from around the world, and they decide that something has high value for us, it is my responsibility to give it an opportunity to demonstrate whether it has value or not. So unless it has shown that it cannot accomplish what it was designed for, I’m duty-bound to honor the decision that was taken. So that is the purely mechanical side of it.

Does the IBMTE action have value? Well, when the Annual Council took this action, it outlined half a dozen goals or values that the IBMTE was designed to attain. And they’re good values. Even those who have problems with the whole initiative do not argue with these values. They relate to the life and the witness of the church; they encourage the togetherness of theologians and administrators in the church. The IBMTE was designed to foster these values.

The council action then outlines how the church felt these values could be achieved, and that is, I grant, 90 percent of the document. But it is also recorded in the Annual Council action that if a given division finds that these values can be better accomplished a different way than the one that’s outlined in this document, they are free to submit an alternate route to the council. Now if it does not work, it should have a very limited life. But if it does work, we should look for creative ways to make it even better for the needs of the local fields.

I must say, however, that I don’t think we handled the setting up of the IBMTE well. I think the process of consultation beforehand should have been much more comprehensive than actually took place. There could have been a greater buy-in from the start if there had been wider consultation.

Paulien: I guess one of the things that worries me about the IBMTE is that it seems to imply that the leadership of the church doesn’t trust the church’s scholars. They want to keep tight control over what we’re doing. How would you respond to a scholar who felt distrusted?

Paulsen: I would say to you, and to all my colleagues who teach our students: “The church desires no other way of training our ministers and our youth than through the systems we have. We do trust those who teach theology. That trust is based on the extent to which we are bonded together. We belong to the same family, but that doesn’t mean that we always see and express things in the same way. In the family, parents and children are bonded by a love that will overcome many things, even when they shout at each other. Families find a way to deal with all sorts of difficult things.”

So I feel that church administrators trust those who are teaching theology, although we might not always express it in the way we should. Trust is there, first of all, because we don’t have any desire or intention to do it any other way. So we need you. The elected leaders that I work with, the division presidents particularly, readily acknowledge the high value that the theologians bring to our church.

Paulien: It strikes me in hearing you that it’s been more than 20 years since the theological consultation that occurred a couple of years after that first Glacier View. At that time, about 60 administrators and 60 scholars worked together in small groups. I’ve had the privilege of working with the Daniel and Revelation Committee and the Biblical Research Committee, so I have a fairly regular interaction with a lot of the church’s top leaders. But most of my colleagues don’t. Perhaps we should consider a broad meeting where a new generation of scholars can get better acquainted with the church’s leaders. The trust you are speaking about can be developed in the kind of personal contact that has been missing for many of our religion teachers.

Paulsen: Yes, I accept what you’ve said. That may well be what should be done. You know, you do something which you think is a good idea at one time, but it has value only for a short period. It would be good to set up a forum in which we can come together and talk about these things.

Paulien: A related question: Religious scholars have a very difficult task because on the one hand, we’re expected to have a prophetic voice in the church, to probe the edges of knowledge, to challenge where chal-
The challenge is necessary. At the same time, we’re supposed to mentor a new generation in the tradition of the church. Those two tasks seem to be in tension at times. Do you have any thoughts on how we can balance these two tasks in our lives?

Paulsen: Those who are involved in scholarship and teaching will always feel this tension. As a committed Adventist and as a professional, you will always be dealing with fresh ideas that are not as fully developed as others. It is part of your thought-life. After all, how do you limit thinking? The reality is, you don’t. You read and you search and you think, and you pray, and you wonder, and sometimes it comes together and sometimes you have to file it away for a while, to allow time for things to mature.

While it is important to do that, you mustn’t leave your students with so many loose ends that they don’t know what to do. Teachers and theologians have a responsibility to a young student so he or she isn’t left to flounder. We are responsible to help students tie all the threads together. A theology teacher does not use the classroom to lay out findings that are in conflict with the stated positions of the church. There are proper venues where individuals can be given opportunity to share findings that challenge where we have been up to that point.

Paulien: We need to explore that. It might not be as big a problem for me and for some of my colleagues in the seminary, because we have a doctoral program. This is made up of people in their 30s and 40s; mature pastors and thinkers. You can explore some really heavy stuff there and keep things together. But in the undergraduate classroom, as you’ve noted, there is a lot of vulnerability. So I feel for my colleagues who teach undergrads. Where do they go, what venue do they have when they have questions or problems, when their research takes them to the edge?

Paulsen: I think we do have a couple of venues for that. The church has the responsibility to provide opportunities for religion teachers to air findings that are somewhat different from where the church is, so they can receive some good feedback. One place where it needs to happen is inside an institution like Andrews. It is helpful to start at a more local level, either within the institution or possibly with the participation of two or three institutions. It doesn’t have to be a General Conference [GC] initiative.

On the other hand, there is a forum already provided by the GC in BRICOM. People can get a hearing for their new ideas there. The church needs to give individuals the opportunity to air their findings so somebody else can test them.

Paulien: While I’ve enjoyed being a member of BRICOM, I think some of my colleagues who were invited to share their findings there felt that they were on trial. And that’s not always the best context in which a person can process ideas. What I hear you say is that we ourselves may need to create venues outside the classroom where we can challenge one another and learn from one another. The classroom often seems the place where intellectual stimulation best occurs.

Paulsen: But it’s also a place where you have a very vulnerable group. I think it is fair and right, however, that people who work with material, such as a theologian does, must be given opportunity to test their findings outside the classroom in an appropriate forum of colleagues and church leaders.
Paulien: Now that we’re on the subject of theological thinking, do you have any thoughts on the future of Adventist theology? Are there any trends around the world that might be of interest to us?

Paulsen: Well, I don’t see one particular global issue. When I think of our church as a global community, there is so much diversity. There is no one issue that seems to be surfacing everywhere. I think the church will always be challenged with “How can I be a faithful Seventh-day Adventist, alive to the church, alive to my task of witnessing, yet do it in my unique cultural situation?” The church is expanding rapidly around the world. And many of the cultures the church encounters are very different from those in the Western world. How can the church cope with this rapid growth and still keep its Adventist identity intact? That is one of the big challenges.

Paulien: When it comes to a variety of cultures, would it make more sense to increase the fundamental beliefs and make them more specific or to make them a little more simple?

Paulsen: In every culture, you have to be sure that you have stated your faith in as basic a way as possible. Being a believer shouldn’t require much formal training. It was never meant to be a complicated science. So should we shorten the 27? Changing the fundamentals doesn’t mean that the belief of the church has changed. When we drafted the 27, it was stated we intended to re-examine them every now and then and say, “Have we said it the best way? Was there something we overlooked that we should have included?”

I don’t expect that we will just open all of these at a General Conference session; you will run into chaos if you do that. There has to be a process beforehand. Some thought should be given to these matters before they come to the session, and that is how we have handled the new fundamental. It was sent to world divisions and institutions of learning to examine the choice of words that have been made.

Paulien: Would you reflect a little on the purpose of the Faith and Science Conferences and their final outcome?

Paulsen: It’s easier, of course, to define the purpose than to define the outcome. Some seven or eight years ago, when I was chair of the board of the Geoscience Research Institute, the request came through that board to the GC to set up a conference where theologians and scientists at our schools could come together and look at Creation. There have been many caricatures of what is being taught about Creation at our institutions.

So the GC agreed to schedule, over a period of two years, a series of faith and science conferences that would look at Creation. These conferences would have input from men and women who teach theology, who are involved in administration, and who teach science or are involved in science research. We were quite deliberate in choosing people who would...
be able to bring a certain broadness of input. It has to be possible for us to talk together, even when we don’t see eye to eye on everything. There is nothing to be gained from running away from something simply because it’s not so easy to talk about.

The purpose of these conferences was to bring people together in an open discussion, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and safety. I don’t expect the church to change its position on the matter of Creation. We have clearly stated in our Fundamental Beliefs our view on Creation. I expect the church to stand firm on that. But I hope that we can come out of these conversations with a better understanding of each other on both sides.

Paulsen: Most Protestant denominations faced with issues like Creation have tended to split into a number of smaller groups. Do you see Adventism heading for a breakup, or is there something different about us that will keep us together?

Paulien: Well, I would like to think that there is. I really don’t sense that we’re going in the direction of a division or a split along that line. In the first place, we are different from other Protestant churches; we are very global. There are many, many elements that bind us together: the way we handle our resources, our Bible study materials, the writings of Ellen G. White. Many things hold us together as one family, and we are very deliberate in making sure that bonded quality stays intact.

So I don’t sense that there is that kind of a rupture coming. As I travel around the world, what I sense from our members, leaders, and teachers is a strong desire to hold the church together. There is a very strong sense in our international family that we are one. You don’t really find this in any other church quite the way we have it. This is God’s design for us that we are going to preserve.

Paulien: I’m encouraged that you’re not as worried about this as some of us might be. A related issue is that at times evangelists take some very different tacks in handling the same subject around the world. It makes me wonder if differences in evangelism could one day lead us to a breakup.

Paulsen: It is a fact that in public evangelism, the basic core teachings of the church are being expressed in largely the same way. But there are evangelists who will highly profile the role of the Papacy in parts of the world, while in other areas, such as in parts of Latin America (where the Catholic Church is a very strong church), our public evangelists deliberately take a different approach. They set about accomplishing their mission, not as a focused Catholic-bashing exercise, but as spreading the complete gospel, which will draw people on the basis of positive values rather than on the basis of negative attacks or criticism.

So I think there are differences in emphasis on that. Being an evangelist is a very challenging role. Each culture has to select its approach and the people who can best carry the message into that culture. Clearly, some people can do that better than others.

Paulien: Thank you very much. Before we close, I’d like to give you an opportunity to talk about any other opportunities or threats the church faces.

Paulsen: When I look at the world church, the biggest challenge that I see is not to focus on growth at the expense of nurture and discipleship. In some places, numbers have become the final criterion that defines whether you have succeeded or not. As a result, there are places in the world where we’ve had large numbers come in, but they have no place in which to worship and they have no one to look after their spiritual needs. They are left like sheep without a shepherd, and they become easy pickings for someone else. So I think we have a huge challenge to make sure that we not only bring people into the church but sustain and grow the Christian life that follows baptism.

Another issue we need to address is the question, “What is the heart of Adventist life?” I think this is some-thing that we need to define very carefully, what is the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist faith identity. There is a reason God called this movement into being 150 years ago. We need those who teach theology and religion to provide strong input on Adventist identity. We need to be clear on the beliefs that give us good reasons to pursue our mission. I feel it is so important that we be clear about the core issues.

In conclusion, when I was a teacher of theology, I found it very rewarding and a sacred responsibility to create a young mind. To our religion teachers, I say that there is no larger or more responsible assignment in the church. Our young people are tomorrow’s church, and they stay with you for many months. It gives you a chance to shape their mind. I appeal to you, therefore, to carefully review the elements that you bring into your teaching in light of this. I would want you to share with your students the central components of Seventh-day Adventist identity. These are what drive and compel us into mission, and mission is what we’re here for.

*When this interview took place, the church’s 28th Fundamental Belief had not yet been adopted.
Teaching About God and Human Life

“God and Human Life” is the name of an undergraduate religion course taught at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. It strikes me as paradigmatic of what undergraduate Bible teaching is supposed to be about.

Before I became a Bible teacher, I used to be a theology professor. My students came to school because they believed God had ordered them to. They came to prepare themselves to go where He commanded. I loved my work with them, but it was not enough. I hankered after a classroom filled with undergrads focused on future riches and fame, or on nothing at all. I wanted to teach youth who enrolled because of academic motivation and intellectual capacity, and those who were apathetic about the spiritual justifications for the existence of my school.

