

What do teachers in Adventist high schools in the Philippines have in common with ones in Brazil, Kenya, or Nebraska? Do they share common goals and faith? If so, to what extent do Adventist teachers—diverse in culture and subject area—support the idea of integrating this perspective into their teaching?

To answer these questions, we* mailed surveys to nearly 750 Adventist high school teachers around the world to determine their ideas about “faith” and its significance to their teaching. These teachers came from more than 50 countries and taught math, science, history, language, and Bible. Our survey questionnaire was offered in four languages—English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. To our delight, more than 450 of the teachers answered our survey—an excellent response, given the unreliable postal service in many parts of the world. The hearty response underscores respondents’ interest in this topic.

The phrase *integration of faith and learning* is well-known to Seventh-day Adventists. The General Conference Department of Education has conducted faith and learning workshops for college faculty around the world through its Institute for Christian Teaching. In a study of reading habits of Adventist educators in North America, one researcher found that “integration of faith and learning” was one of their favorite topics. Adventist teachers at all levels are admonished to teach Christianly using a faith perspective in every area of the curriculum—and for good reason!

Faith provides a unifying purpose for Adventist schools. Without it, teaching lacks a defining purpose, and education becomes Christian in name only. Without a distinctive faith, the rubric “no significant difference” applies to everything that happens in such a school. Indeed, Adventist education then becomes a mockery. But how is this faith perceived and received around the world?

In 1993, Racquel Korniejczuk conducted case studies of Adventist teachers in six high schools in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Based on a series of interviews, questionnaires, and document analyses, she discovered that more than half of the teachers felt that they understood what integration should be. A lesser proportion felt clear about how to implement it in their classrooms. As a result, teachers’ implementation levels varied from slight awareness to dynamic implementation. Although most teachers held a positive view of faith integration, few appeared to function at the higher levels of implementation. The type of subject did not seem related to the implementation of faith and learning in the curriculum. Korniejczuk also found¹ that teachers were curious about their colleagues’ attempts to integrate faith and learning.

A number of questions emerged from that study. Do Adventist teachers elsewhere have similar experiences as those in South America? Does subject area really have little relationship to implementation? Do math teachers, for example, think it possible to integrate faith with their subject? What kind of background have Adventist teachers received in faith integration? What kind of training do they need?

A Profile of the Respondents

To answer some of these questions, every Seventh-day Adventist high school listed in the church’s *Yearbook* was asked to respond to our survey. Two teachers from each school were randomly selected by subject area to participate. Of the more than 450 respondents, 99 percent were church members, three-quarters responded in English, and two-thirds were male. Slightly more than half were less than 40 years of age. Three-quarters of the respondents were equally divided among the areas of science, history, and language or literature. The remaining quarter taught Bible and math. More than half of the teachers had attended Adventist high schools and colleges, and 40 percent had taken some graduate work. Few teachers were re-

Sharing a Common Faith: A Global Study of God-Centered Teaching in Adventist High Schools

BY PAUL S. BRANTLEY

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Senior Matt Colburn participates in a Red Cross blood drive at Milo Academy in Days Creek, Oregon, U.S.A.

cent converts (3 percent) of five years or less. Their median number of years' experience in education was 10. Half of all the teachers had spent five years or less at their present school, indicating a rather substantial turnover rate.

Good News! They Want to Implement Faith and Learning

We were struck with the candor with which

Adventist teachers around the world indicated their desire to teach from a Christian faith perspective. Regardless of their subject area, the teachers indicated a desire to integrate faith in their disciplines. For example, a minimum of 87 percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "Next year (if I am teaching) I definitely plan to integrate faith in my classes." (See Figure 1.)

Only four of the 451 teachers in the sample

indicated that they tended to disagree with that statement—an impressive consensus. Furthermore, when asked if they wanted to learn more about integration of faith and learning, 93 percent of the teachers marked "agree" or "strongly agree." When asked about problems in integrating faith and teaching, only seven percent said they had problems with the philosophy of integration. That is good news indeed to Adventist leaders who wish to promote God-centered teaching among their constituent schools.

What Is the Integration of Faith and Learning?

