FEATURE

The Role of Christian Parents in Influencing Children: Perspectives on Faith Integration

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Abstract: *The integration of faith and learning as it relates to parents raising Christian children. How their role changes over time, and how they can work with the school and the church to support faith development in children at each stage. A model is proposed which combines the aspects of faith in the family setting. Many examples are given of sample activities which can be done at different age levels to support developing faith in children at each stage.*

Integration of faith and learning (IFL) is the "core concept of Adventist philosophy of education." (Taylor, 2001, p. 19). The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church recognizes the importance of the presence of IFL as a unique ingredient in SDA education that must be exerted constantly in SDA education everywhere in the world (see Taylor, 2001). The concept of IFL should also be applied through all the agencies of education, including the home, the church, the school, and the community.

Recognizing the significance of IFL in education, this study focuses on the roles of Adventist Christian parents in influencing children. This paper examines the possibility of integration of faith and learning in parents' involvement with their children during three stages: the early years, the growing years, and the adult years. These three stages are categorized as follows: The early years describe the years the children spend with their parents before entering formal school. The growing years are described in this study as the years of schooling under parental supervision. And the adult years are described as the maturity years of the children as they leave home and may be living with their own family.

Although the Adventist home will be the focus of this study, this paper does not intend to discuss the ideal Adventist home philosophy, but rather to highlight the importance of the integration of faith and learning in family, as

way of helping children to develop a Christlike character. The foundation laid in this paper may be useful for further research.

The Integration of Faith and Learning

One supportive biblical foundation of IFL can be found in Ephesians 3:17-19:

> So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This passage proposes that the center of IFL is Christ and it further mentions being transformed into His likeness. Being rooted and established in love, and learning to grasp the breadth and depth of the love of Christ is what Christian education is all about. The whole point of Christian education is Christ. Commenting on the nature of Christian education, Byrne (1988) agrees that the center of education should be Christ, where all life comes to meaning, and that nothing can be reached without this. Therefore IFL can be simply defined as having Christ in our hearts, and that whatever we do, or think, or learn will reflect Christ's character.

In order for one to experience this sort of growing in Christ that IFL suggests, however, one must experience transformation. Taylor suggests that "believers must undergo a personal, transformational process—the receiving of the mind of Christ. . . as Christians, we must think Christianly" (2001, p. 20). This transformation is a daily, progressive experience, not only a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

In his book, Poe (2004) included Heie's relational model as an illustration of integration. The model proposes that there are three types of relationships: truncation, where everything is totally by itself, coexistence, where they are one but still each has its own separate identity, and integration where all the ideas are blended into one. Although the main purpose of this model is to illustrate the integration of two types of education—secular and religious, it can also be useful to help us understand the concept of IFL. We can derive the same illustration for the integration of two minds--the secular mind and the religious mind. The idea of IFL has to do with the integration of the mind--not in the extent of mixing the worldly mind and the religious mind, but in putting Christ's mind in whatever we do in this world through the process of transformation. In the three time periods of development, this study will examine how parents can lead their children to build up a Christlike character.

Parental Influence

Family is a very important part of the Christian life. The special relationship that God has toward His people should be reflected in families (Ward, 1989). Ward suggests that the main responsibility that God wanted parents to transmit to their children is spiritual and moral development. As their children's first teachers, parents must carry these responsibilities as agents of change. Since humans are born sinful, parents can not expect children to be innocent and good. God has given parents the important responsibility of being an influence for good on their developing children. There is evidence that the role of parents is particularly significant in children during the early and growing years. "There are several reasons–some intuitive, some research-based– to indicate that homes, and especially parent, contribute significantly to all aspects of children's development, including their success at school" (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvares, & Bloom, 1993, p. 8).

Early Christian education at home creates the foundation for what the children will be in the future. It is important to lay a foundation of faith for children while they are still within our reach, otherwise they will be easily influenced by the world. Children will become proud and will be disobedient and wander away from God if they get only worldly knowledge (White, 1943). The duty of education at home is to teach responsibility. At home children learn basic fundamentals of Christian life and attitudes towards one another. Faith influence by parents is part of the life training that they find at home (Byrne, 1988). In the family, children learn their first knowledge of society. Responsibilities and rules at home, interacting with brothers and sisters and parents, and sharing with each other are the social values that children learn in the beginning.