I saw my time with them as the chance to revel together at a neighborhood park instead of trying to get acquainted at a traffic stop. The park is the college Bible classroom, where conversations about Jesus Christ are legitimized both by structure and time, where the teachers are unapologetically Christian, where the textbook is God’s Word, and where the goals are to advance eternal purposes: to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (see John 17:3). By contrast, the “traffic-light encounter” represents Sabbath afternoon witnessing, or even on-campus chapel services and dormitory worships, by which conscientious saints strategize to interrupt keen and busy people with words about how good Jesus is. And He is good. And so is creative Christian zeal. But I wanted more than short, occasional encounters. I wanted hours together in the park.

A New Opportunity

In February 1996, Andrews University’s General Education Committee came up with a new Bible class that would feature boundless associations between theology and everything from architecture to zoology (and everything in between); between existence and transcendence; between God and everything. The class, whose teaching I now share, is titled “God and Human Life” [GHL]. It was conceived to introduce the doctrines of revelation/inspiration, hermeneutics, the Trinity, and soteriology, terms as vital to most college students as supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. To quote the university bulletin, it deals with “How God confronts human beings—includes the process of revelation, principles of interpreting Scripture and similarly inspired material, the nature of God and His expectations for humans, and the evaluation of these concepts as presented in Scripture and classic literature of various religions.”

In truth, “how God confronts human beings” encompasses a much grander scope than mere
scholastic attention to certain aspects of systematic theology. And this is by no means the exclusive province of the GHL curriculum. All of Scripture is an account of how God confronts human beings. And as Paul advises, it was all designed for our educational benefit (Romans 15:4). Bible classes, in academy, in college, or otherwise, ought to demonstrate that outside of biblical explanation, life is too fragmented to make sense. This is true integration of faith and learning.

Speaking and thinking about “how God confronts human beings” urges teacher and students to relate personally and practically to the issues and situations involved, particularly confrontation between people and the God of the Bible. Teachers who deal with the reality of how God confronts humanity must be deeply involved with their subject, and with students. As Parker Palmer points out: “real learning does not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher, with each other, and with the subject.” This relationship is vital if Bible classes are to truly engage students in grappling with how God confronts human beings.

Palmer also insists that students must be brought into relationship with the subject. There can be no doubt as to what—or rather who—the subject is in any Bible class at a Seventh-day Adventist academy, college, or university. The subject is always God. George W. Reid has lamented the “open, freewheeling, and exploratory” character of some [post-modern] Bible classes, which at times “provide little more than an occasion to ventilate uninformed opinions.” Instead, Reid says, authentic college Bible study “leads to inquiry about God and His Word. Its point of ultimate reference is God, not human thought.” The wide variety of religion classes, from Adventist doctrine, to personal spirituality, to business and social ethics, illustrates the many ways to engage students’ minds in thinking about God and His Word.

I wanted to teach youth who enrolled because of academic motivation and intellectual capacity, and those who were apathetic about the spiritual justifications for the existence of my school.

As a Christian teacher, I am certainly not unique in believing in a God who is directly involved with human life. Hindus, Muslims, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and ancient Greeks have all shared my conviction. Thus, as I explain to my students, the notion of God’s association with human beings is not a new idea invented by your teacher over the summer.

The God of the Bible is the one whose initiative makes everything possible (Colossians 1:16), from creation, to revelation, to science, to eternal salvation (John 1:1-3). He is the first and the last (Revelation 1:17); the beginning, the sustainer, and the climactic end (Revelation 21:6; 22:13; Colossians 1:17); the one who cannot be circumscribed by the most meticulous of creaturely observation, but whose self-disclosing witness is always completely reliable (John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21); the one who, paradoxically, is both presumed and introduced in the first words of the Bible: “In the beginning God . . .”
The biblical witness to God as creation’s rational core grants us insight we would otherwise lack into the explanation of origins. It also gives us Earth’s clearest articulation of the meaning of life and individual destiny.

**Integrated Thinking**

This breadth of “God understanding” hints at the counter-intuitiveness of imposing category distinctions upon Him as our subject and the confrontation that is His purpose. Here are six reasons why Bible classes are an excellent venue for integrated discussion of these themes.

1. **Reversing the Fragmentation of Knowledge**

   First is their ability to reverse the awkward fragmentation of knowledge that new college students face. Paul speaks truthfully when he insists that “we know in part ... we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12, NIV). Our knowledge is partial because humans are limited. The need for dividing data into manageable bits that produce 50-minute lectures, semester-long classes, and lifelong careers has produced category distinctions particularly unhelpful to the human progress that education so vociferously celebrates.

   **In truth, “how God confronts human beings” encompasses a much grander scope than mere scholastic attention to certain aspects of systematic theology.**

   Constrained to choose which information bits to absorb, far too many students acquire a “distinction education” instead of a distinctive one. In the university in particular, many courses merely sensitize enrollees to the distinctions between what is legal and what is ethical, between social or environmental sensitivity and commercial success, between international relations and enlightened national self-interest, between faith in a supreme deity and the study of autonomous rocks. Many students learn to accept, to adjust to, or worst of all, to take advantage of these distinctions. But as a venue where God faces humanity, the Bible class provides a context that promotes the integration of these academically and professionally separated categories.

2. **Providing a Sense of Purpose**

   Second, the Bible class can bring a sense of purpose to students’ lives. Human ambition and divine destiny, personal desire and divine design are far more biblically compatible than many imagine. Students who have grown up in a culture where science teaches that God is unnecessary will be amazed at the level of insight for living available in 1 Samuel 23:1-13. In that account, God protects David by revealing a series of actions still in the future. As students learn how much spiritual guidance the Bible’s God can give them, they will enter into dialogue with Him. And the God of David will gladly talk with them about the pros and cons of their hypotheses, to the benefit of their future plans.

3. **Challenging the Disciplinary Credibility Scale [DCS]**

   Effective Bible classes also challenge the disciplinary credibility scale, one of higher education’s most sacred properties. Because the social sciences and humanities do not establish and state their facts in a uniform way, or teach from the same materials across the board, they have trouble claiming the same authority or credibility as physics and other hard sciences. Again, because some disciplines produce quantifiably greater academic and intellectual advantage, or professional success, measured in terms of larger salaries, fatter perks, and/or greater public esteem or acclaim, they are seen as more valuable.
Bible classes do not register on any list of high-value classes based on financial calibrations. Biblical scholarship is not a lucrative career. Students do not see general-education Bible classes as honing their money-making skills. Further, because Bible is not a hard science, college religion classes are hard pressed to compete for credibility, authority, and validity with math, computer engineering, chemistry, biology, or physics.

But effective Bible classes enable the teacher and students to reflect on the only true scale of values. As college youth dream of future fame, scholarly attainment, prosperity, and entertainment, Bible study helps them to remember the real purpose for living: Not science versus history, but serving versus being served (Matthew 20:28). And they are challenged by Jesus’ famous question about gaining the world in exchange for one’s soul (see Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36, 37). Again, as they consider the relative validity of human observations and divine declarations, they may determine to live by “every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” laboring, not “for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (Matthew 4:4; John 6:27, NAU).

4. Straightening Thinking About God

A fourth and major contribution of Bible classes is their potential for unraveling twisted thinking about God. In the early 1980s, Ibrahim Abou Halloun and David Hestenes, physicists at Arizona State University, discovered that many students who earned an “A” in introductory physics continued to think in unscientific ways about motion. Researchers designed experiments that exposed the inadequacy of the students’ ideas, and highlighted the gap between their beliefs and the principles taught in the class. Thus challenged, “the students performed all kinds of mental gymnastics to avoid confronting and revising the fundamental underlying principles that guided their understanding of the physical universe.” In other words, the facts they had memorized and the exams they had passed had not altered their thinking about basic physics. Researchers now know that “some people make A’s by learning to ‘plug and chug,’ memorize formulae, sticking num-

The wide variety of religion classes, from Adventist doctrine, to personal spirituality, to business and social ethics, illustrates the many ways to engage students’ minds in thinking about God and His Word.

C

onscientious teacher response to this problem may engender frustration among well-intentioned students, particularly those fixated on their grade-point average. Though this focus is no student invention, educators are very much aware that in many instances, ‘getting an A’ ranks higher on the undergraduate’s scale of values than understanding the concept. Besides this, there is the Bible classes’ low position in the hierarchy of undergraduate val-
ues. Forthright students have made it clear to me that they don’t want to work very hard in Bible classes—because they have other, more significant things to do; further, they want me to tell them what will be on the quiz and exam; which they expect should be quickly completed with little mental effort.

Meaningful study about God is hardly helped by this kind of environment. Helping students understand how God confronts human beings means avoiding simplistic objectives focusing on memorization and regurgitation, in favor of those “that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life.” Bible teachers have a solemn responsibility to help correct students’ twisted thinking about God, which relegates Him to insignificance or limits His involvement in academics and human life. The conscientious Bible teacher cannot be content to dispassionately communicate theological information. The goal of the study of God is not memorizing data, or grasping theoretical concepts, or earning an “A.” It is experiential. It is linked “to real-world situations [and] problem-solving contexts.” The goal of Bible class is to improve the mind and the present quality of life, and to experience the thrill of everlasting intimacy with God. Godliness, Paul insists, is profitable both now and tomorrow, here and in the next life (1 Timothy 4:8). To the extent that focus on grades and preparation for exams obscures the vital, life-altering goal of reveling in godliness, of basking in the sunlight of God’s love more fully than ever before, to that extent Bible teaching has failed. Helping students see grades as secondary, and a life-changing experience with a God of love as primary—this continues to be one of the great goals of my Bible teaching. And I say boldly: Achieving that appreciation is one of the most liberating thrills in all academe.

5. Bringing a Practical Orientation to Life

Bible classes also provide a much-needed practical orientation for life. Students who understand God’s rightful place in their lives, understand that living with and for Him is wholly and thoroughly gratifying. Life with God is both wholistic and good. It is very different from the schizophrenic tyranny that drives people to compartmentalize their lives into discrete areas such as sleep[lessness], diet, work, church, entertainment, etc. With the fine discriminations of the Holy Spirit for their guide, and God’s glory as their purpose, students may commit to sleeping well, eating right, enjoying refreshing friendships, and renewing their minds with invigorating recreation and regular spiritual communion. Such a life-affirming practical orientation strongly contrasts with the sad combinations of sleep loss and wretched nutrition (junk food) that so effectively undermine the physical health and the powers of concentration so necessary for the student to do his or her best.

Students need to see that it is God’s deep passion for their physical and social happiness, for their total success, that expresses itself as guidelines for healthful and temperate living. Learning of God as Lord of human life delivers conscientious and forward-looking youth from some misguided notion that they must serve two masters, God and ambition. If they will live now as healthy, happy subjects of His kingdom, He promises to grant them the desires of their heart (Psalm 37:4).

6. Sharpening the Great Controversy Perspective

The sixth area where the college Bible class can promote integrated thinking is in linking the story of Lucifer’s rebellion to the origins of “art for art’s sake” and “knowledge for its own sake.” Before Lucifer introduced a
skewed system of values, everything was done to the glory of God. Later, the idea of objectivity allowed things to be assessed and appreciated apart from the celebration of divine love. At times, in this new context, created beings claim applause for their work instead of ascribing all glory, laud, and honor to God. In the spirit of Lucifer’s original search for recognition, humans seek to compete for recognition with the One who brought them into being. Rather than gratefully serving God and their fellow man as artists, scholars, artisans, administrators, or housekeepers, Earth’s fallen creatures chase after personal aggrandizement through self-seeking and indulgence. Bible teaching can refocus students’ thinking by showing how the Great Controversy theme explains and corrects this skewed emphasis and is the key to a comprehensive understanding of human life and God’s relation to it.

Conclusion

Students attend college to obtain training for academic and professional careers. A Christian school must incorporate both knowledge of God and a commitment to service into that training. Effective Bible classes connect students with a God whose boundless power is at the service of His infinite, personally caring love. No one’s actions, attitudes, and choices are beyond the sphere of concern of this limitless loving God. This reassurance will give our youth confidence for living and decision making because God’s solicitude and power are always available on their behalf. Further, because God cares so completely and is willing to help them, they may ask His advice about their best course of action. Wherever His counsel leads them professionally and academically, they may safely follow without having to waver between conceit and inferiority, foolishness and insecurity. This enables them to live full and balanced lives of study, play, and worship that bring glory to God in the here and now; and get them accustomed to sharing and serving in His splendid company forever.

