

# FROM CREEDS TO DEEDS: Teacher Integration of Faith and Learning in the Classroom

By Raquel I. Korniejczuk and Paul S. Brantley

*Are teachers in Seventh-day Adventist schools concerned about integrating spiritual principles into everyday classroom life?*

**J**ill Russell—*chic, 30-something, physician's wife—teaches in the elementary section of an Adventist day academy in California. Although Jill is a deeply caring and highly regarded professional, she feels little obligation to teach spiritual themes in a formal way. "Rather than moralize," she says, "I just 'live the life,' showing love and genuine concern for each child's needs."*

• *David Smith uses The Earth: Origins and Early History in his 10th-grade biology class. He likes the biblical perspective provided by this supplement, but on a day-to-day basis, David rather slavishly follows commercially prepared textbooks. He would appreciate ideas for integrating the Bible into his science teaching. "I'm just not that creative," he laments, "especially when my planning time is so limited."*

• *Several years ago, Shirley Rosenthal became dissatisfied with giving only perfunctory treatment to the Bible in her freshman composition courses at an Adventist college. Now she assigns themes on topics of spiritual interest, which provide excellent fodder for class discussion. The class is designing an outreach publication for community distribution, and two of her students have requested baptism.*

Are these mythical examples really typical? Are teachers in Seventh-day Adventist schools and colleges concerned about integrating spiritual principles into everyday classroom life?

The Valuegenesis survey indicates that Adventist teachers are very committed spiritually—in fact, almost as much so as church pastors.<sup>1</sup> A study of the reading habits of Adventist teachers identified “the integration of faith and learning” as one of the topics of greatest interest.<sup>2</sup> In the North American Division *Profile* report, a sample poll of K-12 educators taken every other year, classroom teachers consistently cite “spirituality in the classroom and school” as one of their top concerns, with percentages often exceeding those of their supervisors at the conference and union levels.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, the research also suggests that different categories of teachers vary in their concern about the integration of faith and spirituality into classroom instruction. According to the responses to *Profile* '93 questionnaires, new teachers were more likely than veteran teachers to embrace the idea of a written philosophy to guide curriculum in Seventh-day Adventist schools.<sup>4</sup>

To what extent do teachers vary in

their degree of support for deliberately integrating faith throughout their curricula? This article will suggest a method for categorizing the levels and stages of integration in Adventist schools and classrooms. Educators can use this framework to diagnose and improve the spiritual tone of their classroom instruction. But first we must define terms

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and debunk misconceptions about integrating faith and learning.

### Definitions and Misconceptions of IFL

The phrase “integration of faith and learning” (IFL) appears frequently in philosophical discourse.

However, its meaning is not always clear when it is unpacked for classroom use. References to IFL in school catalogues and policy statements tend to be general and global. Workshops and teachers’ conventions often do a better job of inspiring commitment to IFL than in defining the concept in instructional terms.

Humberto Rasi, world director of education for the Adventist Church, defines integration of faith and learning<sup>5</sup> as *a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise from a biblical perspective. Its aim is to ensure that students under the influence of Christian teachers and by the time they leave school will have internalized biblical values and a view of knowledge, life and destiny that is Christ-centered, service oriented and kingdom-directed.*

There are many misconceptions about IFL. Some, like Jill Russell (above), feel that “living the life” is sufficient. Living the life is necessary, but by itself is insufficient—just as modeling good English is necessary but insufficient in the teaching of English. Because Adventist schools operate from a Christ-centered worldview, Christian principles must find *deliberate* expression throughout each teacher’s instruction.

Some teachers mistakenly think of IFL as weaving clever homilies into a basically secular curriculum. Their consciences are satisfied by a worship thought or brief prayer “to get the religious part over with” so they can get on with the topic for the day. Others feel that a cursory reference to religious topics or a routine use of denominational textbooks will suffice. Students, how-

ever, have the uncanny ability to sense when IFL is authentic and when it is merely tacked on.

The authors believe that a majority of teachers in SDA schools and colleges resemble David Smith, the science teacher

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described above. They feel a genuine spiritual commitment. However, they are often thwarted by lack of time, inadequate resources, and insufficient organization support.