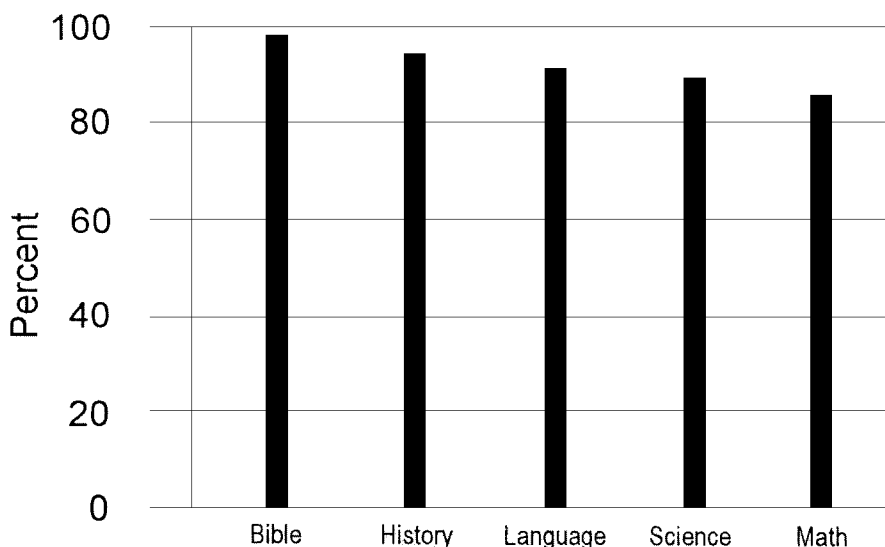
Theorists have debated how to define this concept.² But are teachers clear enough on the concept to actually *do* it? We asked the teachers to respond to this statement: "The integration of faith and learning is a mystery to me." Eight percent of the respondents indicated "Strongly Agree"; another 11 percent said "Tend to Agree"; and still another 5 percent were undecided. Nearly three-quarters indicated general clarity on the concept, although identifying the spectrum of their definitions was beyond the scope of the survey. Teachers may have interpreted faith either as a set of beliefs or as a lived experience. In either case (belief or experience), faith can be perceived as a transcendent set of spiritual values to be communicated to students through teaching. Humberto Rasi, world education director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, defines the integration of faith and learning as a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise from a biblical perspective.³

But What About Math?

Is it easier to incorporate Christian ideals in some subjects in the curriculum than others? Probably. Some areas such as history, Bible, and literature focus on the human condition. This allows numerous opportunities to discuss the Divine-human connection. Other subjects, such as math

Figure 1

"Next year (if I am teaching) I definitely plan to integrate faith in my classes."



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and technical trades, have a more impersonal content. Beyond the example of the teacher, is it possible for even these subjects to incorporate Christ in their content matter?

We asked teachers whether they thought it was impossible for them to integrate biblical faith in the subjects they taught. The answers were fascinating.

Although all groups of teachers disagreed with this statement, math teachers did indicate a slightly greater challenge than some other fields. (See Table 1.) In another item, “Integrating faith and learning is a mystery to me,” more than 30 per-

cent of math teachers agreed, as contrasted with 14 percent of language/literature teachers, suggesting that teachers in some fields could profit from a greater awareness of how their disciplines are connected with spiritual perspectives.

The Challenge: From Rhetoric to Reality

We then investigated how many teachers thought they were *actually integrating* faith by asking for a response to the following statement: “My written lesson plans through this entire year made specific reference to biblical ideas and themes.” (See Table 2.)

Here we see more clearly what is happening in the classroom. Whereas teachers overwhelmingly support the concept of integrating faith in their teaching, a smaller majority report significantly incorporating it into their lesson plans. The challenge seems to be greatest in math, where only 38 percent said this took place. Six in 10 teachers felt that most of the lessons they taught during the year made some reference to biblical ideas and themes.

Korniejczuk hypothesized that teachers would be at varying levels in integrating implementation of faith and learning. She found few teachers at the highest levels, defined as a dynamic school-wide emphasis on collegial sharing of the excitement of teaching Christianly. Our research produced the same results. Only 30 percent of the teachers felt that their faculty worked closely together to make integration extremely successful. About 37 percent focused (correctly) on the effects of integration on their *students* rather than simply looking at their own teaching. About 40 percent felt the school administrator inspired integration of faith and learning throughout the entire school.

Obviously, some good things are happening, but much more can be done. One gets the feeling that teachers around the world believe in integration of faith and learning but are less clear about how to make it happen within their classrooms.

More Good News! Help Is Available

Tools and strategies are increasingly becoming available to help teachers accomplish faith integration. These include resources, training, and leadership.

Resources for faith integration. Teachers desire high-quality resources that will help them integrate faith in their disciplines (64 percent), as well as appropriate training in using them (67 percent). (See Table 3.) Only a quarter of the teachers felt that government control of the curriculum was a stumbling block, although a third said that

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A Croatian and a Filipino student at Red River Valley Junior Academy in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, prepare a Bible assignment.

Table 1

“It is impossible for me to integrate biblical faith in the subjects I teach.”

Teachers=451	Strongly Agree	Undecided/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Math	16%	18%	67%
Language/Literature	10%	12%	78%
History	11%	4%	84%
Science	7%	5%	88%
Bible	11%	0%	89%
Total	11%	7%	82%

the focus on government exams was problematic to faith integration.

Clearly, resources are critical. It is very difficult, though not impossible, to teach Christianly without the help of useful tools and skills.

More than a third of the respondents received the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION. Almost all (95 percent) owned a Bible. At the time of the survey (Spring 1997), most of the teachers had access to a phone, photocopier, television, and videocassette recorder; approximately half had access to a computer. A quarter of the respondents had access to the World Wide Web.