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Effective Bible classes enable the teacher and students to reflect on the only true scale of values.

4. Ibid.
5. Hindus hold that the *Bhagavad Gita* was spoken by Lord Sri Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to His intimate devotee Arjuna. The Hindu *Vedas* are accepted as originally spoken by the Lord [Vishnu] himself to Brahma, from within his heart. Muslims believe that the Qur’an was given through revelation to Mohamed. The church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints holds that the Book of Mormon was made available to the world through Joseph Smith’s obedience to the instructions of Moroni, the messenger of God. And ancient Greeks depended on the oracle of Delphi.
6. Through the years that I have taught GHL, I have consistently required students to memorize a quotation that crystallizes this concept of divine willingness to guide humans who are willing to be led: “Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* [Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1981], p. 70).
8. Ibid., p. 32.
10. Ibid.
11. “Students quickly intut that grades are the medium of exchange. The accounting procedure in higher education has thus led to a distortion in students’ educational goals that may only be rectified by major administrative and programmatic changes” (Donald, p. 22). It may be noted that it is competition, not evaluation itself, that is the culprit. Part 2 of this article explains more about my personal struggle against this distorting phenomenon of competition in the context of student assignment evaluations.
12. Ibid., p. 18.
14. See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 21: “. . . in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” All of creaturely effort was originally a declaration of praise and gratitude to God, the Great Giver of life, and breath, and everything. Lucifer’s radical modification is what selfishness is all about—breaking the circuit of life by validating ingratitude and stealing from God to give to undeserving selves.
PASSING ON WHAT REALLY COUNTS:
TRANSMITTING ADVENTIST VALUES AND BELIEFS AND A SPIRIT OF SERVICE AND MISSION

Adventist religion teachers face a variety of students. Some are entrenched in postmodern convictions and conditioned to seek something more extraordinary in their religious experience than the mere recitation of facts. Others wrestle with a tendency to disbelief or are inclined to question fundamental biblical doctrines. A few come with an atheistic or animistic background. Others have had very tangible conversion experiences, even though the emotional and psychological baggage from their former life may hang on for years. Still others are deeply rooted in an Adventist subculture where they feel at home, yet they feel deeply dissatisfied with the way things are going—or not going—in the church.

How can religion teachers foster the transmission of Adventist beliefs and values to such a diverse audience? In a culture saturated with the idea of self-fulfillment, how can they instill in students a desire to reach out and serve others? How can they help students focus on mission rather than narrowly on academic success to ensure getting a well-paid job?

What Is Education?
The answer is to focus on what really counts in Adventism. For Adventists, all of Scripture is important to our faith. While God’s infallible revelation cannot be reduced to just a few basic doctrines, Seventh-day Adventists are recognized in holding no less than certain basic biblical beliefs.1 We now have 28 Fundamental Beliefs that identify the church’s understanding of certain biblical teachings.

Transmitting what is uniquely Adventist, however, involves more than memorizing a lot of Fundamental Beliefs. Adventist
teachers must also pass on the values and principles embedded in those beliefs. Understanding those values and principles will enable students to translate their cognitive beliefs into a biblical-Adventist lifestyle.

This leads to the question of what education really is. It has been said that "Christian education, simply defined, is the ministry of bringing the believer to maturity in Jesus Christ." In other words, the purpose of educational ministry is to help students develop a Christlike character. This is what we want to pass on.

Education for Faith

Education for spiritual maturity means educating for faith. This can best be done in the context of mutual trust in a faith community as well as in an academic environment that is conducive to biblical faith. However, Scripture speaks of biblical faith in three different but interactive ways. A proper theological understanding of spiritual maturity includes the cognitive, the affective, and the volitional.

The Cognitive Aspect of Faith

"Faith has an intellectual or cognitive aspect. There is an element of knowledge or content to faith. Scripture affirms that faith means believing certain things are true. There is a content to be believed, and that content has specifics." In other words, it is not enough to have faith. What a person believes is every bit as critical as the fact that he or she believes. If we want to help our students grow in faith, we must communicate the biblical content of faith. This will include our understanding of basic biblical truths. "It is impossible to be spiritually mature and yet be ignorant of the truths of God's Word. Spiritual maturity is contingent upon knowing what God has said . . ." and this means "teaching the content of the faith accurately."

The Relational Aspect of Faith

Faith also has a relational aspect. It is not enough to know the right content. Religious beliefs must also capture the heart and will. Thus, a living faith goes beyond the intellectual; it is relational and alive toward God. It requires an emotional commitment to the object of one's faith so that the heart delights in the truth. It is not possible to speak of spiritual maturity apart from these qualities. Therefore, the religion teacher's goal must be to help students turn their hearts toward God. Then they will not only understand the truth but also be attracted and captured by the truth and have a desire to be in communion with Jesus Christ, who is the Truth.

The Volitional Aspect of Faith

Faith also has a volitional dimension. True faith empowers people to put their beliefs into practice to achieve a Christlike lifestyle. We cannot truthfully say that we believe in Jesus unless our commitment translates into active obedience and a loving desire to do God's will.

Taking these aspects of faith seriously will help teachers choose the right approach for transmitting their beliefs. To educate for spiritual maturity means to be faithful to all of Scripture. It also means respecting the dignity of the other person and seeing him or her through the eyes of Jesus—with love and compassion. Furthermore, it includes a belief that students are free moral agents who may need help making wise decisions. An authentic education for faith will avoid manipulative or coercive methods that produce a forced compliance to the will of God. Instead, it will seek to win the students' trust and encourage them to commit their lives to God. It will help them throughout their lives to develop a spirit of dependence upon God and a healthy independence from other people in obeying His will.

Educating for Spiritual Maturity

In many ways, Adventist education has been oriented more toward equipping its students with professional skills rather than developing their character. A study known as Readiness for Ministry showed that what was considered valuable for the pastor’s effectiveness was not, in fact, ministry skills, but character values. For example, more than
half of the top 12 most-valued ministry descriptions—out of 444—were character-based, such as “keeps his/her word and fulfills promises,” “acknowledges his/her own need for continued growth in faith,” “serves others willingly with or without public acclaim,” and “maintains personal integrity despite pressures to compromise.” Although professional skills and other factors are important in ministry, this study compellingly highlighted what really is important for a pastor—the solidity of his or her Christian character in the sight of God and His people. This commitment is just as important for other careers.

While Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized the importance of character development and spirituality, in theory we tend to give less time and attention to those areas than to intellectual skills. We must educate for character as well as intellect, decency as well as literacy, virtue as well as knowledge. Ellen White insisted that “the Bible must be made the groundwork and subject matter of education,” unfolding “a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy,” and warned against humanistic trends: “When education in human lines is pushed to such an extent that the love of God wanes in the heart, that prayer is neglected, and that there is a failure to cultivate spiritual attributes, it is wholly disastrous.”

Christian education is first and foremost character education. “Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. Such an education provides more than mental discipline; it provides more than phys-

Transmitting what is uniquely Adventist ... involves more than memorizing a lot of Fundamental Beliefs.
structured individually or in small groups.18 When the class sizes increase to such proportions that teachers have a hard time remembering students’ names, let alone interacting with them on a one-to-one basis, it becomes very difficult to transmit spiritual values.

Although Jesus occasionally preached to an audience of several thousand, He taught a rather small circle of close disciples. Here, smaller schools seem to have an advantage because their more personal atmosphere is more conducive to the transmission of spiritual values than a large and anonymous setting.19

It is important for students to learn central biblical facts, appreciate the beauty of Adventist beliefs, develop an understanding of worldviews and philosophies, and acquire professional skills. However, all this is worth very little if not accompanied by integrity.

Moral qualities are not so much transmitted intellectually as by observation—from what students see and experience in the lives of teachers—in the classroom, in church, and in their homes and families. Observational learning effectively communicates values, behavior, and attitudes.20

However, there is no spiritual growth apart from truth. “Christian education must approach and treat Scripture as truth if it is to produce spiritual growth.”21 The combination of sound Christian witness and the truth of Scripture is the key to a teacher’s influence and effectiveness. “Character alone, apart from the Word of God, will not produce righteousness. Conversely, the Word of God, if it is not communicated by a righteous teacher, will be less likely to have a powerful influence on the student.”22

In other words, if teachers want to transmit to students the importance of (1) involvement in the church and its missionary activities, (2) an active devotional life, and (3) selfless service, they must value and model these activities themselves. This will inspire their students to do the same.

Essential Values and Beliefs

Having said all this, I would like to pinpoint some essential values and specific beliefs that we must transmit in our schools. These suggestions are not exhaustive, but rather may serve to stimulate further reflection.

Understanding Salvation

Christians want to follow the divine plan for character development because they have experienced God’s forgiveness in Christ. The Bible says that God offers His unmerited salvation to all, but to receive this free gift, humans must make a conscious decision. This means that decision-making skills, such as being able to choose independently and in an informed manner, are basics of Christian education.

Created beings are held responsible for their choices. Therefore, Christian education needs to help students accept responsibility for their behavior and their decisions. Understanding the nature of forgiveness, accepting the redemption offered through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and experiencing the joy and fulfillment that comes from following Jesus and His written...
Word are essential elements of religious education. No student should leave our schools without an experiential knowledge of salvation.

**Understanding God's Commandments**

Postmoderns are plagued by a deep-seated uncertainty about truth. Truth for many has become a matter of taste or personal preference. Familiarity with the Ten Commandments can provide reliable orientation and guidance in moral education. However, it is helpful to apply God's law in different contexts so that students comprehend the principles embedded therein and can apply them to their own lives.

For example,23 the first commandment (Exodus 20:2, 3) includes the principle of setting the right priorities because God deserves first place in our lives, rather than material things, possessions, other people, or fame.

Not misusing God’s name means more than refraining from swearing and cursing. It also means living as a child of the God whose name we bear and not falsely portraying His character through our words and deeds. This calls for integrity and honesty, as well as self-control, patience, justice, and steadfast love.

The fourth commandment calls us to be good stewards of our time and physical energies (Exodus 20:9, 10). Other commandments highlight the worth of the family, teach us to respect other people’s possessions, to be truthful, to value the beauty of sex within the safe boundaries of marriage, and to guard the dignity of life.

**Biblical Virtues**

The Bible teaches many virtues that provide a basis for decision-making.24 These principles can be found in a condensed version in passages such as Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 13, Matthew 5:3-11, and Romans 12, to name but a few.

We should teach our students to be self-controlled and moderate (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 10:31), content (1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:11), grateful (1 Thessalonians 5:18; Philippians 4:4-6; Psalm 95:2; 107:1), honest (2 Corinthians 13:7; Philippians 4:8), loyal and committed (1 Corinthians 15:58), kind and compassionate (Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 3:8, 9), patient and persevering (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Revelation 2:25), and respectful of all people and of divine authority (1 Peter 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Romans 12:10).25

**Promoting Peace and Practicing Forgiveness**

Today, it seems particularly fitting to promote peace and forgiveness. Christians should be peacemakers (James 3:18), reflecting God’s shalom in their lives. In a world increasingly torn and divided by violence, war, and aggression,26 it is our privilege and responsibility as teachers to imitate God’s indiscriminate love and to reflect His forgiveness in the way we deal with ourselves, our students, other people and races, as well as with other denominations and nations. I believe this requires a serious re-evaluation of our individual and collective attitude toward all wars and violence as a method of conflict resolution and a serious look at the rise of nationalism even within our own ranks.

**Understanding Sacred Time and Prophetic Time**

Other aspects of our faith should be fostered and faithfully transmitted to students. Our name, Seventh-day Adventist, already suggests an understanding of sacred and prophetic time (i.e., the Sabbath and the Advent hope).