The first education of children has a significant effect on how they perceive the world. Siahaan (2005) mentions how parental involvement can help social problems such as behavioral problems and child delinquency. It is significantly more difficult to correct these problems later in life than to avoid them by proper early training. White (1943) states that "the greatest care should be taken in the education of youth, to vary the manner of instruction so as to call forth the high and noble powers of the mind" (p. 73).

While parental influence at home has an important role, it cannot be separated from two other entities in integrating faith into children's learning which are the school and the church. "The home must look to other institutions (school and church) as allies in the great task of education." (Byrne, 1988 p. 209). It is through parental influence at home that children are directed for their perspective in life, and for their beliefs, while the school and the church are to enhance this influence. When these institutions—home, school, and church— work hand in hand, they will create greater influence in educating children.

Integrating Faith through Parental Influence

Integration of faith has been instituted in many Adventist schools around the world, and without doubt there is agreement as to the importance of modeling faith through learning in the schools. It is equally interesting to consider the possibility of modeling the integration of faith with learning in the child's first educational institution—the home.

In this paper, we will examine the similarities between integration of faith in the schools and in the home. Taylor (2001) suggests that the integration of faith should be based on four foundations: it should be "Christ-centered, Bible-based, student-related, and socially-applied (Deut. 6:8, 9; Luke 2:52)" (p. 27). This is suggesting that in any curriculum and instruction in the school, these four foundations should be the basis for integration of faith. In the same manner, the child's education within the Adventist home should also be based on these foundations. Adam (1972) used a parallel approach to Taylor's in talking about the foundation of faith in the home. In short, he suggested that Christian homes should be Christ-centered, should use the Bible as a foundation, and that communication must come first. White (1952) also stresses the importance of the family influence as a social dimension. She says that "society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. . . . The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences" (p. 15). This paper discusses how the concept of integration of faith in education can also be integrated into some aspects of strategies of developing faith that can be used at home throughout three distinct time periods in the life of a child as described earlier in this paper.

The early years of developing faith

The early years of children are critical. Home is the first agency of education that every child will taste in this world. The home environment becomes the children's school, brothers and sisters as fellow students, with their parents as teachers. What children learn in their early years affects their later years. White (2001) states that "the early training of children is a subject that all should carefully study" (p. 17). She further comments that during the years from the time a child is born to the time they go to school, home will be their place of learning and parents hold full responsibility in teaching their children.

In applying the four foundations of integration of faith (Taylor, 2001), parents should put Christ as the center in the home. Daily devotions, prayers, worship, are part of the training of developing faith in Christ for the first foundation. The second foundation is that of Bible-based activities. Faith is also developed through Bible reading in worship, stories taken from the Bible, values taken from the Bible, and truth found in the Bible. Every activity in the family should be child-related. Responsibilities given in the home, such as

doing the dishes, cleaning the house, or any other chores, should be shared with the children. This develops basic physical skills in the children and teaches them to be independent, which is the third foundation in the integration of faith. The fourth foundation of faith has to do with exposing the children to family, relatives, neighbors, church, etc., and including them to participate in helping the society, such as helping the poor, or visiting an orphanage.

The early years are very important moments for growing children's faith. White (2001) emphasizes the importance of doing missionary activity from the beginning. Children adhere to their early training experiences throughout their entire life.

The Growing Years of Developing Faith

The growing years are the years when children enter the other educational agency, which is the school, up to the time when they leave home. Another critical part of parental influence in integrating faith is during these growing years. During these years, parents begin to shift children away from dependence to being independent individuals. During these years, children also face a lot of other influences from outside the home. Children in the growing years struggle between the influence from outside world and the influence from home. The first thing that parents should remember is to choose the right school as a partner in training their children in faith development. In choosing a school, White (2001) encourages parents to select "the school where God is the foundation" (p. 133). The influence of the parents is not to be decreased, since the support that the children need during these years is great. Parents should continue to develop faith in exalting Christ as the center of the home; in these years, parents are to present Christ as the personal Savior of the children (White, 2001). Parents are to build the relationship of the children with Christ, through their example. Children in these years need heroes in their life. Using the Bible, parents should introduce faith heroes in the children's heart.