Diagnosing the extent to which teachers vary in their concepts of IFL can help them to reflect upon their levels of IFL as a basis for more effective integration. Moreover, the assessment allows leaders at the system level to more precisely identify teachers’ concerns and to assist them in their work.

### Levels of Implementation

Outlined below is an organized framework for describing levels of faith and learning integration in the classroom. It is an adaptation of two widely used models: the Concerns-Based

Adoption Model,<sup>6</sup> by Gene Hall, Shirley Hord, and their associates; and the stages of IFL described by Arthur Holmes<sup>7</sup> and articulated by George Akers.<sup>8</sup>

*Level 0: Non-use.* “Integration of faith and learning does not relate to my discipline. I have no interest in getting involved.” This level includes teachers who are unaware of and unconcerned about the underlying worldviews of the subjects they teach. Teachers at this level typically resist incorporating faith into their classroom practice. Fortunately, the proportion of these teachers in SDA schools is not large.

*Level 1: Orientation.* “I don’t know much about integrating faith into learning, but I’d like to know more.” These teachers may be aware of the claims of a Seventh-day Adventist worldview upon their teaching, but feel unsure about how to implement it throughout their instruction. They tend to depend upon curriculum materials or the textbook to guide what and how they teach. If these materials are not Christ-centered, the spiritual element gets short shrift.

*Level 2: Preparation.* “I’m making concrete plans to integrate (to a significantly greater extent) my faith into classroom instruction.” These teachers have implemented IFL at an unconscious or unplanned level, but would like to systematically restructure their teaching to give greater emphasis to spiritual concerns. They are taking the necessary steps to integrate faith and learning in their classrooms.

*Level 3: Irregular Use.* “My efforts to implement IFL are not proceeding very smoothly due to lack of time, management, or resources.” Teachers at this level are conscious of their Christian worldview. However, logistics or lack of skill make implementation difficult for them. Therefore, their integration of faith and learning is fragmented.

## Table 1: Levels of Deliberate Teachers Integration of Faith and Learning

Level of Use of IFL	Characteristics	Correlation With Holmes/Akers Model
<b>Level 0: Non-Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher has little or no knowledge of IFL.</li> <li>• Teacher is doing nothing toward becoming involved in IFL.</li> <li>• Teacher has no intention to become involved in IFL.</li> <li>• Teacher thinks that the subject he or she teaches is not related to faith (religion).</li> </ul>	
<b>Level 1: Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher is aware that he or she should incorporate faith into learning.</li> <li>• Teacher would like to learn more about IFL.</li> <li>• Teacher is planning to implement in the future, but has not begun yet.</li> </ul>	
<b>Level 2: Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher has deliberate plans to begin IFL.</li> <li>• Teacher plans to begin IFL at a definite time.</li> <li>• Teacher is taking steps to get ready.</li> </ul>	Disjunction
<b>Level 3: Irregular Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher attempts IFL, but has problems with management, time, resources, etc.</li> <li>• Teacher is more concerned about logistics than effect on students.</li> <li>• Use is incidental rather than carefully planned.</li> <li>• Use is superficial and occasional without a thematic or programmatic emphasis.</li> </ul>	Injunction
<b>Level 4: Routine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Syllabus and objectives show IFL in some themes.</li> <li>• Teacher recognizes that some things can be improved but has no concrete plans to do so.</li> <li>• No coherence in the Christian worldview.</li> <li>• Use of prayer, little homilies, IFL based more on teacher's talking than student response.</li> </ul>	Conjunction
<b>Level 5: Refinement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher varies the implementation of IFL to increase impact on students.</li> <li>• Teacher can describe changes he or she has made in the past few months, and plans for the near future.</li> </ul>	
<b>Level 6: Dynamic Integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher initiates discussion with colleagues regarding ways to improve IFL.</li> <li>• Regular IFL collaboration occurs with other teachers (support group).</li> <li>• The school examines student responses to assess teachers' effectiveness in IFL.</li> </ul>	Integration or fusion

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*Level 4: Routine.* "I'm using IFL routinely in my classes through my syllabus, course objectives, and worships. I feel comfortable with my present methods and plan to continue them." Teachers at this level see IFL as something teachers do (activities or coverage of content) with little regard for its impact upon students.