To know the Sabbath and keep it in the right spirit means knowing the difference between what is holy and what is profane, between the sacred and the common. Students can develop an awareness for this important distinction when they experience it in how their teachers live, dress, talk about God, conduct worship services, choose what kinds of music to listen to, and use Holy Scripture, to name but some areas.

The Sabbath also points us to the supernatural origin of all life, as revealed in God’s seven-day creation27 and points us to the Creator of time, the Sovereign of time, and the Redeemer in His time.28 Character education has declined under Darwinism, which depicts morality as evolving rather than fixed and certain. All this makes the teaching of the biblical doctrine of the Sabbath even more urgent today. The Sabbath is a sign that human beings belong to God. Our worth and dignity are not derived from what we do but come as a result of being created by God and spending time with Him.

Seventh-day Adventists are a prophetic movement that draws its identity as God’s remnant people out of a particular interpretation of Bible prophecy. Understanding apocalyptic prophecy, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation, is essential to comprehending the church’s role in this last phase of world history. To understand the times in which we live gives a sense of urgency for our mission to the world.

Connected with this prophetic understanding of history are other aspects of our Adventist belief such as our understanding of salvation and Christ’s high-priestly role in the heavenly sanctuary, the judgment, our unique mission and responsibility as God’s end-time people, and much
more. Biblical prophecy gives us a sense of realism. While we see this world as it really is—in all its dark and sinful condition, we never despair because of the wonderful Advent hope.

Conclusion

While the content of our beliefs is important for spiritual maturity, it is personal character that will manifest itself in service to other people and communities and in courage in public life. This is what we want to pass on. Therefore, religion teachers should believe what they teach about God and the Bible, trust the Scripture, promote faith, and consistently model what it means to live in relationship with God and with those He has placed in their care.23

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The preface to the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists states: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain Fundamental Beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word” (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, p. 9).


The religion teacher’s goal must be to help students turn their hearts toward God.

This definition suggests that Christian education is to be oriented toward believers and thus begin where evangelism ends, helping believers grow in their faith.

3. Even though the word character appears relatively rarely in the Bible, God has plenty to say about developing a Christlike character. For Ellen G. White, the concept of character includes the “preparation of the physical, mental, and moral powers for the performance of every duty; it is the training of body, mind, and soul for divine service” (Christ’s Object Lessons [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1941], p. 330). Thus, “an upright character is of greater worth than the gold of Ophir. Without it none can rise to an honorable eminence. But character is not inherited. It cannot be bought. Moral excellence and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. . . . The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort” (Patriarchs and Prophets [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958], p. 223).

4. I am here following closely Downs, Teaching for Spiritual Growth, pages 18 and 19.

5. Ibid., p. 18.

6. Ibid.

7. The Epistle of James warns against the dangers of having a faith that is only cognitive and tells us that orthodoxy alone is not sufficient (1:25-27, 2:14f, 4:17).


9. Ibid., pp. 18, 19.


15. Ibid., p. 350.


18. Ibid., p. 133.

19. In saying this, the positive spiritual dimension and atmosphere that exists on many larger Adventist schools and institutions around the world is not denied. However, the larger the setting, the more difficult it becomes to implement spiritual formation. One way to create a setting that fosters spiritual and character development at large schools is to create numerous smaller circles and study groups where spiritual mentoring on a personal basis is much easier than in a large, more anonymous, classroom setting.

20. Ibid., p. 163.

21. Ibid., p. 132. It has been pointed out that “the perfect truth of Scripture is not clearly communicated in a purely socialization mode. . . . A pure social learning approach to Christian nurture could lead to heresy being taught and believed, without anyone realizing it. It is the propositional truth of God’s revelation that provides the safeguards and norms for our faith. If the propositional truth is lost, the foundation is lost” (p. 163).

22. Ibid., p. 160. This means that when choosing a teacher, Adventist schools must look for more than knowledge and academic qualifications. “God has called us, not to model perfection, but to model redemption. We are to be living demonstrations, not of how good we are, but of how good God is. We are to be models of the Gospel, of God’s redemptive acts in sinful humanity” (p. 164).

23. There is not enough space here to give an example of an application for every commandment. This, however, is something that needs to be done to help students understand the relevance of God’s perfect law that gives freedom (cf. James 1:25, 2:12).

24. See the discussion in Donna J. Hubenicht, Ten Christian Values Every Kid Should Know (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2000), which I follow closely in this section.

25. Hubenicht has correctly pointed out that “all of these values are rooted in love—God’s love and the love He gives to us. Without love in the center of your being, these values cannot be expressed” (ibid., p. 25).

26. In light of this biblical fact, I wonder whether an active participation in and support of military engagements and bearing of arms reflects such a peaceful attitude.


28. I am indebted to my cousin Michael G. Hasel for these ideas.

It is not unusual for incoming freshmen, when looking over the general-education requirements at a Seventh-day Adventist college or university, to exclaim: “Eighteen quarter credits [or 12 semester credits] in religion! Why do I have to take more Bible classes? I took Bible in academy. I came here to prepare for a career.”

And it isn’t just students who are prone to ask such questions. Several years ago, Pacific Union College (PUC), in Angwin, California, where I taught when this article was written, was revising its general-education program. This stimulated a great deal of discussion. Which classes from each discipline should be required? How could the school ensure that students received a quality liberal-arts education? It became clear during these discussions that not all faculty members outside the Religion Department were equally committed to maintaining a sizable religion requirement in the general-education program. Some of them expressed the same doubt as the hypothetical student, “Why must we require so many credits in religion?”

Now in fairness to those who pose this question, there is no precept in the Decalogue mandating that a tithe of general-education classes be devoted to biblical and theological studies, though religion professors might wish that were the case!

Religion teachers may wonder why anyone would ask such a question, since the answer seems so self-evident (at least to us). We may be tempted to fall back on tradition—asserting that the college has always required this number of religion credits. However, I would propose that we view the question as an opportunity to reflect analytically about why Adventist colleges should require religion classes. Doing so will help us discover

If the endeavor in which Adventist colleges and universities are involved is to truly deserve the label “education,” it must have a spiritual dimension. It must speak to the most vital area of life, namely, humanity’s need for a relationship with a transcendent God.

By Greg A. King
and set forth the rationale and objectives for such classes, and to reaffirm their essential nature.

I believe there are persuasive and weighty reasons for requiring religion classes as part of the general-education program at any Christian college—and especially at an Adventist institution.

Rationale
There are a number of rationales for required religion classes, but I would like to focus on two matters close to my heart. First, if the endeavor in which Adventist colleges and universities are involved is to truly deserve the label “education,” it must have a spiritual dimension. It must speak to the most vital area of life, namely, humanity’s need for a relationship with a transcendent God. Solomon was right when he declared, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7, NIV).

Unfortunately, most secular higher education has completely lost this dimension. For example, Harvard University, arguably the most prestigious educational institution in the world, has as its motto the Latin word veritas meaning “truth.” However, you might have a hard time finding a Harvard student or faculty member who could make any connection between the current brand of education offered at the university and the original meaning of that motto. When Harvard began its storied history, that term did not mean truth in the abstract, it meant the truth that is found in Christ Jesus. Harvard was founded to train missionaries to witness to the Native Americans.

It is hard for some to fathom that Duke University, famous today for its basketball championships, has on its campus a plaque that reads, “The Aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the son of God.” But that was what Duke stood for at one time. Now, any assertion by its administrat-
tered education,” and in challenging students to live “lives of useful human service and uncompromising human integrity.” In fact, the role of these classes is so vital that it would be difficult to imagine the mission being accomplished without a religion requirement.

To summarize, both the sine qua non of the spiritual component in true education and the vital role of religion classes in fulfilling the mission of the college provide a strong rationale for required religion classes. I will now set forth several objectives of such classes.

Objectives

Several years ago, a student wrote on an information sheet distributed at the beginning of one of my Bible classes: “I was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home. My parents are people of great faith, and I love them and am grateful to them for raising me as a Christian, but I no longer consider myself to be Christian. In academy, I became a real believer, but later I became a believer with a lot of doubts. Over the past few years, I’ve seriously questioned my beliefs and am currently in the process of doing so. My questions have become more basic right now. They’re somewhere around, am I prepared to believe in a God? If so, what kind of God?” It is these kinds of students—who are becoming increasingly common on our campuses—that I have in mind as I propose the following objectives.

1st Objective: Evangelistic

Simply stated, the primary purpose of religion classes must be to help our students have an encounter with Jesus Christ. In other words, we are not merely transmitters of information, or experts in various specialties, we are also evangelists—and our target audience is the group of students in our classrooms.

The importance of this task is underscored by the fact that many of our students have never experienced a soul-saving, life-changing relationship with Jesus. If we really believe that Jesus is the One who provides the most abundant, satisfying, fulfilling way to live (see John 10:10), and that eternal life is found in knowing Him (see John 17:3), then one of our primary goals must be to inspire our students to have a relationship with Him, too. And we should use every opportunity we can, whether through sharing a devotional thought in the classroom, touching base with students outside of class to let them know we are praying for them, etc., to share our own relationship with Jesus Christ.

In a published interview, Malcolm Maxwell, president of Pacific Union College for 18 years, succinctly described this responsibility: “In accepting a position on the faculty of Pacific Union College, you are accepting pastoral and evangelistic obligations;
part of your job at PUC means you will reach out and touch our students for Christ. This is the one thing that sets our school apart. Many schools provide a good academic experience; we do, too, in a context of Christian commitment. That’s what we’re all about.” If this is the responsibility of any teacher in any discipline, it must especially be true for religion teachers.

This objective is not necessarily achieved through excellent lectures or scintillating reading assignments. In fact, accomplishing this evangelistic goal may sometimes have little to do with course-related issues or specific subject matter. Please do not conclude that this condones shoddy teaching or scholarship, for we must strive for excellence in our lectures, our scholarship, and indeed, all that we do. But our primary objective transcends the academic enterprise.

I was reminded of the transitory nature of the information we transmit when a student, immediately after completing his final exam, went over to the wastebasket in the corner and without fanfare, threw away all of his notes from the class. This experience served as a jarring reminder that students tend to remember little of the factual content of their classes. Many of the dates and names and historical events vanish from their minds like the morning dew. However, they are likely to remember what type of person I am, whether I took a genuine interest in them, and most of all, if I, in their view, had an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ that inspired them to want to get to know Him better.

2nd Objective: Impart Bible Knowledge

A second objective follows naturally on the heels of the first. It is to impart a knowledge of the Bible, the Word of God. To fulfill this objective, we must require classes that focus on the study of Scripture.

This objective is worthy of attention for a couple of reasons. First, we must communicate to our students the centrality of the Word of God in our personal Christian faith and in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We need to clearly indicate that we really do give priority to the words of Scripture. In a world where so much is transitory, we must show that we believe that, “‘The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever’” (Isaiah 40:8). Teaching the Word of God has always been a central part of the Protestant tradition, and Adventist colleges should show that they value this aspect of their heritage.

Emphasizing a knowledge of Scripture will also help to counter the widespread biblical illiteracy that exists in both the world and the church. While we might chuckle about the lack of biblical knowledge exhibited on television game shows, with people identifying the Epistles as the wives of the apostles or declaring that Noah’s wife was Joan of Arc, we might be shocked at the lack of awareness of some scriptural basics by longtime church members.

By “imparting a knowledge of the Bible,” I don’t mean that the teacher should act as if he or she has completely mastered the treasures of the Bible and is there merely to dispense these treasures to the students. While the teacher does need to share important passages, themes, and concepts, perhaps the best thing he or she can do is to inspire students to engage in their own personal study of the Word.

If I can enthusiastically share a verse or teaching from the Bible, I have achieved a positive result. However, if I can arouse in my students a passionate hunger to study the Bible for themselves, to make a lifelong commitment to seeking God in the pages of His Word, I will have made a lasting, perhaps an eternal, difference in their lives.

