

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

TEACHING LITERATURE IN AN ADVENTIST
SECONDARY SCHOOL: A West Indian Perspective

by
Sandra E. Gayle

Principal
Willowdene High School
Spanish Town, Jamaica

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers of literature in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) schools and parents and guardians of SDA students often ask "Why do we teach literature? What do we really want to accomplish? Can any good thing come of literature?"

These questions often arise because for many years the SDA community has grappled with the idea of having literature in the curriculum. Many have argued about the great disadvantages to the young mind. Some have even advocated the elimination of literature from the classroom, especially after some read Ellen G. White's statements concerning the thrashy state of the fiction of her day. White (1923).

Yet, while one must wisely select what is put before the students, one is quite likely to agree that literature plays a crucial part in the formal education of the high school student, since it has much value.

Sire (1990) clearly states that literature forms a major window on human culture. He states that through the great works of poets, novelists and essayists we see the multiple splendors of the world. In literature, he declares, is a major value for Christians to be read with the mind awake as it embodies various worldviews. Walsh and Middleton (1977) point out that a worldview is never merely a vision of life. It is always a vision for life as well. They declare that our worldview determines our values. It helps us to interpret the world around us. It sorts out what is important from what is not, what is of highest value from what is least.

Literature really provides an enrichment programme. It broadens the scope of knowledge and communication skills and rightly guided by the Adventist teacher, can so enoble one's thought, and so enhance one's values that one cannot but have a good walk with man but moreso a closer walk with God. God is the Creator, the Creator who has also endowed man with the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment - even in written form.

Several authors have seen the benefits that the teaching of literature in a Christian setting can engender. Knight (1980) states that the belief in the reality of Jesus as Lord and Saviour and the trustworthiness of the Bible as the primary source of dependable knowledge not only accounts for the existence of a Christian school but often provides criteria for curriculum selection and emphasis including such diverse areas as the choice of music and literature.

White (1952) admonishes,

"True education does not ignore the value of scientific knowledge or literary requirements; but above information it values power, goodness; above intellectual requirements, character. The



world does not so much need men of great intellect as of noble character. It needs men in whom ability is controlled by steadfast principles."

It is because the writer of this essay feels that such a noble route can be taken to fit the high school student with values that can be derived from a study of West Indian Literature that this paper has been written. The purpose of this study therefore, is to sensitize those involved with the process of Adventist Christian Education with the whole idea of the value system associated with the teaching of West Indian Literature.

It is hoped that the teachers of West Indian Literature will find this work useful, and that in turn they will be able to transmit the importance and the value of literature to those who come under their tutelage

Rationale for teaching Literature

1. Literature books should be carefully scanned and a value system used for the selection process before students are asked to acquire them for study.

2. Just studying the genre-poetry, novel, short story-structure, language style, character sketch and themes is not satisfactory because the works are sometimes based on certain theories that conflict with the Biblical worldview. Integration of faith with the content is imperative in the Seventh-day Adventist classroom.

3. The ability to study literature and use language is God-given and should be carefully cultivated.

4. Literature is valuable in enabling us to realize our individuality, our humanity and our responsibility in upholding truth.

5. Students should be given every opportunity to grow intellectually, to use language, to understand their fellowmen and to begin to learn from the mistakes of others and to teach others to do likewise.

6. Since language learning is best conducted in pleasant school circumstances- suited to the students' interests and needs, the teacher of literature should prepare adequately to deliver his lesson under conditions conducive to learning

7. Students learn by precept and example. The Seventh-day Adventist teacher of literature, therefore, as emphasized by Honore (1996), should:

- a. have a personal knowledge of Christ, a growing knowledge of the Bible and a proven knowledge of human nature.



- b. should be a faithful, growing, capable, spiritual leader who knows the Lord, knows, believes and practices the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

8. The teacher of literature should be on guard to eliminate thrashy, frivolous texts from the curriculum- as such texts- documented by Ellen White (1923) are a powerful battery by which Satan tears down a simple, religious faith.

