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Reflections of an Adventist Teacher

A Personal and Professional Worldview Synthesis

As a Seventh-day Adventist educator teaching in an Adventist school, my worldview has significant implications for my practice. I am a Christian theist.¹ The framework for the development of my Christian theistic worldview can be traced back to my early childhood years. My first introduction to Jesus was through my loving parents. I remember a home that was filled with love, acceptance, and safety. I have fond memories of Sabbath school, church, and family worship. I received further exposure to God during my formative years of school. From Grade 1 through the end of high school, I was privileged to attend Adventist schools. This was a commitment my parents had made to our family. My worldview continued to develop even after I became a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when I was 12 years old.

As I continued my personal Christian journey, the transition between home and school was somehow seamless as I experienced the overarching theme of God's love as ever-present. I made the choice to attend an Adventist university after finishing high school. It was during my years away from home, outside of the protection of my parents and church family, that I began to fully interact with and learn about other systems of beliefs and ways of life. I have never strayed too far; my personal journey with God remains and my faith continues to deepen. Through relationships with others, I have been challenged to think about what I accept as truth and my choice to be a Christian theist. I believe that it is the relationships I have had and continue to maintain that have helped to shape my current worldview.

Rationale for My Chosen Worldview

My Christian theistic worldview is rooted in the strong foundation of my first teachers: my mother and father. I believe that they took the responsibility of parenting as paramount and the advice of Proverbs 22:6 to heart as they did their best to demonstrate love to each other, their children, and others. I also had the blessing of having a close relationship with both my maternal and paternal grandparents into my adult life. All four grandparents were traditional, conservative Adventists who lived simple, joy-filled lives until the day they died. Two were centenarians—more than 100 years old! Through the lives of my parents and their parents before them, I have learned about the gift of salvation (John 3:16), the forgiveness of sin (1 John 1:9), and the endless love and grace of God (John 1:14; Romans 5:8).

My relationships with my parents and grandparents have been my tangible examples of who God is and the hope for the future that a life in service to Him can give. Seeing the importance of God in the lives of my parents and other family members was my firsthand experience with Him as well as a persistent invitation to developing a personal relationship with Him. One of my favorite inspirational Bible passages, Jeremiah 29:11 to 13, states: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future/ Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (NIV).² This Scripture passage provides me with a compass to navigate in a confusing and chaotic world.

Strengths and Challenges of Chosen Worldview

One of the biggest strengths of the Christian theistic perspective is the belief that God desires to have a personal and intimate relationship with His creation and promises in the plan of salvation an eternity spent with Him (as described in John 3:16, 17; Romans 5:8; and John 1:12). God's invitation, open and available to all, allows everyone equal opportunity to a saving relationship with Him (Ephesians 2:8, 9). The Bible, God's Word, gives humanity guidelines by which all should live, specifically in relation to Him and to others (Exodus 20:1-17; 2 Samuel 7:28).

Another positive aspect of Christian theism is the assurance of the presence and the power of God. In Genesis 1:1, the first line of the first book of the Bible speaks of God's existence and His awesome creative abilities.³ Recognition of God as the Source of all life gives my life, as a creature made in His image, importance and meaning (Genesis 1:26). God was purposeful in His design and creation of me, a sign that He desires a personal connection with me (Psalm 139:13-16, Luke 12:7, Ephesians 2:10).

Some of the alleged weaknesses of Christian theism are actually criticisms directed at the church. Many individuals perceive the church as a dull, boring, out-of-date, dreary, muddled, misguided sort of place.⁴ Although this is sometimes a reality, we should remember that humans are flawed, fallen creatures. The church, the body of Christ, should be a place that provides believers a sense of community and belonging. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), but being bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), all can be saved. As a community of believers, Christian theists are called to worship God, encourage others, and continually seek a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Development and Strengthening of Worldview

I believe that teaching, my chosen profession, gives me many opportunities to strengthen and grow in my worldview as an Adventist teacher in an Adventist school. As a Christian educator, I can make the study of the Bible a priority and daily be reminded of God's promises and endless love. Spending dedicated time

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in prayer and communication with God allows me to not only share with Him the burdens or joys of my heart, but also learn to listen to His voice patiently and silently. This period of time that the world paused due to COVID-19 restrictions has provided yet another chance for me to develop a more personal relationship with God.

Jesus' words found in Matthew 22:37 to 39 provide me with great motivation, both personally and professionally: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."'" Striving daily to be more like Jesus will ultimately enable me to demonstrate His transformative power in my life to my family, my students, and my colleagues. Every day, I seek to re-

commit my life to God and dedicate myself to a life of loving service to others.