A basic ingredient of imparting a knowledge of the Bible is sharing the time-honored principles for interpreting it. These principles will be of great benefit to our students as they study a Book that can sometimes be very challenging. If I can help them to interpret the Bible more competently and accurately, I will have better prepared them to serve as active lay people and leaders. Moreover, this may help safeguard them against some of the interpretive excesses that have been characteristic of fringe groups such as the Branch Davidians.

3rd Objective: Share Christianity’s Major Doctrines

A third objective of required religion classes is to communicate the major teachings of Christianity and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Bible emphatically challenges the community of faith to transmit revealed truth from generation to generation (see, for example, Deuteronomy 6:7, 8). One of the best places for this to happen is in a classroom.

This objective is important for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that what is not passed along will eventually be lost. If we want our students to be committed Adventist Christians, we must communicate the beliefs that we as a church deem important. Babies are not born knowing the chief tenets of the Christian faith like salvation by faith in Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, and the Trinity, nor major teachings of Adventism, like the Sabbath and Creation. They must be taught these doctrines.

It is important to note that the purpose in communicating Christian teachings and the Adventist faith is not simply to indoctrinate or to en-
able the students to regurgitate ideas in the same way the teacher stated them in class. Rather, the Bible teacher should lead the students to thoughtfully reflect upon, understand, and commit themselves to the same heritage of faith to which he or she is dedicated.

For the teacher to fulfill this objective, he or she must not act as an impartial, unbiased moderator with no commitment to any position. As a Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher, I am a partisan for Christ. I am committed to my church, and I make no apology for attempting to share my commitment with my students in a thoughtful and well-reasoned manner.

There is no space here to list the teachings that should be communicated in the classroom setting. Of course, foremost among them is the plan of salvation and acceptance of Christ as a personal Savior. Another important teaching is a biblical worldview that undergirds all of Christian faith and life.

Secular society continuously bombards our students with a completely different worldview, described in this quote by a Harvard scientist: “Man is the result of a blind, purposeless process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned.” Adventist religion teachers must combat this nihilism by presenting a loving, personal Creator God who knows His children personally and has a plan for each one (see Jeremiah 1:5; 29:11). In addition, Adventist doctrines such as the Sabbath, Creation, and the Second Coming should be presented in the classroom.

**4th Objective: Transforming Students’ Lives**

The fourth and final objective grows naturally out of the previous ones. It is to inspire our students to pattern their own lives after the example of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 2:6). Bible classes should challenge students to devote their talents and energies to God in order to make a difference in the world.

**W**e are not just trying to change our students’ minds. Our goal is much more far-reaching and significant—for our students’ lives to demonstrate supreme love to God and unselfish love to others (see Matthew 22:37–39), for them to treat others with justice and mercy while they walk humbly with their God (see Micah 6:8), and for them to live the principles in the Sermon on the Mount. We want them to be so committed to living for God that they will respond with acts of moral courage, should the situation require it.

Our ultimate goal, like that of the Master Teacher Himself, is to see the lives of our students transformed so that they become agents in advancing the kingdom of God on Earth.

**Conclusion**

When I became chair of the religion department at Pacific Union College, one of my colleagues asked about my main objectives for the department. His question challenged me to crystallize in my own mind what I hoped our department would accomplish through its teaching ministry on our campus.

As I thought about his probing question, I concluded that our objectives revolved around three major concerns: the Son of God, the Word of God, and the church of God.

First, our religion classes should inspire students to begin or deepen a relationship with Jesus Christ and to model their lives after His pattern of love and service; Second, our classes should help students become better acquainted with Scripture and motivate them to study God’s Word for themselves; and

Finally, our classes should challenge students to be more committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

If religion classes leave our students more passionately devoted to Jesus, more deeply committed to His Word, and more strongly dedicated to His church, we will have accomplished our objectives.

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“What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of Heaven and earth. . . .”

The Apostle Paul in Athens

Should graduate students in Adventist universities be required to take religion courses? I believe that they should.

My purpose in asserting the importance of including religious studies in the curricula of graduate programs is born of two convictions. I believe that the careful study of religion should be an important element in Christian education at all levels, and I lament that many graduate programs are missing this opportunity. So this is a call for change.

Some years ago, when I became dean of the religion faculty at Loma Linda University (LLU) in Loma Linda, California, I needed to understand the religion requirements for undergraduate and graduate programs as well as for post-baccalaureate professional programs. I found that these programs had vastly different requirements. In order to earn a diploma, every undergraduate student had to take a significant number of religion courses. And, thanks to the visionary leadership of my predecessors, the LLU post-baccalaureate professional programs such as medicine and dentistry also included carefully designed religion components. The curriculum for our medical students, for example, continues to include seven required courses in religion, for a total of 14 quarter units, with titles like “God and Human Suffering” and “Wholeness for Physicians.” The dentistry program has a similar religion curriculum.

I was surprised to discover that most of LLU’s graduate programs required only one unspecified two-unit course in religion. The requirement could be fulfilled by either a graduate-level or upper-division undergraduate course. This minimal requirement applied regardless of whether students were enrolled in one- to two-year master’s degree programs or in the much longer doctoral programs.

A proposal to change this requirement, so that all graduate students would take at least one three-unit course in religion at the graduate level, produced some resistance. One program director—a very conservative Adventist—wrote a stern two-page letter in which he argued that our graduate school was not a “seminary” and that the purpose of religion courses for graduate students should be mostly devotional.

More than one colleague asked me why our university should have any graduate-level religion requirements when most of our sister institutions’ graduate programs had no such re-

BY GERALD R. WINSLOW

How is it that so many Adventist graduate programs include no provision for the academic study of religion?
requirement. Nevertheless, the proposal passed.

Since that time, the inclusion of religion in the curricula of all LLU graduate programs has expanded so that even our 18-unit certificate programs include at least one graduate-level course in religion. And our doctoral programs, with the clear mandate of LLU’s administration and board of trustees and the generally enthusiastic support of program directors, now include three different three-unit graduate-level religion courses. From all that I can see, the dire predictions have not come to pass. On the contrary, student evaluations indicate a high level of appreciation for the courses.

A Survey of Graduate Programs

The argument that required religion courses would put Loma Linda University out of step with other Adventist graduate programs puzzled me. Was it true that Adventist graduate education was generally devoid of required courses in religion? The disappointing answer, at least in North America, is mostly yes. In 2003, I surveyed the curricula of all the Adventist graduate programs in North America other than those at LLU. The eight schools surveyed offered a total of 80 graduate programs (excluding ones such as the M.Div., whose major emphasis is the study of religion). Of these 80 programs, only five (about six percent) required courses with a religion prefix. Two of these programs were in church administration; one was in music ministry.

Further scrutiny of the 80 programs indicated that several of them did require courses with titles such as “Christian Ethics and Values” and “Faith and Learning” that obviously included the academic study of religion, even though the courses did not bear religion prefixes. Even so, it appeared that only about 18 percent of the graduate programs that are now devoid of the formal study of religion have always been this way.

Why Graduate Programs Do Not Include a Religion Component

How is it that so many Adventist graduate programs include no provision for the academic study of religion? Did this result from the conviction that such programs would be superior if they did not include a religion requirement? I have not made a study of the history of Adventist graduate education, but my more than 40 years of personal experience, first as a student and then as a professor and administrator in Adventist higher education, have allowed me to draw some conclusions.

The relative absence of religion in so many of our graduate programs is not the result of secularization. In other words, these programs did not start with a clear vision regarding the integration of religious studies, and then, over time, experience an erosion of commitment. Most of the graduate programs that are now de-
void of the formal study of religion have always been this way. Why is this so?

I offer the following incomplete list of answers based on my experience and on numerous conversations with Adventist educators. Here are three examples of reasons commonly given:

1. **Our students have already studied enough religion.** When Adventist graduate programs first emerged, most of the students came from the church’s undergraduate institutions. Some decades ago, it was common for Adventist colleges to require two units of religion for every undergraduate quarter of study. Thus, at that time, most students had to take 24 units of religious studies. Later, this was lowered to 18 units for students who had attended Adventist secondary schools. Subsequently, the standard became 18, and in some cases 16 units, for all students. In the early days, since most students enrolling in Adventist graduate programs were church members who had taken many religion courses, administrators concluded that benefits of the academic study of religion had been achieved. Underlying this argument is a profound misunderstanding of the purpose of religious studies. Many people regard such courses as “academic lite”—mostly devotional in nature, and hardly worthy of graduate-level study.

2. **Required religion courses will make our graduate programs unattractive.** This fear expresses itself in many ways. Some are afraid that including required religion courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. After all, should it not be possible to integrate the study of religion within courses in history, literature, mathematics, and science? And, since all of our professors are people of faith, surely they can make clear the connections between their disciplines and religious convictions. I fear that part of the price for a belief in the “priesthood of all believers” is the corollary that most anyone should be able to teach religion, regardless of his or her academic preparation.

3. **We can integrate religion in our programs without requiring formal courses.** This is one of the most common reasons for rejecting required religion courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Others fear that the inclusion of religion will either make the program longer, and thus more expensive, or will force the elimination of other important courses, thus making the program inferior to its competitors.

The author, Gerald R. Winslow, teaching a religion class at Loma Linda University.

To these three examples, many more could be added. It is my belief, however, that negative reactions of this sort have caused Adventist graduate programs to miss remarkable opportunities for offering a genuinely superior education. Many reasons can be given for this belief. I will men-
tion only three.

1. Graduate education presents students with an important opportunity and stimulus for spiritual growth and maturation. Graduate studies typically present students with critical issues of meaning and values at a time when they have newly entered adulthood. Many of these students are more ready to address fundamental questions about their purpose in life than at previous times. As James Fowler has observed, “Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining best defined by structural stages of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood or adolescence.”

While there are many ways to incorporate opportunities for faith development in the curriculum, the inclusion of carefully crafted courses in religion ensures that graduate students will encounter, both in their course work and in the person of the professor, potentially invaluable opportunities for growth.

Our graduate students today come from remarkably diverse religious backgrounds. Providing them an appropriate environment for the exploration of faith requires careful respect for this diversity. But it does not require spiritual or theological neutrality. As Richard Rice has argued, the task of the professor of religion on an Adventist campus is more than “dispassionate inquiry.” In Rice’s words, we have a responsibility to “recommend a religious perspective.”

Doing so in a manner that respects the student’s own religious biography is the way to the most fruitful conversations.

2. The inclusion of religious studies helps to ensure the balanced education of the whole person. Because of the ministry of Ellen White, Adventists have rich resources for reflection on the value of wholistic education. Adventist education is never more successful than when it remembers these words: “True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possi-
ble to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers."

Nothing about this vision ends at the conclusion of a baccalaureate education. Failure to include serious study of religion at the graduate level carries the unhappy risks of imbalance. Students are expected to gain the highest levels of intellectual inquiry in their chosen areas of academic specialty while the exploration of their religious convictions may remain at the level of adolescence. Small wonder, then, that religious belief may seem juvenile and irrelevant for such students.

Quality Christian education, on the other hand, makes explicit provision for the integration of the sacred. In the words of Parker Palmer, "The health of education depends on our ability to hold sacred and secular together so that they can correct and enrich each other."6

3. Graduate education that includes the study of religion is intellectually superior. This claim may seem the least obvious. But I am firmly convinced that including religious studies in curricula as diverse as business administration and the natural sciences will help to create programs that are stronger academically.

Recently, one of my colleagues, a periodontist who teaches in our dental school, told me that the most important course he took during his graduate studies in dentistry was Philosophy of Religion. He said he believed this was true not only because of the opportunity for spiritual growth, but also because the mode of inquiry opened new horizons of intellectual life.