*Level 5: Refinement.* "I'm trying to improve my efforts at IFL so that my students may benefit more." At this stage, teachers shift the focus of integration from themselves to their students. They believe that although the teacher facilitates IFL, the process really occurs in the minds and hearts of students. Therefore, they vary their strategies according to student reaction and needs.

*Level 6: Dynamic Integration.* "My students and I are experiencing real growth in our Christian lives and in the way we approach our studies. We are working collegially as catalysts for IFL throughout the school, the home, the church, and the community." At this level, teachers are not only concerned about IFL in the curriculum and about its effect upon students, but are also vitally interested in the culture of the en-

tire school. They work as consultants and coaches, helping other teachers implement IFL through subject integration as well as outreach and service.

Table 1 summarizes our adaptation of the Concern-Based Adoption Model and the Holmes-Akers correlation. In the disjunction stage (levels one and two) faith and learning are disconnected and separate. As the teacher becomes more aware of the importance of basing instruction on Christian principles, he or she attempts (at level three) to inte-

grate faith and learning, but these attempts are likely to be fragmented and expressed in superficial homilies (injunction stage). When IFL becomes more routine (level four), greater overlap occurs between faith and learning (conjunction); but not until levels five and six (fusion) does integration focus on the impact upon students, colleagues, and community. At this point, learning becomes yet another avenue to express one's deep, abiding faith in God.

### **Strategies for Increasing Levels of Faith and Learning Integration**

It is tempting to direct these recommendations only to teachers. However, teachers often are guided by administrative priorities at the local, union, and division levels. For genuine, pervasive change to occur, it must begin within the administrative structure as well as within the classroom. For this reason, we offer two sets of recommendations—one for each level. These strategies can be implemented simultaneously.

### **Suggestions for Schools and Classrooms**

1. Nothing promotes initial awareness like a good workshop or retreat. The teachers, principal, and school board should carefully examine the underlying reason for operating the school. A guest speaker can serve as a catalyst to provoke discussion and promote introspection.

A retreat removes school people from the busy, intrusive workaday world and brings the importance of their worldviews into sharper focus. It allows teachers to recommit themselves to the task of building Christian faith within their classrooms.

The school principal is key to planning an IFL retreat. He or she must feel keenly enough about this issue to make

it a priority.

2. After teachers become aware of the importance of integrating faith in their classrooms, they face the daunting task of *preparation*. At this point teachers need plenty of time and *resources* to alter their behaviors.

The principal is also essential at this stage. He or she must provide sufficient support and incentives for teachers as they undergo the translation process. The opportunity to prepare curriculum materials and share teaching ideas is important.

3. Finally, when teachers begin *implementation* of IFL strategies in the classroom, the school should *regularly plan IFL study sessions* so that teachers can freely discuss their problems and celebrate their successes. A portion of the weekly faculty meeting could be devoted to that purpose. Cooperative coaching can equip teachers with the skills and competencies to implement IFL successfully.

Again, the principal's role is important in creating a climate for teachers to try IFL and to analyze the effects upon the lives of their students.

### **Suggestions for the Wider System**

1. Church educational planners at the conference, union, and division levels should spell out a concise *philosophy, set of goals, and essential learnings* for each grade/area of study. This would provide guidance in preparing textbooks and curriculum materials for each division. The education department of the South Pacific Division recently prepared these kinds of guidelines for its elementary and secondary schools.

2. Regional or national *teachers' conventions*, planned by the union or division, can help build awareness. Speakers may be featured at this level who

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***Church educational planners at the conference, union, and division levels should spell out a concise philosophy, set of goals, and essential learnings for each grade/area of study.***

would be unavailable to local schools. The higher education conventions for college faculty, held decades ago, provided a unique opportunity for faculty to come together, get to know one an-

other, and focus on IFL within their disciplines. The workshops conducted by the General Conference's Institute for Christian Teaching provide a good starting point.

3. Denominationally prepared *curriculum* materials can be immeasurably helpful as teachers translate their faith into action, particularly if these materials are appropriate for classroom use. Building IFL into textbooks and textbook supplements can help ensure coverage within every subject area.

