

The Institute for Christian College Teaching

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN VALUES
IN THE
ADVENTIST COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:
AN EXAMPLE IN THE
TEACHING OF
HISTORY

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by

Neville E. Inggs
Helderberg College
South Africa
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024 - 88 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring Md 20904, USA

ABSTRACT

An active, integrated program to teach values is absolutely essential in the Seventh-day Adventist college environment. Two methods of approach are explained, Kohlberg's moral development, and values education. The latter is taken as an example and discussed in terms of approaches for its implementation in the Christian college curriculum with examples taken from the study of History.

INTRODUCTION

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Moral (values) education has assumed many forms throughout the history of educational endeavor. It has included the study of the Bible and theology as a means of teaching moral truths, and, from time to time, it has included formal instruction in ethics in an attempt to lead students to make thoughtful moral choices. The advocates of a liberal education have suggested, as educational goals, the development of values through the education of the whole person, and this is a proposal with which Seventh-day Adventists are able to concur, since our own philosophy of education seeks to do just that. We have always believed that there is a strong link between knowledge and action and the educational tradition of the Adventist Church has shown a deep confidence in the power of education to affect and elevate conduct.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST INSTITUTIONS

The tradition of moral education continues, but generally there seems to be a trend among some Adventist college teachers to absolve the non-religion faculty of responsibility for teaching moral values and to relegate the topic to, at best, the teacher of Bible or the teacher of a course in professional ethics or else, at worst, the subject is believed to be best suited to preaching from the platform during the Chapel hour. This comment is, of course, a generalization, but within the experience of the writer, who has visited a number of Adventist college and university campuses and spoken to some of the faculty, in practice, there seems to be a trend in this direction. The result of this situation is that, although the purpose and plausibility of teaching moral values is present, its impact has been weakened. This trend may well be an indication of a move towards secularization since one of the indicators of secularization in a Christian college is that faculty gradually cease to promote Christian purposes and values.¹

There are several reasons why some teachers are reluctant to deal with the topic. The problem may exist because some teachers are not confident of their own spiritual experience. It may be, however, that the root of the difficulty lies in the fact that many of the teachers in Seventh-day Adventist colleges, particularly outside the United States, gained either their entire university education or obtained advanced degrees at secular

institutions. There neutrality in moral matters is upheld as the ideal, and the very thought of transmitting Christian values per se, let alone attempting to do so through one's subject, is not acceptable. The upshot of this state of affairs is that prospective Adventist college teachers, who take such courses, are not exposed to a model of this kind of teaching. As a result, they simply do not know how to go about the delicate task of leading students to perceive and appropriate to themselves the very best of values for living the Christian life with their particular disciplines as the media of transmission of such values.

SUBJECT INTEGRITY

Another problem, and a very important one, is that some of the teachers of "non-religion" subjects in Seventh-day Adventist colleges fail to see how moral education can be approached from within their own disciplines other than by merely "attaching" it to the discipline in an artificial, even artful kind of way. This approach would be unsatisfactory to both their students and other practitioners of the discipline who would perceive the attempt as forced and superficial and a diminution of the integrity of the content and method of the discipline.

This need not be the case. The teaching of Christian values can be integrated with the teaching of other subjects, particularly in the area of the social sciences, without any artificiality at all. An attempt will be made in this paper to suggest possible approaches to the inclusion of the approach, with particular emphasis on the teaching of history. It must, however, be emphasized that values education, through the study of an academic discipline, in this case history, must never be allowed to diminish the integrity, methodology, or aims of the discipline, but must rather enhance the study by enabling the student to achieve deeper insights into that which is being scrutinized.

CHANGE AFFECTS VALUES

The modern technological world forces upon us the sense that traditional ways of viewing Christian values somehow do not prepare us to face many of the issues forced upon us by advances in physical science, biology, psychology and modern medicine. Nuclear power and weapons, the prolongation of life by artificial means, test-tube

fertilization of a human ovum and its subsequent transplantation into the womb of a surrogate mother, genetic engineering, and the growing incidence and increasing social approval of abortion as an acceptable method of birth control - all very recent developments - have outpaced our ability to simply decide on their moral consequences for human life. Traditional ethics do not appear to offer us any ready answers and so the result is moral uncertainty and confusion. It is imperative that Christian teachers accept their God-given responsibility to communicate acceptable values to their students which will help the latter to make Christian choices to guide their lives as Christians.