Exploring the relationship between language and thought and the way we justify our most basic convictions helped this colleague throughout his career to seek greater clarity on the issues that matter most. Any time students have the opportunity to join with other first-rate minds in the close examination and discussion of a text, their intellectual growth is likely to be significantly enriched. This is especially true when the text in hand focuses on what it means to be human in a divinely created universe. Ellen White’s observation is as cogent today as it was when published a century ago: “As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. . . . No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation.”7

If we believe this—and we should—then we will be emboldened to integrate religious studies, including biblical study, in every Adventist graduate program. We should not fear decreased enrollment because we will believe that the educational programs we are offering are spiritually and intellectually superior to their secular counterparts. We already have sufficient evidence that large numbers of students will be attracted to exactly this kind of education.

**How to Do It**

Experience has taught me that expanding the religion curricula at the graduate level must be done with great care. A supportive alliance with program directors and deans is essential, and courses must be tailored to the specific needs and interests of the participants. Most graduate students are highly focused on particular aca-
Academic and professional goals, and courses in religious studies need to address the practical implications of their inquiry. So, for example, when our graduate school introduced a new doctoral program in social policy, one of the new religion courses, negotiated with the program director and approved by the graduate council, was “Christian Citizenship,” an exploration of Christian ethics focused on the formation of social policy.

Finally, and crucially, the professors who teach graduate students must be carefully selected. An excellent undergraduate teacher may, or may not, make a gifted leader of a graduate seminar.

Today, Adventist graduate programs have an unprecedented opportunity for reaching new levels of academic and spiritual excellence. Many thousands of students come to our colleges and universities seeking the best education. For a significant percentage of these students, their time in our church’s graduate programs will be their only encounter with Adventist education. We should not fail them, nor should we fail to live up to our visionary calling as a prophetic community of faith, by omitting the careful study of religious convictions as a central feature of every graduate program we offer.

We must pray for the Holy Spirit to help us overcome our insecurity about our spiritual heritage and religious identity, which so often produces fear of overtly incorporating religion into our graduate curricula. Other Christian universities have matured beyond this insecurity. And, by the power of the Spirit, I am confident that we can, too.

As administrators and professors, we should work to ensure the creative inclusion of religious studies in our graduate programs because this is our calling from God, and because the result will be a better education for the wonderful students who invest in Adventist higher education and who put their trust in our leadership.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES
2. I am referring to quarter units, not semester units.
7. Ibid., p. 124.
I was a youth pastor, building a thriving ministry in Southern California in a friendly, supportive church. My seminary classmates were all following their call to ministry. And then I got the phone call. “Bailey, have you ever thought about teaching Bible full-time?” The local academy principal wanted me to begin a ministry at the local Adventist school, and I had to make a decision.

Although I had taught on occasion before, I’d never thought about making this kind of career change. But I was being given the chance to teach Bible and music, both areas I loved. So after prayer and thought, I said, “Yes.” Then with enthusiasm, I began to make the move from full-time pastoral work to full-time teaching.

To my surprise, I began to receive a number of critical phone calls. “I’m so sorry to hear that
you’ve left the ministry!” The astounded reaction was from one of my best friends in ministry, who viewed the move into teaching as a denial of my calling. Our discussion lasted a long half-hour. Another call came, and the concern was repeated.

I thought I was ministering to a different group of people, not leaving the ministry. But a number of identity tags began to be eliminated from my life—no more invitations to workers’ meetings, mailings from the ministerial department were not forwarded, conference youth ministry information failed to reach me anymore. These subtle signs reinforced my concern that teaching was not considered a mainstream ministry, and in fact, I found it easier and easier to distance myself from other ministerial matters.

**What Does Research Suggest?**

But our own denominational Valuegenesis research supports the idea that religious education is one of the venues where young people clarify their vision for their lives, learn values and life-affirming choices, and meet Jesus as a personal friend. Most important to parents and teachers is Adventist schools’ nurturing of spiritual faith. The findings suggest that students like their church school because it helps them develop their own religious faith. For example, when asked, “How much has each of the following helped you to develop your faith?” 74 percent responded that attending an Adventist school helped this happen. And the value of religious education seems amplified because we have trained, committed, and creative religion teachers in our schools who are professionals in teaching faith. We’ve learned, for example, that 63 percent of grades 6–12 students in Adventist schools say that the Bible teacher is an important factor in their faith decisions.1

**What’s So Unique About Bible Teaching?**

Religion teaching in Adventist schools is an important and integral part of the faith-development process. Ellen White suggests that those who attend our colleges and universities should have a training that is different than that given in public education: “Our youth generally, if they have wise, God-fearing parents, have been taught the principles of Christianity. The word of God has been respected in their homes, and its teachings have been made the law of life. They have been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the gospel. When they enter school, this same education and training is to continue. The world’s maxims, the world’s customs and practices, are not the teaching that they need. Let them see that the teachers in the school care for their souls, that they have a decided interest in their spiritual welfare.”

Tragically, only slightly more than one-third of the potential students from Adventist homes take full advantage of this unique ministry. Other youth must wait until the weekend, when their Sabbath school teachers and local pastors provide this value-added education. In Adventist schools of various sizes and types, teachers lead young people in Bible study and religious discussion, seeking together to understand the Bible’s meaning and significance for Christian living. Despite their weaknesses and difficulties, God has used the efforts of devoted teachers to accomplish significant results in the lives of those they teach.

**A Lot of Money “Just for a Bible Class”?**

All too often we hear those words, “Adventist education is so expensive; it’s so much money for only a Bible class.” And, of course, if that were all that students got for their money, this criticism would be justified. But that is not all that our schools provide. If the school has the luxury of having full-time religion teachers, the possibilities are far greater than many expect.

Perhaps one reason why many parents feel dissatisfied with their schools is that the teaching of religion seems too general and vague. If the Bible curriculum has been reduced to a discussion of generalized Christian theological concepts or philosophical principles, then the study too often ends only as a theoretical exercise, without sufficient carry-over into daily life or application to home, school, relationships, recreational choices, and other areas of students’ personal experience. Findley Edge, a religious educator, suggests a way out of this dilemma. “The objectives that Christian teachers seek may be subsumed under three general headings: knowledge, inspiration, and conduct responses.”

Men and women who teach the Scripture have a responsibility to move beyond the content and cognitive insights of textual material or theology, as important as these are. Going beyond conceptual theology and textual exegesis to inspiration (worship, praise, gratitude, forgiveness, and personal freedom) and then helping students make choices that impact their own actions, and respond to God’s leading, helps make the religious educational endeavor more professional and balanced as well as more complete.

There is a natural learning progression in religious instruction. First, the teacher helps the students understand the biblical story or passage. And then, the instructor
moves logically to building Christian attitudes, actually naming the virtue he or she would like students to understand (honesty, purity, love, goodness, kindness, friendship, etc.). Once the values in the text or Bible lesson have been clarified and other stories or passages in the Bible have been explored and compared, the next logical step for the religion teacher is to move to the most difficult goal—response. Helping students to commit to and practice this new attitude is the test of creative teaching.

You see, no religious truth is truly learned unless it makes a difference in one’s life. Teaching commitment to an attitude was the purpose of Jesus’ ministry—not just sharing information about God, or clarification of His requirements, but making a difference in His hearers’ lives. And it must have worked, for in 300 short years, the civilized world of the West was populated with a thriving Christian community and a growing, active church. So answering the questions like, “What difference will this attitude make?” “What problems will class members face if they express this new attitude in some part of their lives?” “What temptations might come if they live this attitude?” or “What might keep us from having this attitude?” are all-important questions to ask on this journey.

So What Else Can Religion Teachers Do?

The spiritual dimension of life is difficult to clarify since religious experience is such a personal commitment, but Bible teaching is a true ministry that moves well beyond mastery of subject matter and adequate communication of God’s plan for students’ lives. A list of the things that are included in ministry for the young might be endless, but let me identify 10 areas that the religion teacher, or at minimum, those responsible for the religious life of a school, might target to increase student commitment to God.

Our Valuegenesis research of Adventist students in denominational schools identified some areas as particularly important and revealed a significant correlation between a mature faith and commitment to the church. It suggests we can do some things to enhance our students’ commit-
ment to God and the church:

1. Encourage their commitment to personal piety through shared devotions, worship, and prayer by the community of students and faculty—in essence, creating “church” for them every day.
2. Schedule weeks of prayer, and encourage student participation in spiritual activities.
3. Create a climate rich in personal testimony and witness by their teachers and friends, helping them to build their own testimony of God’s grace.
4. Ensure that a personal, loving relationship with Jesus is modeled by caring adults.
5. Help them understand God’s guidance, wisdom, and direction for their lives, as well as His discipline, correction, and forgiveness when they make mistakes as they develop strong morals and a desire for personal growth.
6. Give them a working knowledge of God’s principles of living so that they understand the practical issues that govern life and have the wisdom to tackle life’s complex situations and apply their new attitudes about God.
7. Help them learn how God’s strength helps them face difficult times.
8. Give them a sense of purpose and of personal value through knowing that God made them unique, loves them unconditionally, and wants to be involved in their choices every day.
9. Encourage the development of strong character through openness to the power of the Holy Spirit.
10. Promote praise and thankfulness, strong morals, and a desire for commitment to personal growth.

All these can be products of the multi-faceted ministry of the religion teachers in Adventist schools.

The Challenges of Bible Teaching

What makes religion teaching unique is its dual focus—knowledge and spirituality. Religion gives us hints about the organization of the kingdom of God, but spiritual life implies concern for the hearts, minds, and actions of people who commit themselves to God’s purpose and mission. That is why it is important to recognize that not everyone is equipped or even gifted enough to fulfill this calling. Just because someone in your school seems “religious” or “spiritual” or seems to take a particular interest in prayer or service may not make him or her the best person to fill both roles of this crucial position. Schools with small budgets often take the easy way out and ask someone who seems “religious” to teach Bible, but the results often reflect a failure to recognize the skill needed to faithfully and clearly communicate both a knowledge of the Bible and the intent of the message of Jesus.

Like other disciplines, Bible teaching is a profession, in that it has a distinct content for students to master. In the Middle Ages, theology was thought to be the “queen of the sciences,” and many began their academic careers by mastering this area of study before taking law or medicine, or entering politics. The field of religious studies has disciplines—Old and New Testament studies, often called biblical studies; ethics, psychology of religion, comparative religion, sociology of religion, theology—both biblical and systematic—to mention just a few. Careful understanding of the “content” or “knowledge” area of any discipline is crucial for mastery.

Would you let a person trained in communications teach accounting? Or let someone teach English as a second language who speaks only Japanese? Of course not. Likewise, trained professionals, gifted in teaching and skilled in the knowledge of Scripture and theological thinking, are the best choices to teach students about religious topics. When this is coupled with personal piety and understanding of spiritual and faith formation, you have an ideal match that will benefit your young people.

That is why it is crucial that schools hire Bible teachers with appropriate training and that these teachers keep up-to-date by participating in professional organizations and by reading journals in their discipline. Religion teaching is a constantly evolving area of study because as new research on the psychology of learning and faith development become available, they can be applied to the study and practice of religion and adapted to the needs of the students, resulting in better learning and personal commitment. A trained professional will keep abreast of these changes, developing fresh and creative methods of adapting curricula to meet emerging challenges. The professional Bible teacher will look for ways to use exegesis to move students to conversion, commitment, and a growing faith life.

Administrators must recognize that the ministry of Bible teaching requires more than hiring a devout person who shows up at class on time with a comprehensive lesson plan covering the topic of the day. Ideally, the Bible teacher becomes a pastor, friend, mentor, guide, and model of the love that Jesus shared with His disciples as He prepared them for the kingdom.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

How often do you hear a student say, “Bible is my favorite class! It is the most interesting subject I’m taking. It’s the only class I know I will really use in every part of my life”? Or are they more likely to say, “I hate Bible class! It’s boring and has nothing to do with real life.”

How about parents? Recently, a parent admonished me: “The only reason I am sending my child to this school is because of the Bible classes, so make them good.” Another parent’s reaction was different: “I don’t see why my child is failing your class. I really would appreciate you not giving so much homework. Besides, it’s Bible class. You act like it is an important class like math or science.”