9. The use of fiction is to be directed by consecrated teachers whose aim is to glorify God and to encourage students to grasp the utmost from their educational endeavours in literature as well as other disciplines.

10. Literature is dynamic. Thus, the teacher should be prepared for continual growth both in himself and his students.

Objectives for Studying Literature

1. To generate in the students the desire to pursue language development even after they leave school.

2. To help students to realize, appreciate and enhance their God-given language potential.

3. To assist students to develop and maintain a God-like value system.

4. To enable students to develop a sense of judgement and critical discrimination.

5. To make available for students a wide variety of appropriate texts to develop their creative abilities.

6. To develop in students a wholesome respect for others- with their various backgrounds, culture, views and lifestyles.

7. To develop in the students the ability to critique justly and well.

8. To develop in the students the desire and the ability to communicate with their school mates, their elders and with God.

9. To enable students to develop the ability not only to understand various texts but to extract positive lessons for life from such texts.

10. To develop in the students the ability to communicate clearly, to respond correctly and to eliminate from their lives the wrong portrayed.

The Selection Process

The West Indian High Schools that are affiliated with the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) are sent guidelines for literature in the form of suggested reading lists. These lists are sent to the school every three years



and to a large extent, form the literature curriculum. There is usually a wide choice both of set books and thematic books.

Since the Seventh-day Adventist classroom must reflect the beauty of Jesus, as teachers seek to restore in each student the image of his Maker, the Seventh-day Adventist teacher of literature must use a value system in the selection of texts. Thus, the student of literature will be led to stabilize, to cement his thinking in God's word and in the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church. They will be led to appreciate that the world has beauty and worth and order. The student will not see literature merely as a means of relaxation -- nor as an escape from reality. They will, however, as a result of this selection, be enabled to respond appropriately, both to the order and beauty of good living and to the disorder and ugliness that sin has wrought. This will be the result of the integration of faith and learning. As Rasi (1996) declares, this integration of faith and learning aims to ensure that students, under the influence of Christian teachers, will have freely internalized Biblical values and a view of knowledge of life, and destiny that is Christ-centered, service-oriented and kingdom-directed.

Literature can be many-sided. It can make possible many different reactions. Some texts will provide enjoyment only. Others may make the reader callous or bitter or resentful, if he is not properly guided. As Gallagher and Lundin (1989) state - "We can use many works of literature for multiple purposes, others may serve only one. Some texts teach. Others amuse. Others give us joy in the gifts of God."

Sometimes the teacher of literature might need to study the life and aspirations of the author or poet and the era and the locality in which he lived. This is so, because in many instances the text may voice the conscious and subconscious thoughts of the writer and also the sentiments for the age in which he lived. If such statements embodied in the writing are wholesome, then all is well. If they are contrary to the word of God, then the teacher of literature needs to be aware of this and needs to be able to lead his students through without damage of their characters. If the teacher feels that he cannot do this because the language, the characters, the incidents are too tainted with violence, with callousness and with evil being glorified and triumphing over good, then his option might be either to seek specialized help in handling this situation or to seek other texts. Knight (1980) declares that some in choosing literature pieces for their classes might put forth, Philippians 4:8- "Finally brethren, whatsoever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worth of praise, think about these things." He, however, implies that this might be a shallow usage of this text since in the Bible there are stories that are sordid in the extreme with seemingly sexual immorality, mass murder and the basest passions (Judges 19-21). The answer as to why the Bible - the greatest literature text - includes

such stories may, he concludes, be in the fact that the Bible always places such stories in an interpretive framework that gives insight into human nature, shows the degradation that stems from sinful lives and how God came and saved His people. So too, should the teacher of literature use the texts to point out values for man. Knight (1980) adds that the function of literary study in a Christian school is not to help us become learned in the great authors of the past and the present, but rather, it is to help us to use some of their writings to view the issues of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, with clarity and sensitivity.