However, less than a quarter of the teachers had access to textbooks or other teaching aids that would help them integrate faith in their courses. This anonymous survey revealed that teachers around the globe genuinely want to teach Christianly but lack some basic necessities. They need textbooks and/or supplements to help them teach from a faith perspective. More than half the teachers said they needed library reference materials.

Teachers were asked what resources would be most useful in integrating faith in their classes. Considered "definitely useful" or "useful" were the following: textbook supplements and guides (89 percent); sample lesson plans (88 percent), workshops and training sessions (86 percent), opportunities to share faith experiences with other teachers around the globe (84 percent), indexes of high-quality faith teaching materials (75 percent), and the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (72 percent). (These percentages do not include the "somewhat useful" category.)

Recent advances in information technology are making the Internet widely accessible. The Circle project at Andrews University, for example, will be a Yahoo-type clearinghouse for resources on faith integration and Adventist education. Its Web site will feature an online database that allows users worldwide to access and download materials 24 hours a day! It will also point users to other Adventist databases around that are of special interest to church educators. This resource has exciting potential for our educational administrators around the world. They can access them with hundreds and thousands of educators within their fields. The official launching of Circle is scheduled for August 2000.

Training for faith-learning integration. It is significant that the respondents cited inadequate training as the leading obstacle to faith integration. Although the silent spiritual witness of a Christian teacher is important in conveying faith, teachers also need instruction in intentionally and effectively communicating their faith. It would take too much time for each teacher to learn effective skills through trial and error.

Graduates of Adventist colleges were

When asked if they wanted to learn more about integration of faith and learning, 93 percent of the teachers marked "agree" or "strongly agree."

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Georgia-Cumberland Academy (Calhoun, Georgia, U.S.A.) science teacher Fred Anderson explains free radicals to student Elizabeth Rigsbe.

less likely to believe that it was impossible for them to integrate biblical principles in their subject matter than were graduates of government schools, suggesting a great need to train teachers with no background in Adventist education. Similarly, new Adventists were more likely to see implementation as a "mystery" (30 percent) than those who had been members longer (12 percent). On the other hand, several findings from our survey suggest that new teachers (or newly Adventist teachers) are more open and excited at the prospect of integration than are old-timers. When asked about definite plans to integrate faith next year, nearly 70 percent of newer teachers responded "definitely agree," as opposed to 36 percent of veteran teachers, who were likely to respond with a less-enthusiastic "agree."

Learning any skill requires lots of practice. This is no less true in teaching. For faith integra-

Table 2

"My written lesson plans through this entire year made specific references to biblical ideas and themes."

Teachers=451	Strongly Agree	Undecided/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Math	38%	29%	33%
Language/Literature	45%	17%	38%
History	46%	21%	34%
Science	48%	16%	36%
Bible	84%	7%	8%
Total	52%	17%	31%

Humberto Rasi, world education director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, defines the integration of faith and learning as a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise from a biblical perspective.

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tion to thrive, teachers need professional development that encourages them to try effective strategies and provides them with encouragement, support, and tools to make the strategies work.

Workshops are helpful if (1) they are spaced throughout the year so that teachers do not lose momentum in trying out new strategies; and (2) they provide support personnel who serve as resources, mentors, and guides. Workshops and seminars that focus on theory alone usually have limited value. Our research indicates that teachers are committed to the idea of integration, but need specific strategies, skills, and resources to implement it effectively in the classroom.

Leadership for Faith-Learning Integration

Both resources and training require adminis-

A grateful graduate at Auburn Adventist Academy (Washington, U.S.A.).

trative support and leadership. Leaders can help inspire, coach, and provide incentives to help busy teachers become more effective. The administrator sets the tone for the school, provides training opportunities, and supplies the staff with resources that support reform and change.

The primary reason for operating Seventh-day Adventist schools and colleges is to restore God’s ideal within each student. Nurturing the life of faith within each student is paramount. No one is more crucial to promoting a faith commitment throughout the school than the school leader, who

is uniquely positioned to help (1) set a culture for school change and reform; (2) provide important training for faculty and staff to implement change; and (3) supply the necessary resources to achieve change and reform.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Christ commanded His followers of faith to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The Master Teacher promises His faithful workers, “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19, 20, KJV). ☞

*The author expresses his gratitude to the many people who assisted in this global study of Adventist secondary teachers, including the General Conference Department of Education.

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3. Raquel I. Korniejczuk and Paul S. Brantley, “From Creeds to Deeds: Teacher Integration of Faith and Learning in the Classroom,” *Journal of Adventist Education* (December 1993/January 1994), pp. 9-14.

Table 3	
What are the greatest problems that make it difficult to integrate faith throughout your teaching?	
Problem	Percentage of Respondents
Teachers needing more training	67%
Lack of good materials for faith integration	64%
Focus on government exams	34%
Lack of time to prepare	31%
Lack of student interest	17%
Philosophical problems with IFL	7%