These sentiments have been repeated to me many times in many ways throughout the past four-and-a-half years of teaching Bible classes to grades 9-12. They help explain the dilemma of Seventh-day Adventist high schools today. To put it plainly, we don’t know what to do with the subject of religion, usually referred to as Bible class. We know it is important—indeed, probably the most important subject. Without it, our schools would have little reason to exist. However, we also know students will either seem to already know almost everything about what

Getting Back to the Three R’s in High School Bible Class

By Stephen Herr

Students from the author’s junior class discuss theological issues while role-playing members of various religions.

Several of the author’s students visit a nursing home as part of their religion class work.
we teach—or know nothing about the subject whatsoever. In addition, a significant number of students don’t seem to care whether or not they take a Bible class, and we aren’t sure what to do about it.

I want to offer a ray of hope and guidance to those of you who are teaching secondary-level Bible classes. I especially want to help the ones who find themselves assigned at the last minute to teach religion courses. Many of you have no formal training or education in this area beyond the general-religion classes you took in college. For those of you who have been teaching a while, I hope to re-inspire your love for the Bible and for your students.

Finding the ideas, resources, and time to teach Bible classes effectively is not an easy task. In addition to Bible, many of us teach in other disciplines, do administration, or serve as dormitory deans. Even a full-time Bible teacher has numerous other tasks: preparing chapels, vespers, weeks of prayer, Bible retreats, Sabbath schools, mission trips, and anything else relating to religion on campus. Unfortunately, we often fail to balance the time spent on classroom teaching and that devoted to programming and events. The events are public and seem to highlight what we do more than classroom teaching do. So, if we’re not careful, we spend most of our time on that area.

I have struggled with finding that balance during my time at Highland View Academy, a boarding academy in Hagerstown, Maryland. As with most teachers, I have many responsibilities other than classroom teaching. So how do I create an effective learning experience for my students? I have gone back to the three R’s. In teaching Bible, these are responsibility, relevance, and role-play. Understanding and utilizing these can help your classes to become life-changing events.

Responsibility

As teachers, we have a responsibility to know what we are doing. It’s often tempting, when we’re busy with weeks of prayer and mission trips, to get up front in class and try to “wing it.” We think that because we know the Bible stories so well—from growing up with them—that we should be able to teach students how to be better Christians. I’ve noticed that when my students get excited about what is happening in class, it’s after I have studied, planned, and had my own experience with God prior to stepping foot in the classroom. Careful planning includes setting goals and including in class things that will bring about those goals.

Good preparation does not imply slavishly adhering to a lesson plan, even though having one is very important. It includes being open to “teachable moments” when students ask questions about moral issues that are of profound concern to them.

Relevance

Do you see the meaning for your own life in each lesson you teach? If not, you will have a hard time making the class relevant to your students’ lives. Do you understand the needs and interests of your students? By getting to know each of them, you can craft lessons that relate the Bible and class assignments to their lives.

Each year, during the Adventist history unit, I assign my sophomore class a research paper. They are asked to choose a pioneer and tell why he or she had a lasting effect on the Adventist Church. Several of my students are now defenders of people such as Joseph Bates because they can see how their work has actually affected the church and society today. If I mention Joseph Bates in class, those students cheer. If someone makes a negative remark about Bates, they get very defensive. For them, the early history of the church is a living document, not just a list of facts and dates.

Another activity I use in class to make the Bible relevant to students is schedule issue days. Each student writes down questions, problems, or a topic that is on his or her mind
relating to the Bible, God, religion, Christianity, or Adventism and each slip of paper is put in a box, and we choose several to discuss, while offering biblical guidelines and applications to that situation. It’s helpful to pull out the topic a day or week in advance to give yourself and the students time to prepare for the discussion.

When you schedule a time for sharing and testimonies, don’t be afraid to share your own experiences. Students watch their teachers, principals, deans, and every other staff member to see if these adults really live what they claim to believe. To help students feel more comfortable, schedule a sharing day or set aside a segment of each class. Start off with your own testimony. If we as teachers are afraid to share your own experiences, sharing and testimonies, don’t be slip of paper is put in a box, and we choose several to discuss, while offering biblical guidelines and applications to that situation. It’s helpful to pull out the topic a day or week in advance to give yourself and the students time to prepare for the discussion.

Role-playing is more than just visiting places of worship. Get students out in the streets of your neighborhood or town sharing the news about Jesus. Have them knock on doors all over town and ask to pray with those they meet. Once a month, I take a group of students to a local nursing home. We sing and talk to the residents. It doesn’t require a lot of preparation. But the impact on students and residents is immeasurable. Jesus understood that real learning happens when people teach, so give students plenty of solid contact with hungry souls all over town.

I use another role-playing strategy when I teach the doctrine of salvation to the junior class. I could just explain all the terms, texts, and ideas, and move on. But then I remember that I learned twice as much in my first four years of teaching than I did in my four years in college. So I have created a Bible study for each student to give to another person. If you prefer, you can spend some class time on how to prepare a Bible study. The past couple of years, I have assigned my students to give the study to their parents or to a school staff member. This requires them to do more in-depth preparation, and communicates to the parents and/or deans what the students are studying in class. It also gives the nervous first-time Bible study giver an adult listener who doesn’t criticize, as another teenager might. By doing this activity, you can achieve multiple goals: Help students understand the various doctrines and teach them to give a Bible study. Whenever a student takes ownership of information and tries to convince someone else of the merit and value of that information, he or she will understand it better as well.

The three R’s—responsibility, relevance, and role-play—not are the only important concepts in religious instruction, but they have given my teaching new focus and direction. ◆

**Resources I have found helpful:**

**Books**
- *Help! I’m a Small Group Leader* by Laurie Polich
- *Mission to OZ: Reaching Postmoderns Without Losing Your Way* by Mark Tabb
- *God Cares* (Daniel and Revelation) by Mervyn Maxwell
- *Secrets of Revelation* by Jacques Doukhan
- *Studying Together* by Mark Finley
- *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris
- *Guys and Girls Curriculum* from Youth Specialties

**CD-ROMs**
- *The Ideas Library* CD-ROM v.3.0 by Youth Specialties

**DVDs**
- *Matthew* by The Visual Bible
- *Acts* by The Visual Bible

**Websites**
- Youthspecialties.com
- Circle.adventist.org
- Religioustolerance.org
- Lordsday.org

**Journals**
- Youthworker Journal
- Christianity Today
- Signs of the Times

*Stephen Herr has been the Bible Teacher and Campus Ministries Director at Highland View Academy, in Hagerstown, Maryland, since 2001. He is currently working on an M.A. in Religious Education from Andrews University, with emphasis on Campus Spiritual Leadership.*
“I’ve pastored before, but never taught Bible. I don’t even know where to begin!”

“I’m already so overwhelmed—and the school wants me to add another class!”

“I hardly ever see my family. It seems like I’m always at school!”

These are samples of comments that I have heard from Bible teachers in my eight years as an elementary and secondary teacher. These statements capture some of the frustrations that many of us feel when trying to be an effective teacher and still live a semi-balanced life.

In February 2003, I conducted a North American Division-wide survey of academy Bible teachers. At the time, I was teaching Bible at a boarding academy in the Midwest. The Mid-American Union Conference supplied me with the names of all the current Bible teachers from each union directory and the funds to cover supplies and postage.

Of 178 surveys mailed, 106 were returned—a very respectable 60 percent response. The survey contained 16 multiple-choice questions (respondents were asked to mark strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree), and six open-ended questions. The surveys were sent to the approximately 100 academies and junior academies in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda.

The survey dealt with two specific areas—Bible teachers themselves and curriculum/content issues. The responses to the surveys provide some insight into what is happening with Bible teachers and their classrooms. A number of fundamental issues have been raised by this survey, which will be discussed in this article. But first, let’s find out more about the Bible teachers who responded.

Demographics of Bible Teachers Who Responded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76%</td>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Bible teaching endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Ordained ministers (seven were pastors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Not certified, or ordained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Average years they had taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Had taught for five years or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Had taught for more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Served as school chaplain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Taught only one or two Bible classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>Taught only Bible classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Male (all recipients)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On paper, at least, Bible teachers in North America are quite well qualified. Sixty-nine percent said they were certified to teach Bible. The other 31 percent had various levels of qualification. Twelve percent were certified teachers but did not have a Bible endorsement. Nineteen percent were teaching without any teaching certification; however, almost a third of those were ordained pastors.

Years of experience was also significant. Although the average Bible teacher had taught for 8.1 years, most were quite new to teaching Bible. Most of those responding (53 percent) had taught Bible for five years or less. Only 28 percent had taught the subject for more than 10 years.

Teaching Load

It should come as no surprise that 34 percent of the
Bible teachers also served as school chaplain. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of the respondents taught only one or two Bible classes, and only about half (54 percent) said Bible was the only subject they taught. Most were either part-time teachers or taught Bible in addition to their “primary” job—whether that was teaching one or more other subjects, or serving as a dean, vice principal, or guidance counselor. The Bible teachers also said they spent countless additional hours sponsoring classes or organizations, or doing coaching or supervision. Some mentioned as many as six such responsibilities in addition to their teaching load.

**Level of Stress and Effect on Family**

Having worked at a boarding academy for six years and now at a day school, I know that teaching can be quite stressful. The majority of Bible teachers agreed. Almost 60 percent said they often felt overwhelmed and stressed. That could account for the large number of new Bible teachers. Their families fared only a little better. Nearly half (44 percent) of the Bible teachers said that their families suffered because of their job. While this is less than half of the respondents, it is still a matter of concern since it represents a large number of spouses and children who are not getting the attention they need.

**Expressed Needs of Bible Teachers**

What did Bible teachers say would help them be more successful? The most common request was practical ideas—especially from other Bible teachers. Time was the second most mentioned challenge. They felt they had just too much to do and not enough time to do it. Multimedia and video resources were the third most mentioned need. Fourth was their desire for a deeper spiritual/prayer life. Often, Bible teachers and pastors are expected to have everything together spiritually. They, like all people, need a support system to stay strong.

The teachers also expressed a desire for more support from the conference, the administration, and other teachers. Some teachers said they needed more training or experience to do their job well. Other miscellaneous needs were smaller class size, more money for equipment and resources, and more outside class activities and field trips.

**Curriculum/Content Issues**

Another area explored by the survey was textbooks and curriculum. What materials are Bible teachers using in their classrooms? Are they using the new Bible textbooks? Eighty-
two percent said that they were consistently using the Crossroads Bible textbooks. Only 12.5 percent indicated that they did not use the series regularly.

Another question inquired about how heavily teachers supplemented the textbooks. Three-fourths indicated that they supplemented heavily (50 percent strongly agreed). Since the majority of these teachers still used the textbooks regularly, it appears that they are personalizing their teaching to make it as practical as possible.

The survey also asked the Bible teachers’ opinion of the new Crossroads Series curriculum. Sixty-three percent of the teachers said they were satisfied with the Bible textbooks (22 percent strongly agreed; 41 percent agreed). Even though there were some complaints, overall, most Bible teachers appeared very satisfied and...