4. *Teacher preparation* programs at Adventist colleges and universities should ensure that their students can articulate a carefully reasoned philosophy of faith development. The curriculum should expose students to the integration of faith and learning through practical classroom experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Although teachers, administrators, parents, and the church all share responsibility for integrating faith, the "litmus test" for IFL is in the hearts and minds of students. Findings from the Valuegenesis survey confirm that faith maturity is highest where home, school, and church work together to establish a climate of warmth and acceptance. All three must cooperate to help students develop independent thought, identify and criticize secular positions, and learn to think Christianly. We must prepare our youth for the challenges ahead.

The description of integration of faith and learning in this article may help teachers identify where they are in the growing process and aid them in finding ways to improve their own integration techniques. The framework also can help educational leaders devise effective ways to work with teachers at each stage of IFL development.

# Some Basic Christian Assumptions for Academic Subjects

## Visual Arts

- Art is from God. It has been given to human beings to help them discover their identity, worth, and creative potential. Artistic sensitivity is heightened as we love God and acknowledge Him.
- The environment reflects some of the beauty of its original creation and the ugliness caused by sin.
- Art is influenced by moral and religious principles, and relates our perceptions of the environment to these principles.

## Bible

- The Bible provides coherence for all school subjects.
- Bible study not only addresses Adventist doctrinal beliefs, but also relates to life-style issues and ethical decision-making.
- The central focus of Bible teaching is the development of relationships. The most important is with God.
- The test of effectiveness of Bible teaching is in the life-style one adopts. Bible teaching encourages a sound application of scriptural principles in one's relationships and life.

## Commercial Studies

- God is the Creator and Owner of all matter.
- How Christians view God and His relationship to humans carries implications for the way Christians believe the commercial world should operate.
- An important principle of Scripture is justice, which is expressed partly through good stewardship of resources, the value of individuals, and integrity.

## English

- The ability to use language is God-given.
- Growth in language is integral to personal development and to realizing our God-given individuality and humanity.
- Language enables us to know God and to communicate our understanding of Him; to explore and expand our private and public worlds; to organize our experience; and to form, recognize, and reveal our values.

## Geography

- Study of the natural environment assumes the existence of a God who has created all existing matter. Through studying His creation, students are taught to appreciate not only its aesthetic beauty, but also the need to live in harmony

with the laws He has established.

- Study of the environment should lead to a heightened awareness of one's responsibilities in caring for God's creation. The environment has been partially destroyed because of the alienation of humanity and nature since sin entered the earth.
- Geographical study should emphasize the concepts of restoration and stewardship.

## Mathematics

- Everywhere in nature are evidences of mathematic relationships. These are shown in ideas of number, form, design, and symmetry, and in the laws governing the existence and harmonious working of all things. The study of these laws, ideas, and processes, mathematics reveals some of God's creative attributes.
- Learning mathematical processes, axioms, and laws can help students to more clearly identify God's design and handiwork in nature. These show Him to be a God of system, order, and accuracy who can be depended upon. His logic is certain. By thinking in mathematical terms, we are actually thinking God's thoughts after Him.

## Music

- God intends music as one means of fostering spiritual development. Musical appreciation and expression help celebrate our worship and faith.
- Music helps us develop abilities such as creativity, communication, and emotional expression. Music education forms an indispensable part of our aesthetic development.
- Music is a gift from God, designed to give us balance, to uplift us, and to lead us to Him.

## Physical Education

- Humanity was originally created in God's image, but this image has been marred by sin. Physical education focuses on the restoration of God's image in humankind through emphasizing health-related concepts.
- Our bodies are temples of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. As we build health and its positive attitudes, this influences both our stamina and worldview, and God's image becomes strengthened in us.
- Through a healthy life-style and a knowledge of health and fitness, we can become positive models, glorifying God and making Him more real to others.

## Science

- Science is the continuing search for understanding about ourselves and our changing physical and biological environment. Therefore, rightly interpreted and understood, it must be consistent with ultimate truth, which is embodied in God and

glimpsed by human beings.

- Science allows us to explore and try to comprehend the order and perfection of God's original creation.
- Science allows us to use logical thought and creativity in investigating God's creation and the laws by which it is governed and maintained

## Social Studies

- God is the central reality that gives meaning to all knowledge.
- There is a conflict between the forces of good and evil in the world. This conflict is reflected in changes in the natural and social environment. ☞

These Christian assumptions were taken from Frank Gaebelain (1968) and the South Pacific Division Curriculum Frameworks (1991).

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