Outreach ministry should be encouraged during these years. Parents are responsible for children's exposure to society. Preparing children for marriage, work, life decisions, and helping them develop a personal spiritual life are areas that are built up during these years. It is never too late (or too early) to start children thinking about the process of preparation for work and marriage (Barnes, 1997). For preparing children for work, attitude preparation is very important. and "one of the most important skills we need to teach our children is how to think through the selection of a spouse" (Barnes, 1997, p. 110). Especially in these critical areas of work and selection of a life partner, faith in Christ and attention to God's word should always be the core principles.

The Adult Years of Developing Faith

Although the time spent with children decreases during the later years of adolescence and the years of adulthood, parents still can exert a positive influence on their children. During these years, the children have reached maturity and live independently. After some time, they will be married, working, and could have become parents as well. Integration of faith has to continue even to these years, but the level of IFL is different from the previous years. In these years, parents' role of influence is more like a consultant and supporter. In these years, however, Christ should still be the center of the relationship between parents and children, the Bible is still the base for values and guidance, children should still be the focus of the influence, and the family should still seek to benefit the society. The influence of the parents is no longer directly guiding the life of the children. But with their support and encouragement, parents should work hand in hand with their children to be promoters of the integration of faith to their children's children.

The main influence that parents can give to their children is support and advice. In Exodus 18, the story is recorded that can illustrate what kind of help parents can give to their children. In that particular chapter, Jethro was showing his support and being there to advise his son-in-law, Moses. Jethro's statement in verse 19, "Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you" shows significant support to his son-in-law Moses toward the accomplishment of God's work. The advice given was in fact, Bible-based, Christ-centered, child-related (it was about Moses' work concerns), and socially applied. Developing faith in the adult years is still vital for our children.

The Model of Parental Influence on a Child's Developing Faith

Figure 1 represents how parental influence parallels the integration of faith and learning, through the three developmental periods in children's lives. The objective of parental influence and integration of faith is to lead the children toward Christ's character. Parental influence includes character building, discipline in the family, and affects other faith traits such as love, patience, and trust. In more scholastic terms, the integration of faith includes the dimensions of Christian curriculum: spiritual (heart), intellectual (head), physical (hand), and social (humanity), which parallel the four foundations of integration of faith: Christ-centered, Bible-based, children-related, and socially-applied (adapted from Taylor, 2001). Strategies and objectives are created to fulfill the process of parents' influence and integration of faith, leading children toward Christ's character.
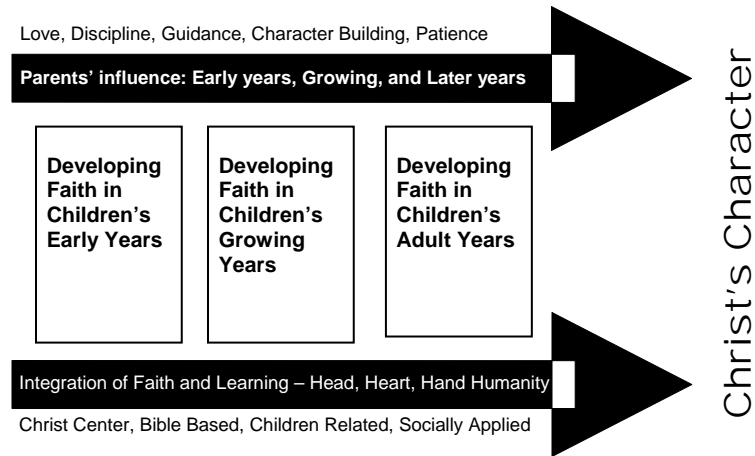
Love, Discipline, Guidance, Character Building, Patience

Parents' influence: Early years, Growing, and Later years

Developing Faith in Children's Early Years	Developing Faith in Children's Growing Years	Developing Faith in Children's Adult Years

Christ's Character

Integration of Faith and Learning – Head, Heart, Hand Humanity

Christ Center, Bible Based, Children Related, Socially Applied

Figure 1. Model of parental influence on a child's faith development.