Yet, the Seventh-day Adventist teacher of literature is not expected to go out of his way to select the 'unlovely' in order to prove that this too has merit. Rather, as far as possible, he should do everything in his power to help the students in his literature class, both in his selection of texts and the interpretation of the texts, to think critically, to distinguish good from evil to accept the beauties of the good and to benefit from value lessons from the evil, the ugly, and from the guilt, the violence, and the exploitation of their fellow men.

Value system from the selection of texts

In the Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Curriculum - English (1990), it is stated that most of the content differences between a Seventh-day Adventist Secondary School and other schools will be in the affective domain. These differences will relate to what is perceived as the quality of merit in studying some genres of literature, particular passages from genres of the literature, certain types of language situations and certain types of drama. Emphasis placed on morals and ethics will also create differences. The teacher, of course, will be key to emphasize what is believed to be positive Christian values.

Holmes (1994) points out that we need to ask how values are transmitted. He declares that young people assimilate values more from example than from precept, more from their peers than from their elders and also more by being involved than by merely looking on. The community can act as a catalyst to get students interested and active in upholding values. Holmes (1994) emphasizes that Plato in his Republic, urges selectivity in the use of literature and the arts because they too transmit values.

A list of values and the diagram for the continuum expressing values for language and literature, taken from the Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Curriculum - English, is in the appendix for extensive use by the teacher of literature.

Methods of Integrating Faith and Learning

Not only is developing the habit of integrating faith and learning- of teaching values connected with the content- one of the goals to be achieved by the teacher. It is also a goal to be achieved by the student. While the student cannot and should not be expected to make a spiritual relationship to everything he reads, and should not expect the teacher to give him a spiritual parallel to every aspect of every poem, short story, novel or other literary work read, there should be an alertness developed in both student and teacher to spot lessons of truth. Such a practice while not overdone, handled unobtrusively builds faith, values and Christian experience.

Suggested Activities for the Teacher and Student

1. The teacher should do necessary research on topic, book or work in order to be an effective facilitator. At times the cooperative work of teacher and student could be a part of the decision-making process, as far as selection is concerned.

Topics and texts should illustrate value priorities of Adventist Christians. The teacher should have a personal Christian philosophy and worldview that is objective. He should lead the students to affirm a personal Christian philosophy helping them to open their minds and draw parallels, make spiritual illustration and form analogies.

It is a fact that the teacher is a very important link in integrating faith with learning in the classroom. In actuality, the most effective way to integrate the subject of study with Christianity is through the teacher who has a genuine worldview. This is so because it is largely the teacher who will gradually condition the worldview of the students. Holmes (1994) points out,

"The teacher is the key to a climate of learning. His teaching is his ministry. His enthusiasm about ideas, his scholarship, and the importance he places on teaching provide a model.... It is important that the teacher be transparently Christian as well as enthusiastic and careful scholar, and that he not compartmentalize the two but think integratively himself."

In the teaching of West Indian Literature, the teacher will find that thematic study is very important in transmitting values. The theme of nationhood, of national identity for example could be used to show not only the true worth of patriotism to one's country but by extension the value of the heavenly heritage, of the supreme excitement of preparing for citizenship and of

eventually achieving citizenship in the new world. As the themes are studied, there will be found a unifying element that gives meaning.

2. The teacher could divide the class in cooperative working groups for some assignments. The teacher should use knowledge of the class, their cultural background, their age group, their maturity, their aspirations or current class climate to decide when and how the division should proceed.

3. In selecting activities, as in selecting texts, the teacher should be conscious of the need to build a picture of the worldview and Adventist lifestyle.

4. Assignments or projects should be given to each individual or each group assignment dealing with the text content and the values that can be identified. They should know, and while not necessarily condoning with the particular West Indian culture that is being portrayed, be able to appreciate the setting and reasons for actions -- for example, slavery in the West Indies. Students could be encouraged to brainstorm and/or to use the method of reader-response criticism where the student should assert his values and beliefs during the process of reading. This allows the student to react to the text actively, emotionally but rationally, and to note the response. Teacher, as a catalyst and guide, can ask leading questions.