---

**My Family Often Suffers Due to My Job**

- Strongly Disagree (12.4%)
- Disagree (14.3%)
- Neutral (29.5%)
- Agree (25.7%)
- Strongly Agree (18.1%)

---

**Teaching Methods**

- Acting/skits
- Cooperative learning
- Debates (Creation vs. evolution)
- Discussions
- Group projects
- Illustrations
- Imagery
- Mock trial
- Music in the classroom
- Object lessons and stories
- Oral presentations (PowerPoint)
- Personal testimonies
- Posting assignments (on the Web)
- Reports
- Role-play
- Scrapbooks
- Sharing assignments
- Simulations
- Small groups
- Students teach class
- Writing KWLs (What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned)

**Hands-On Projects**

- Career shadowing
- Clay statues/figures
- Conduct evangelistic series (with New Beginnings DVDs)
- Dramatize Bible
- Drawing
- Experiential/interactive learning
- Fashion show for Daniel 2 statue
- Feeding the homeless
- Quilts for AIDS babies
- Mechanical baby
- Models of sanctuary or New Jerusalem
- Murals of chapters in Revelation
- Paint themes on classroom walls
- Plan wedding and reception
- Posters
- Treasure hunt
- Video and art projects
- Video interviews
- Walk through Old Testament in life-size map

**Practical Ideas**

- Bible marking (chain referencing)
- Bios on people
- Career report
- Catholic and Mormon guest presenters
- Character toolbox
- Creative dates
- Devotional/prayer journals
- How to give Bible studies
- Journals/gratitude journals
- Mark promises in Bible
- Take a break from the media
- Peer counseling/mentoring
- Personal devotional program
- Philosophy of life paper
- Plan vespers
- Prayer families (in school)
- Prayer for an individual student
- Reaction/position papers
- Spending time alone with God
- Student week of prayer
- Students design spiritual theme bulletin board
- Students giving worship
- Visit a temple or synagogue
- Writing creeds
- 30-day fast from secular music
grateful to have the new Bible textbooks.

Other Curriculum Materials

The teachers used a wide variety of materials in addition to the textbooks. Not surprisingly, the Bible was used heavily—including topical Bible studies and specific books of the Bible. Ellen White’s books were also used—especially the Messiah (The Desire of Ages), Steps to Christ, and the Conflict of the Ages series. This is good news, since few teenagers have ever read any significant amount of Ellen White’s writings.

Other resources were mentioned as well:
- Videos/DVDs (Net ‘99, the ACTS set, and Focus on the Family).
- Books such as God Cares 1 & 2, 27 Fundamental Beliefs, Philip Yancey books, commentaries, and even college material from their own teachers.
- Materials from Youth Specialties and Amazing Facts.

Practical Ideas

There were as many different ideas as people surveyed—and then some. In the sidebars on pages 42 and 43 are a sample of the ideas that Bible teachers said they were using in their classrooms across North America.

Obviously, a lot of wonderful things are happening in Bible classes across North America, but the survey
also revealed some problematic issues. Let’s look at some of them.

Addressing Fundamental Issues

The majority of Bible teachers don’t remain in the profession very long. Why is that? Is teaching Bible their main focus, or is it something added to their “regular duties”? It appears that many people teaching Bible either have too many other things to do, or the assignment is not their passion or priority.

Hiring practices may also be a factor, as it appears that many schools are not employing full-time Bible teachers. This situation of having few full-time Bible teachers is more serious than it might appear. Like people in other disciplines, Bible teachers need mentors and networks to help one another—especially those who are just starting out. For example, for three years while I was teaching in the Mid-America Union, I was the only Bible teacher in the entire union who was qualified or willing to work with a student teacher. No one else taught enough Bible classes, was certified and endorsed in Bible, or had had enough experience. It gave me a great opportunity to work with student teachers, but also raised concerns about who is teaching Bible to our young people.

How well are they trained to teach Bible? Some academies don’t have the money to hire a full-time Bible teacher, so they assign the classes to anyone with a free period—whether or not the person has any training or aptitude for it. I’d like to challenge schools to be very careful in selecting Bible teachers—choose someone with a passion for the subject who will make the maximum positive impact on your students. Just because someone has completed a minor in Bible and taken a methods class does not make him or her an effective Bible teacher!

Why all the fuss about who teaches Bible? I agree with an experienced teacher who once told me that Bible class is different than any other class. The spiritual battle for students’ souls is fought more in Bible class than in any other class. In Bible class, we aren’t talking about numbers, writing essays, how to hit a ball, or even how to (or not to) blow something up in the lab, as important as these things may be. We are talking about students’ lives and eternal destiny—the issues that they struggle with, how they feel about God, the church, their parents, and what values they embrace. The Great Controversy is always going on in the minds of students—whether or not this is evident. If you’re sending a teacher to such a battlefield, you’d better send the best you’ve got, or can get!

Is the stress too great? Are they getting burned out? Teaching, especially in a boarding school, takes a 110 percent commitment of time and energy. Small schools in particular tend to pile an unreasonable number of responsibilities on teachers and then wonder why they get burned out and school morale takes a nosedive. Overloading teachers with too much work is potentially self-destructive for both the school and the teacher.

Do they have anywhere to turn when they need help? Teachers of history, math, science, English, and music can join national organizations that hold yearly conventions and make lots of resources available on the Web and in catalogues, etc. There are very few resources that apply specifically to Seventh-day Adventist religion teachers,
with our unique beliefs and needs. Even if we can get some things, they often cost a lot of money. In some schools, teachers are given a budget of $200 per year to teach four-plus classes—and discouraged from even spending that.

Some efforts have been made to provide resources. The CIRCLE Website (http://circle.adventist.org) offers valuable links to helpful materials, books, and videos. However, a lot of the materials must be purchased, so this will be a limiting factor for many. The Adventist Education Forum (http://edforum.adventist.org) is also a valuable resource where participants can ask questions and read discussions other people are having. Music and physical education have their own sections, but all the other disciplines are lumped together. It would be nice if religion had its own area, as well.

Another place to go for help is other teachers in your discipline. Conventions of various sizes are a great place to meet other Bible teachers and share ideas. I was very disappointed, though, at the 2000 NAD teacher convention in Dallas because no time was set aside for Bible teachers to discuss ideas and issues. Those who could, met during lunch and decided that a Website would be a great idea to share resources. Unfortunately, it hasn’t happened—because no one really has enough “extra” time to invest into it while teaching full-time.

In my survey, I asked about a Website to share ideas. Eighty-eight percent of the Bible teachers said they desired a Website, and more than 50 percent said they would submit ideas. What really needs to happen is for the North American Division Office of Education, an Adventist college, or some other third party to host and maintain a Website for Bible teachers—or for a group of teachers to do this. A committee could be designated to screen materials for suitability, academic quality, and theological soundness before they are posted on the site. There also needs to be an incentive to post ideas—maybe even an academic or monetary reward. This would be cheaper and much more effective than hiring outside people to create materials that may not prove useful. I imagine that most academies would be willing to pay a small yearly fee to access such a Website.

Conclusion

The survey results were interesting and informative. If the issues are indeed as I have portrayed them, then I hope that improvements will be made. All of us as the Body of Christ must work together to accomplish the specific tasks God has given us. We cannot function without God’s power in our lives or without one another. Let us all seek to walk more closely with Christ and work together to more effectively share His love with our students!

Keith Kerbs has taught secondary-level Bible for seven years and is currently teaching at Columbia Adventist Academy in Battle Ground, Washington. He is pursuing an M.A. degree in Religious Education at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.
While “Thy word have I hid in my heart” (Psalm 119:11, KJV) is an oft-quoted Bible verse, in today’s post-modern society, it seems that weekly Sabbath school Bible gems and memory verse songs have all too often been replaced by movie quotes and popular song lyrics.

Madeline Johnston, a retired seminary secretary at Andrews University (AU) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, noticed the disturbing lack of memorization and wanted to do something about it. “I believe memorization is important,” she explains. “Both Ellen White and science have shown us the benefits of memorization for the mind. Memory stretches and grows if it is used, but atrophies if not. Also, Bible verses that we memorize stay with us and impact our lives.” Her passion for increased knowledge of God’s Word has resulted in the Robert M. and Madeline Steele Johnston Endowed Bible Knowledge Award.

Johnston received her inspiration for the award from attending Culter Academy, an evangelical school in Los Angeles. There, students who memorized and recited 500 verses received a special gold pin at graduation, which was exchanged for another pin if they did a second 500.

Johnston thought Andrews University would benefit from a similar award open to the entire university family. She shared her idea with friends and school administrators and received mixed feedback. Some suggested that a Bible knowledge award might be more appropriate than one focused on rote memorization. So Madeline began to look into the possibility of creating an endowment to honor both Bible knowledge and memorization.

Madeline’s husband, Robert, professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at AU, had helped develop the seminary’s Bible Knowledge Entrance Test. During his years as a professor, Johnston had noticed a lack of basic Bible knowledge among his students. Occasionally, he would give bonus questions on exams: extra credit to any student who could write the Ten Commandments or name the books of the Bible in order. He discovered that only about 25 percent of the class could respond correctly.

Johnston discussed his concern with the other seminary faculty members, who agreed that the problem needed to be addressed. As several other seminaries had already done, they voted to require incoming Master of Divinity students to take a Bible Knowledge Entrance Test during orientation. All students would have to pass the test before graduation. Those who failed it the first time would be required to take a remedial course in basic Bible knowledge.

As the chair of the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test Committee, Johnston created and administered the test until his retirement in 2002, when David Merling assumed this role. The test, which has now been given for almost a decade, consists of both multiple-choice questions and memorization. The multiple-choice section includes questions on the Old and New Testaments as well as general Bible knowledge. Students must answer questions on topics such as the major divisions of the English, Septuagint, and Hebrew Bibles; the stories and significance of Bible characters such as David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha; the names of the 12 disciples; and the similarities and differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John. The memorization part requires students to quote all or...
part of the 23rd Psalm, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Three Angels’ Messages; to know where those are found; and to list the books of the Bible in order.

Students are given an opportunity to prepare for the exam. Seminary applicants receive a study guide covering what they are expected to know. The information, along with a sample test, is also on the Internet (http://www.andrews.edu/sem/bket/bket.htm).

When the test was first given, the pass rate was less than 50 percent; however, scores have improved greatly, and the effects are visible in the classroom. ‘Teachers can tell the difference in their classes now,’ states Johnston. ‘They can assume that most students have a basic knowledge in certain areas.’

Working with Andrews’ development office and general counsel, Madeline drafted a proposed endowment to reward both Bible knowledge and memorization. Part A awards $750 cash each fall to the M.Div. student who, taking the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test for the first time, scores the highest. Part B focuses on memorization. Any student, faculty or staff member at schools connected to Andrews University (kindergarten through university level), or spouse thereof, who memorizes 500 Bible verses from a nonparaphrastic translation of their choice and recites them nearly word-perfect, 250 at a time, to a designated person, receives a high-quality leather Bible embossed with his or her name, a certificate, and a special bookmark/ruler to note the event.

The seminary dean’s office sent a letter to Johnston’s colleagues and former students, giving them an opportunity to contribute financially. The endowment was announced at Johnston’s official retirement reception in September of 2002. Bob Kingman, then chair of the AU Physics Department, announced that the governing committee of Physics Enterprises, a department-operated business that manufactures and sells physics teaching tools, had voted to give the Johnston Endowment a matching grant of up to $10,000. This launched the endowment with seed money of $20,000. Other parts may be added to the endowment, if funds become available.

The first Bible knowledge award was presented in the fall of 2003 to William Kasper, who scored 100 percent on the Bible Knowledge Entrance Test. In the spring of 2004, two participants claimed the memorization award: Susan Joshua, wife of seminary student Calvin Joshua; and Marvin Budd, then a contract teacher at AU, now its database administrator.

The inclusion of InMinistry extension students began to be included in the testing in 2004, with $50 of the award going to the off-campus student with the highest score. That fall, three M.Div. students tied with a score of 98 percent on the entrance test.

The Johnstons hope that this award will inspire students and faculty alike to follow the lead of the Psalmist by hiding God’s Word in their hearts.

Bev Stout is Media Relations Coordinator at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
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Unique Resource for Teachers

As an ancient history professor in Israel, I am impressed! The Family Bible Story series is meticulously researched and historically accurate, weaving fascinating details into the stories and artwork. Creative layout. Historical sidebars. Short stories for small children. First-rate drawings. Illustrated glossary. These children’s books will delight the young and educate the old! I highly recommend them.

—Todd Bolen, Associate Professor
The Master’s College, Israel Bible Extension
Judean Hills, Israel

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