GOALS

The goal of values teaching strategies appears to be to teach moral reasoning through argumentation and in this way to develop a heightened awareness of the issues involved. It is then hoped that this will result in the permanent adoption of values into the student's life-view and practice, which, for the Christian teacher and student, will be a Christian value.

The question as to whether or not it is right and proper for the historian to pass judgment on the actions of individuals or nations comes to mind. Some great historians have answered the question in the affirmative, while others have refused to accord the scholar that privilege or responsibility. Of course, for the historian to pass moral judgment upon persons or groups is irrelevant since what is past is past, but it behooves the Christian teacher of history to be able to use the approach to assess the effects of decisions and actions upon people and, from this point of view, it is a legitimate approach.

From this assessment, one hopes will come a realization of what Christian values are, what they might mean in a world motivated at present by non-Christian values and, in the end, that this contemplation will urge upon the individual student a desire to pursue these values in his own life to the glory of God and to the benefit of all who may come within the compass of his life.

APPROACHES TO VALUES DEVELOPMENT

The approaches to values teaching all appear to share the same tenet that education, in the fullest sense of the word, must focus on human choice. Moral education and the

Kohlberg posits a three-tier hierarchy of moral development, each element of which is further divided into two elements giving six stages of moral growth as follows:

1. Obedience to rules is dependent upon external compulsion;
2. Rules are the instrument of rewards and contribute to the satisfaction of an individual's needs;
3. Rules are ways of obtaining social approval and esteem;
4. Rules sustain some social order;

expanded upon in the Sermon on the Mount and other directives of Jesus. It is these values which must be disclosed through a study of the actions of historical persons, particularly in the actions of those who purported to be Christians living in a Christian society. The matter of how to deal with non-Christians may, for the Christian, be resolved by referring to Paul when in Romans 1:25,26 he states that all men were granted the opportunity of knowing God, but they refused to avail themselves of the opportunity and so they fell away from God. Paul continues, however, in chapter 2 and emphasizes the fact that God has placed His law and ways in their hearts.

The valuing process demarcates a broad method of enquiry and assessment. In order to integrate values education into the college curriculum, its implementation would require significant, but not necessarily radical, changes in the current approach to teaching and learning. For years, college teachers have used methods and achieved some of the above aims. There is no doubt that whenever students engage important ideas and values a lasting influence on their lives results. Further, many teachers of existing courses in the humanities could easily focus more sharply on questions of human significance and thereby enhance values education by making a conscious commitment to nurturing values through appropriate and imaginative teaching.

CONTENT AND FORM

How can the valuing process grant equal and simultaneous attention to both the content and the form of the curriculum? It must be emphasized that valuing cannot be a passive affair. It can seldom, if ever, emerge from the "chalk and talk" method or through the presentation of the contents of a textbook to a group of students who spend their time frantically scribbling "notes" in a class situation where there is little or no opportunity for reflection on what is being presented. As basic conditions, values teaching demands that students be:

1. Active in developing and defending their own positions on specific topics;
2. Challenged to probe the reasons which lie behind human choices, and, by extrapolation, their own;
3. Given the opportunity to confront standards and points of view contrary to their personal perspective;
4. Encouraged and enabled to assume the role of a person with a contrary view;

5. Given the chance to wrestle with problems that have no simple solutions;⁵
6. Willing to change their positions.

Teachers should select topics that will lead students to consider the motivation of human action and experience. Ample literature will have to be supplied with as much original source material as possible in order to give the students enough reliable, first hand information upon which to base their criticism.