Some possible questions are:

- (i) What is the message and value expressed in this scenario?
- (ii) What feelings are evoked?
- (i ii) What values are neglected by this choice?
- (iv) How do you evaluate the author's stand?
- (v) How does the method used here differ from Christian methods and how is this way not right?

- (vi) Why have you taken your particular position on this issue and would you have taken this position if you were the person involved or closely related to this person?

- (vii) How do you justify the position you have taken?
- (viii) Was the chief character's choice just, true, sensible, worthwhile?

- (xi) How will this help you to be a better person? The text should be viewed holistically. Students should be led to observe how faith directs learning and how learning is enriched (ennobled) by faith.

5. The teacher could have individuals keep a journal at intervals- with relevant points gathered from particular exercises.

6. Students should be encouraged to make practical implementation of desired behaviours and each should note the reactions to:



- (i) himself/herself
- (ii) the target person/persons
- (iii) the class
- (iv) the school
- (v) the larger society (in time)

Students should be taught to find meaning in the poem or story- not by moralizing but by discovering.

7. The teacher should keep relevant samples of:

- (i) students 'outcomes
- (ii) students 'feedback
- (iii) teachers 'feedback

The West Indian Perspective

According to Brown (1989) there is no denying that in many crucial respects, West Indian Literature is an outgrowth of the Western literary tradition. Yet West Indian writers have preferred to define their work with reference to what they perceive as a distinct West Indian experience. The West Indian writer has been the most insistent, the most persuasive articulator of a West Indian consciousness which defines a special cultural identity in the region and its literature, and which, consequently, endows that literature with a unifying principle and a corporate rational image. Thus, West Indian literature often portrays a distinctive ethos in terms of its social structures, its politics, its history. It emits an identifiable West Indian experience.

West Indian literature then, will include slavery and its horrors, colonizations and the resolute spirit that some of the exploited exhibited. Conversely, it will include callousness possibly caused by the pain of the process. It includes racism. This does not mean, however, that these negations of the past are absolutes of the West Indian condition. There is achievement, creation, pride of place, nationhood building with its joys and cultural consciousness. Through all this struggle for selfhood, is the ambivalence of references to the culture of Great Britain- the mother country.

Consequently, major themes of West Indian Literature include: attitude to authority, attitude to power, dreams and aspirations, encounters, family life, freedom, growing-up, heroism, the individual, love, men and women, national identity, nature, religion, sexuality, society, socio-economic handicaps and violence.

All these themes, can be used in the integration of faith and learning. Values can be identified and worthwhile lessons learnt.

The Teaching of Poetry

While the teaching of poetry might be challenging, the Christian teacher can lead his class to accomplish much.

Biblical poetry can be used as examples or as reference. The teacher should make every effort to arrive at the relevant questions - those involving theme and application.

In the poem "Nature" by H. D. Carberry, the students could be led not merely to see the seasons mentioned but also to see nature's God, the beauty of God's creations and also for further thinking- beautiful human nature.

In the "Castaways" by Claude McKay, the poet evokes beauty of nature and then beauty of concern of the castaways. More Christian values could be drawn out from this poem- by the students.

The Short Story

From the short story as from every other genre, much value can be elicited as students are led to:

- (i) examine plot, themes, setting and characterization
- (ii) find an alternate ending
- (iii) say what good could have accrued had circumstances been different

- (iv) record what lessons one might learn for positive growth
- (v) list what prerequisites one needs for making judgements, criticisms and recommendations for growth or for positive change of worldview.

Conclusion

The Christian teacher of literature has many ways of integrating faith with content. The writer is merely whetting the appetite of the teacher concerning the vast store house of values than can, through a study of literature with its colourful culture, be transmitted to the youth who in turn, it is hoped, will continue to extract their own values as well.

As a result of the long era of suspicion with which the church views literature as a school subject, acceptance of the teaching of literature as a worthwhile subject will not happen overnight. Literature teachers need to take up the torch of integrating faith and learning.

Much more work than praying before the class begins or of pointing out the very obvious values, needs to be accomplished. Christ should be seen as the centre of every lesson. Awareness of the dangers of dualism, -- that is having no integration of faith and learning; awareness of the mandate of the sacred truth given to every teacher to help to restore in each student, the image of his Maker, must ever be seen as important.