Implications for Education and Professional Life

As an educator, I believe that my role in the classroom has great influence on the students and families I serve. As a Christian, my approach to each student is based on the guidance of Ellen White in *Education* where she wrote: "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do."⁵ Viewing my students as God's creation implies that each one is a uniquely crafted masterpiece and must be treated with care and respect. This means that my calling as a teacher is to help provide all of my students with educational experiences that help them to not only acquire knowledge through various disciplines but also, and more importantly, to develop a character that leads toward restoration and redemption.⁶

This also means that I must be well qualified scholastically and seek to grow continually in my development as a Christian professional. As I work to promote excellence in my students, I must also embrace the goal of self-improvement.⁷ The task of a Christian teacher is one of great responsibility! It calls me to be deliberate and intentional in all I say and do so that I constantly point students to God. This re-

quires that my life reflect the model set by Christ's life, and that my obedience to Him and His Word is constantly evident in how I live (1 John 2:3-6).

Ellen G. White's *Education* has much to say about the Christian teacher and classroom. As an ambassador for Christ, my primary focus is not just on teaching and imparting information to students. I desire "to inspire them with principles of truth, obedience, honor, and integrity, and purity—that makes them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society."⁸ Of teachers, White also said, "Love and tenderness, patience and self-control, will at all times be the law of their speech."⁹ Because children are attracted to a cheerful and sunny demeanor, in my classroom, I endeavor to show them kindness and courtesy that models how they should treat one another.¹⁰

Some of my other professional responsibilities are providing opportunities for my students to assume leadership roles, maintaining a welcoming learning environment that will engage and challenge every student to think critically and creatively in learning activities, as well as making myself available to both students and parents to provide assistance and timely feedback on student progress.

Implications for Diversity

In 1 Corinthians 12:15 to 18, we find an analogy of the church to the various parts of the body. Just as each body part is different in form and function, but necessary to making the body complete; likewise, each student who becomes part of my class contributes to making our class whole (Galatians 3:28). This analogy can also be applied to the many families of the students served by the school and to the community at large. Diversity in the classroom takes many forms. Differences in language, culture, religious beliefs, interests, and abilities are all student qualities that are to be embraced and celebrated. Embracing diversity has been a beautiful experience for me. My students and I have learned so many new and interesting things from one another that help make our learning much more enjoyable.

In my classroom, teaching with diversity means that I encourage my students to be independent thinkers. This involves helping them to see the value of study through questioning, searching for answers, and engaging in conversations with others to gain understanding.¹¹ Using many forms of differentiated learning¹² and instruction is also another important way to embrace diversity in my classroom. Recognizing that each student is an individual with unique needs allows me to customize learning experiences to meet these needs and create more meaningful connec-

tions between their lives and what we are learning in the classroom.

But most importantly, diversity in my classroom means showing all who enter my classroom the unconditional love of God. When Christ was here on earth, His ministry took Him to various places, and He mixed and mingled with many kinds of people. The Gospels are filled with stories that depict Him intentionally seeking out encounters with those who were ignored and dismissed by society—the ailing, women, and children (Matthew 8 and 9; John 4:1-26; and Mark 10:13-16). Jesus was deliberate in His interactions with others and always welcomed those who were considered unimportant, undeserving, or unlovable. The plan of salvation is not only for a select few, but available to anyone willing to accept God's gift (John 5:24). As a servant of God, it is my responsibility to embrace all those I am charged to care for and to strive to manifest God's love to all of His children.

Conclusion

As an Adventist educator, my personal and professional synthesis of worldview impacts my teaching practice. For this reason, I must intentionally engage in continuous reflection about what I believe and why, and above all, how it influences what I do. As I examine what I believe to be true about my personal worldview and profession, I strive to become more authentic and to have a greater impact on the lives of my students, their parents, my colleagues, and my community. ✍

This reflection has been peer reviewed.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Christian theists believe that God is the Creator, and that He is actively involved in the lives of all creation. Theists also believe that God is infinite, triune, transcendent, sovereign, and good. For more see James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14-44; George R. Knight, *Educating for Eternity: A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2016), 9.

2. Jeremiah 29:11-13. All Scripture references in this article are taken from the *New International Version* (NIV). Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

3. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 31.

4. Dallas Willard, ed., *A Place for Truth: Leading Thinkers Explore Life's Hardest Questions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 255.

5. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 17.

6. *Ibid.*, 255.

7. *Ibid.*, 281, 287.

8. *Ibid.*, 29.

9. *Ibid.*, 293.

10. *Ibid.*, 240.

11. _____, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), 35.

12. Differentiated instruction tailors the learning experience to individual student needs through adjusting the curriculum to students' skills and abilities. Pioneered by Carol Ann Tomlinson, the approach calls for continuous assessment and flexible grouping of students with similar skills. For more, see Institutes on Academic Diversity, "What Is Differentiated Instruction?" (2016): <https://differentiationcentral.com/what-is-differentiated-instruction/> and for videos, see <https://differentiationcentral.com/videos/>.



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