Strategies of Integration of Faith Through Parental Influence

Using the proposed model of developing faith, Table 1 illustrates the concept of integrating faith in the family. Using the concepts in Table 1, Tables 2-4 suggest objectives and examples of strategies that parents can use in integrating faith and influencing the children during the early years, the growing years, and the adult years using the dimensions of Christian education and foundation of faith integration suggested by Taylor (2001).

Table 1
The Concept of Faith Integration in the Family

	Foundations of Faith Integration			
	Christ-centered	*Bible-based*	*Child-related*	*Socially-applied*
	Christ must be the core of the strategies	**The Bible should be the basis of these strategies**	**Strategies suggested are focused on the child's need**	**Strategies suggested for the purpose of social implications**
Heart – Spiritual	*Spiritual devotion*	*Bible values*	*Building Christlike character*	*Witnessing*
To nurture the spiritual growth of the students	Family & personal strategies for spiritual nurture	The Bible as foundation of spiritual values in the family	Nurturing character	Creating space for witnessing
Head – Intelligence	*Wisdom in Christ*	*Wisdom in God's Word*	*Wisdom in the child*	*Social wisdom*
Caters to the intellec--tual growth of students	Christ as the source of all wisdom	Developing intellectual in God's word	Self intellectual development (Introvert)	Social intellectual development (Extrovert)
Hand – Physical	*Growth in Christ*	*Bible-based guidance*	*Physical development*	*Developing social skills*
Physical develop-ment and growth of students	Modeling God's image in physical activities	Guidance and direction that is Bible based	Wholesome child development of multiple aspects of being	Social readiness, physical acts of service
Humanity – Social	*Christ-centered relationships*	*Bible-based community*	*The child in society*	*Service to others*
Social develop-ment of students	Understan-ding Christ's concept of social relationships	Preparing for heavenly (Bible-based) community	Child's exposure toward society	Encourage-ment toward service orientation

(left margin, rotated: Dimensions of Christian Education)

Table 2

Early Years: Strategies and Objectives of Integration of Faith

	Christ-centered	Bible-based	Child-related	Socially-applied
Heart (Spiritual)	<u>Spiritual devotion</u> Prayer and worship in the family Develop a spiritual environment in the home	<u>Bible values</u> The Bible as the foundation of spiritual values (love, patience, discipline, etc.) and instruction in the family	<u>Building spiritual characters</u> Give children responsibili-ties that will build up trust, belief, commitment, and love	<u>Witnessing</u> Have the children participate in spiritual programs/ activities
Head (Intellectual)	<u>Wisdom in Christ</u> Develop children's respect to God – "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" Psalm 111:10	<u>Wisdom in God's Word</u> Develop children's interest in studying the Bible daily. Enroll them in Sabbath School Class	<u>Wisdom in child</u> Develop children's confidence by teaching them self- confi-dence and courage to learn	<u>Social wisdom</u> Teach children basic manners, socialization, and life skills
Hand (Physical)	<u>Growth in Christ</u> To grow to be like Christ. Helping them to find their identity as God's child	<u>Bible-based guidance</u> Introduce the children to missionary activities using Bible stories and pantomime	<u>Physical development</u> Involve the children in exercise and care for their body	<u>Social skills</u> Basic skills like gardening, cleaning the house, and sewing
Humanity (Social)	<u>Christ-centered relationship</u> Teach children what kind of relationship toward others God wants us to have	<u>Bible-based Community</u> Introduce children to heaven, and how we are going to live as mentioned in the Bible	<u>Child in society</u> Expose children to society. Bring the children to see what is happening in the community	<u>Service to others</u> Include children in the program of service to society, visiting the sick and caring for the unfortunate