As Gallagher and Lundin (1989) put it "A Christian understanding of literature needs to be built upon doctrines that have been derived from the Scriptures and developed through the course of Christian history" Then, says Sire (1990) we might begin to understand who we are as a human family in all our diverse and glorious yet fallen splendors. So to the frustrated teachers, to the worried parents and students who might have become confused over the issue of the teaching of literature I say, "Something good, very good can come out of literature."

Nature

by H. D. Carberry

We have neither Summer nor Winter
 neither Autumn nor Spring
 We have instead the days
 When gold sun shines on the lush green canefields-
 magnificently

The days when the rain beats like bullets
 on the roofs
 And there is no sound but the swish of water in the
 gullies
 And trees struggling in the high Jamaica winds.

Also there are the days when the leaves fade from
 off the guango trees
 And the reaped canefields lie bare and fallow in the sun.

But best of all there are the days when the mango and the
 logwood blossom.
 When the bushes are full of the sound of the bees and the
 scent of honey
 When the tall grass sways and shivers to the slightest breath
 of air
 When the buttersups have paved the earth with yellow
 stars
 And beauty comes suddenly and the rains have gone.

The Castaways

by Claude McKay

The vivid grass with visible delight
 Springing triumphant from the pregnant earth
 The butterflies, and sparrows in brief flight
 Dancing and chirping for the season's birth
 The dandelions and rare daffodils
 That touch the deep-stirred heart with hands of gold.

The thrushes sending for the their joyous trills,--
 Not these, not these did I at first behold!
 But seated on the benches daubed with green,
 The castaways of life, a few asleep,
 Some withered women desolate and mean,
 And over all, life's shadows dark and deep.
 Moaning I turned away for misery
 I have the strength to bear but not to see.

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VALUES

Listed below are a group of values which the framework committee have identified as being important to English teachers. This checklist is not exhaustive, and will doubtless be added to over time. Teachers will also use values from outside the list for it is just a starting point to give teachers some ideas for planning. They should resist the temptation to refer to masses of values in lessons and units.

Academic Values

Ability to exercise judgment in reaching conclusions.	Intricacy
Accomplishment	Knowledge
Accuracy	Logical thought and expression
Achieving	Mastery
Alertness	Neatness
Ambition	Objectivity
Application	Openness
Brevity	Orderliness
Carefulness	Organization and structure of ideas.
Caution	Perception
Clarity	Perseverance
Coherence	Persuasive mode of expression
Cohesion	Planning
Competence	Precision of language
Conciseness	Preparation
Consistency	Principle
Cooperation	Progress
Critical Analysis	Purposefulness
Critical Evaluation	Pursuit of Truth
Determination	Quality
Development	Reason
Diligence	Relevance
Discernment	Self-criticism
Discrimination	Self-discipline
Efficiency of text	Self-expression
Enquiry	Self-motivation
Evaluation	Sensibility
Exactness	Sensitivity
Excellence	Simplicity
Expertise	Sincerity
Explicitness	Skill
Explorativeness	Studiosness
Flexibility	Tenacity
Fluency	Tentativeness in research
Forcefulness of presentation	Thoroughness
Good workmanship	Tidiness
Imagination	Tolerance
Independent thinking	Truth
Insight	Use of Resources
Intellectual curiosity	Validity
Intellectual honesty	Wisdom
Intellectual tolerance	Zeal

Aesthetic Values

Alternation	Integration
Attractiveness	Originality
Balance	Poise
Beauty	Preparation
Clarity	Realism
Composition	Reality
Conservation	Repetition
Construction	Responsiveness
Contrast	Rhythm
Creativity	Sentiment
Delicacy	Serenity
Design	Shape
Discord	Simplicity
Diversity	Spontaneity
Dominance	Subtlety
Economy	Surprise
Elegance	Symmetry
Fluidity	Tone
Gradation	Understatement
Gracefulness	Uniqueness
Harmony	Unity
Impact	Variety
Inspiration	