THE STUDY OF HISTORY AND VALUES DEVELOPMENT

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

Many of the issues in history naturally lead to the examination of democracy and of human morality. Students might pursue the questions regarding race and human identity. They might look at the connection between social conditions and human dignity. In response to the positions they might adopt on the specific cases they are studying, students could be led to investigate their own values for consistency, congruity, and authenticity in terms of their profession of Christianity by asking, for example, What issues arise from considering race as a definitive human characteristic? Can racism be justified through a consistent Christian position? What might happen if legal rights were a function of race?⁶

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

In the proposed approach certain teaching materials and methods are especially suitable. Good pedagogy demands that there be a continuous movement between

reflection and experience, between the abstract and the concrete, between practice and theory. Primary historical sources could prove particularly helpful in providing a rich experience, as it was once lived, from which values can be drawn and subjected to critical and theoretical analysis. Discussions, however, must be made to steer a course between aimless, rambling chatter on the one hand and stock responses on the other. The goal should be to consider consequences, to try to see how value commitments on the part of historical characters shaped events, and to review the values in terms of their consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness, adequacy and duration.

A practical example of this approach would be as follows:

1. Take the first lecture or two to discuss and develop with the students a world view which might prove helpful in assessing actions and events.
2. Discuss, in broad outline, the details of the topic under discussion, e.g. The Watergate Scandal.
3. Set a reading assignment on the topic. In the assignment include as much primary source material as possible: transcripts of the tape recordings; memoirs of both the guilty parties and their opponents.
4. At the next lecture, review the events to draw the threads together into a coherent whole.
5. Lead the students in discussion, or organize groups to discuss the topic by asking questions like:
 - 5.1 What values should the president of a country have?
 - 5.2 Why is it sometimes difficult for a national leader to live up to those values?
 - 5.3 Are there occasions when a national leader may deviate from these standards? If so, what circumstances would justify this?
 - 5.4 Is it right that the voters may demand greater integrity from their leader than they do from themselves? ... and so on.

The study may culminate with a question to be worked out by the students: "President Nixon was justified in his decision to initially conceal his knowledge of the Watergate burglary." Carefully present historical evidence to support or contradict

the statement.

In addition to methods and materials, there is also a new role and responsibility for the teacher. The student's state of moral equilibrium must be gently and supportively challenged in order to get him moving to higher levels of thought. This can be achieved through imaginative discussions in which there is a demanding give-and-take between and among peers and the teacher. It is essential that an atmosphere of openness be maintained in order to maintain the dignity of all the participants, even when a position is being criticized. The teacher must convey to the students her faith in their ability to offer valuable responses to difficult problems. Effective teaching for values not only involves discussion, but should include the occasional use of role-playing, debates, simulations, and games. These techniques are useful, especially since some students find it difficult to take positions and defend them publicly. Students may also work in groups of four or five with each group responsible for developing and defending a particular point of view. Organizing students into groups allows them to argue and shape their positions in situations where they do not feel constrained to adopt a prescribed view. Role play gives the opportunity of the participants to experiment with options without necessarily committing themselves seriously. Taking the role of a famous historical figure or his or her antagonist, may prove to be a worthwhile and memorable experience.

The teacher is also going to have to be willing to reveal his own values and commitments, with all the risk and vulnerability that this entails. "By being open and honest with his students, the teacher will help them to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings with him and, in the process, with themselves and with one another. The best example a ... teacher can give his students is his candor when formulating and expressing his own decisions." ⁷

THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

A most sobering thought in contemplating values education is that the most enduring effects of college experience do not reside in the facts and theories learned in a particular course. These are soon forgotten. Christian college teachers are acutely aware of the fact that the most important contribution to a student's ethical development does not come from the formal curriculum, but from the realization of community, which

occurs as the student becomes aware of the fact that he or she is part of a group of individuals who share in a common quest. Moral development does not depend so much on what is taught, but on the total process of how it is communicated. Morrill quotes from the work of D. Heath that a teacher claimed that "the Quaker ideal came through more strongly than I realized ... It is with me all the time. I don't think the content stayed with me. That's mostly gone. But the values have remained." ⁸

This aspect brings home most forcibly that to reach its full potential, values education must encompass the total life of the campus. Every feature of Christian college life presents opportunities for fostering personal growth and for contributing to the development of a student's values. Christian values are formed and reformed through human interaction, and the Christian college environment has a distinctive set of human relationships that can and do influence personal development. If Christian teachers want their students to be just, they are going to have to see a just society in the organization of the college. If they want them to be loving and considerate, the leaders of the college community are going to have to be loving and considerate. Faculty and staff, in whatever areas they serve, are all going to have to hone their own sense of values to razor sharpness if they wish to convey to students the worthwhileness of Christian values.

END NOTES

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