Table 3

Growing Years: Sample Strategies and Objective of IFL

Growing Years	Christ-centered	Bible-based	Child-related	Socially-applied
Heart (Spiritual)	<u>Spiritual devotions</u> Create a prayer circle, where parents and children will make prayer requests and pray for them	<u>Bible-based values</u> Create a Bible reading circle in the family. Parents and children take turns reading the Bible	<u>Building spiritual character</u> Prepare a religious bulletin board where the children can feel the spiritual environment	<u>Witnessing</u> Involve children in outreach ministry such as visiting the prison, singing in the church, etc.
Head (Intellectual)	<u>Wisdom in Christ</u> Develop witnessing in children's heart. Children should be able to tell others of what they feel about God, and should learn more of Him daily.	<u>Wisdom in God's word</u> Teach the children to use the Bible as God's communication tool to them. Learn about mission and prophecies	<u>Wisdom in child</u> Develop self-reliance and critical thinking in children. Encourage children to join intellectual activities	<u>Social wisdom</u> Teach the children the profession that they want to use in serving the society and the Church
Hand (Physical)	<u>Grow in Christ</u> Build spiritual faith in the children, and an understanding of their body as temple of God	<u>Bible-based guidance</u> The Bible as instructions for daily living. The Bible as the source of their developing faith	<u>Physical development</u> Help children balance their lifestyle. Introduce them to CELEBRATION philosophy	<u>Social skills</u> Continue nurturing basic social and physical skills that they need to survive
Humanity (Social)	<u>Christ-centered relationship</u> Prepare the students for a deeper Christian relationship between men and women, or parents to children	<u>Bible-based community</u> The Bible as the answer to the worldview questions of Who am I? Where am I going? What is wrong in our society? and What is the remedy for this problem?	<u>Child in society</u> Get the children ready to be participants in society. Nurture the students with what real life is about and how God is involved	<u>Service toward others</u> Involve the children in ethical service such as helping one another, respecting others' views, and standing firm on principles

Table 4
Adult Years: Strategies and objective of Integration of Faith

	Christ-centered	Bible-based	Child-related	Socially-applied
Heart (Spiritual)	Spiritual devotions Pray for adult children. Be involved with their spiritual life by supporting and counseling but not interfering with their spiritual devotion	Bible-based values Use Bible resources as the foundation for counseling and guiding adult children. Encourage them to pursue Bible study intellectually	Building spiritual character Encourage adult children to be the spiritual head of their family. Be there to help that happen	Witnessing Join adult children in their interest and involvement in Church. Participate and support their programs
Head (Intellectual)	Wisdom in Christ Keep turning them to Jesus as the source of all wisdom to answer life's questions	Wisdom in God's Word Affirm the Bible as a reliable source for information about and communicating with God	Wisdom in Child Encourage lifelong learning. Seek opportunities to support their learning	Social Wisdom Provide guidance in the profession they choose. Remind them of the social responsibilities they hold
Hand (Physical)	Grow in Christ Encourage them to live their faith in action more and more by being a model to them	Bible-based guidance Encourage leisure activities in accordance with biblical principles	Physical development Support the adult child's deepening identity in the Lord by mature counsel	Social skills Continue to model practical skills and money- or time-saving ideas
Humanity (Social)	Christ-centered relationship Support the relationships they develop with others. Remind them Christ is the center of their home	Bible-based Community Help children provide a Bible-based, loving atmosphere in their respective homes	Child in Society Get involved in society together with them. Be IN the world, but not OF the world	Service to others Together with adult children, support service to others through donations, voluntary acts, community programs

Conclusion

Parental influence can create a great destiny for children. Helping children develop faith is a continual process of life-long learning. It is not a destination but a journey that parents and children should take together. Along that journey, the family can be an agent of faith integration to the world. White (1952) suggests that when a family unites for Christ, it can be a witness to society. She says, "If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the 'light of the world'" (p. 36). Integration of faith should be instituted early in the home and should start with the parents first. To influence children, parents should have a personal conviction of faith. Parents are also encouraged to partner with school, church, and community to build up faith in children. The whole point of integration of faith is stated in Philippians 2:5, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus," "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17). The objective is to build a Christlike character in our children's hearts in whatever activities we are doing. As the first teachers, parents could be the longest teacher a child might ever have, and they hold a responsibility for every child's destiny. Creating a place for Christ in their hearts and making the Bible their foundation as they walk in this world can make a difference in the life of each child. Let us pray that we all will receive the power and the grace to shape, transform, and prepare our children for Christ and for heaven.

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