Social and Cultural Values

Acceptance	Encouragement
Accountability	Enthusiasm
Affection	Environment
Affirmation	Equality
Altruism	Equity
Appreciation	Fairness
Approval	Family
Attractiveness	Freedom
Autonomy	Friendship
Awareness of heritage	Geniality
Candidness	Good health
Charisma	Graciousness
Charity	Gratitude
Cheerfulness	Happiness
Christian marriage and home	Heritage
Citizenship	Honesty
Cleanliness	Hospitality
Confidence	Humaneness
Cooperation	Humanity
Courtesy	Humility
Culture	Humour
Decisiveness	Independence (action)
Dependability	Independence (choice)
Devotion to family	Independence (thought)
Dignity	Individuality
Diligence	Influence
Empathy	Integrity

Interdependence
 Leisure
 Liberty
 Liveliness
 Loyalty
 Modesty
 Nobility
 Optimism
 Organization
 Parenthood
 Participation
 Patriotism
 People
 Personal growth
 Pleasure
 Politeness
 Positive outlook
 Prestige
 Pride in school
 Punctuality
 Purity/virtue
 Quiet
 Recreation

Reliability
 Respect (authority)
 Respect (race)
 Responsibility
 Rights of others
 Safety
 Sanity
 Security
 Self confidence
 Self control
 Sense of community
 Sensitivity
 Service
 Sharing
 Supportiveness
 Sympathy
 Tactfulness
 Thoroughness
 Thoughtfulness
 Tolerance
 Unanimity
 Willingness to be involved

Christian Values

Awareness of moral, Christian issues
 Benevolence
 Cheerfulness
 Compassion
 Concern
 Contentment
 Cooperation
 Courtesy
 Devotion
 Duty
 Earnestness
 Empathy
 Ethical sensitivity
 Faith in God
 Flexibility in moral judgment
 Forgiveness
 Freedom
 Gentleness
 Genuineness
 Goodness
 Grace
 Honesty
 Holy life
 Hope
 Humility
 Integrity
 Justice
 Kindness
 Liberality
 Lifestyle

Long suffering
 Love
 Loyalty
 Meekness
 Mercy
 Mission
 Modesty
 Moral integrity
 Obedience to law
 Patience
 Peace
 Perfection
 Personal worth as a child of God
 Purity
 Purpose
 Purposefulness
 Religion
 Repentance
 Responsibility for moral decisions
 Rest
 Reverence
 Righteousness
 Selflessness
 Self-control
 Self-motivation to develop faith
 Self-realization
 Self-respect
 Sense of worth in God's eyes
 Sensitiveness
 Service

Sincerity
Solemnity
Spirituality
Stewardship
Tactfulness
Temperance
Tenderness
Thankfulness
Tolerance

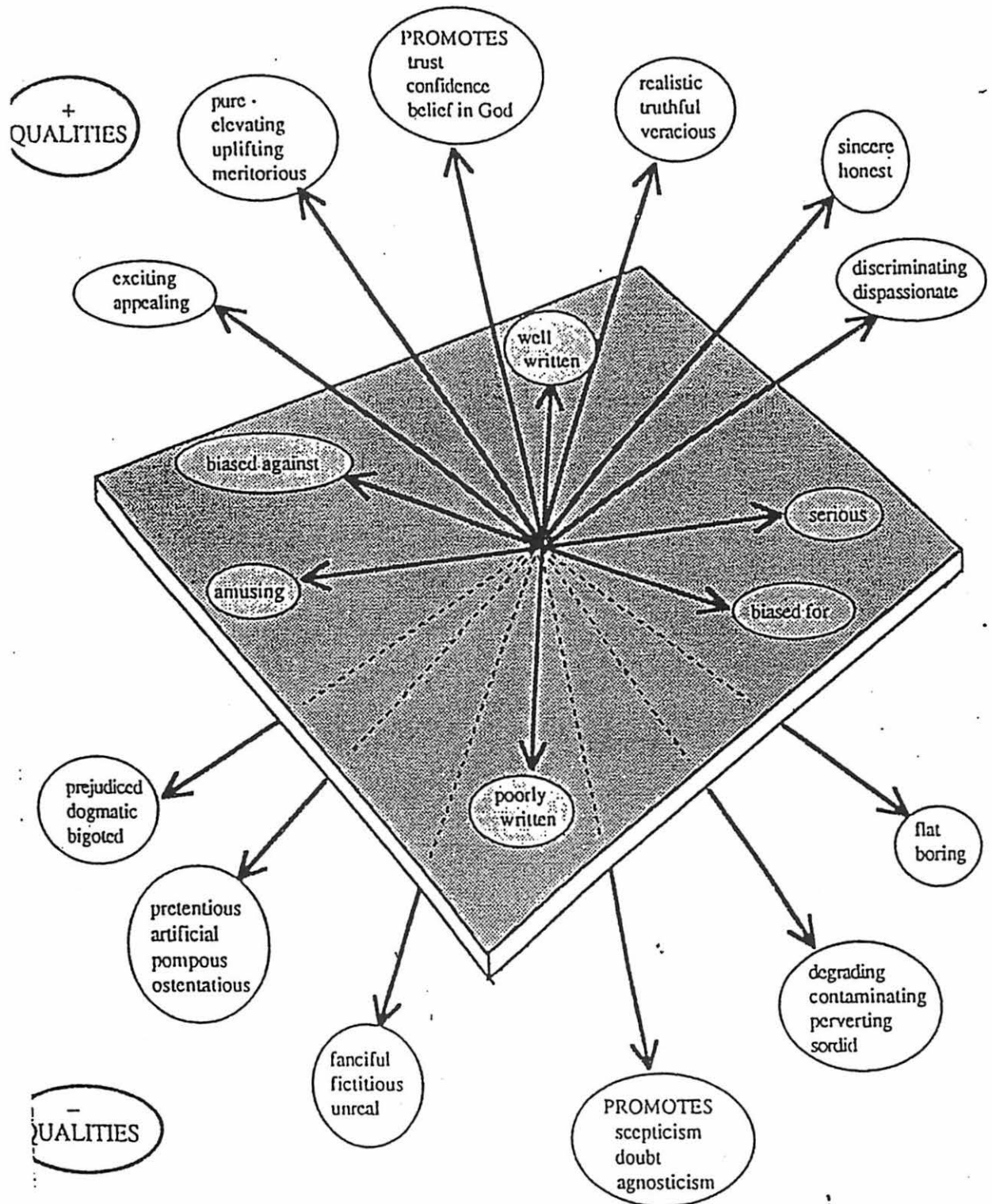
Trust in God
Trustworthiness
Truthfulness
Understanding of ultimate truth
Unselfishness
Uprightness
Virtue
Wholistic lifestyle

Vocational Values

Adaptability
Adventure
Astuteness
Authority
Career awareness
Certainty
Clarity
Challenge
Conservation
Consideration
Cooperation
Creativity
Curiosity
Decisiveness
Dependability
Determination
Directness
Economy
Education
Efficiency
Entrepreneurship
Flexibility
Foresight
Forethought
Forthrightness
Frankness
Good workmanship
Imagination
Impartiality
Industriousness
Ingenuity
Initiative
Integrity
Intuition
Leadership
Lucidity
Mastery
Neatness
Open-mindedness
Openness
Perception
Perceptiveness
Persistence

Pride of achievement
Pride of workmanship
Punctuality
Reasonableness
Recognition
Reliability
Repetition
Resources
Respect
Security
Service
Significance
Sobriety
Spontaneity
Stability
Success
Technology
Thoroughness
Time
Tolerance
Wealth
Work Ethic

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CONTINUUMS EXPRESSING VALUES FOR LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE



This diagram shows three-dimensionally the range of values that must be considered when choosing text for Christian schools. The higher up the continuums of moral worth – the more 'above board' – the more acceptable the selection. Values shown on the board are morally neutral.

INTEGRATION OF FAITH IN LITERATURE

