

The Philosophy and Practice of Christian Service

*Helping students to
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*To hear is to forget
To see is to remember
To do is to understand*

"Oh, you're beautiful! You're just beautiful!" exclaimed the tiny gray-haired woman as tears ran unchecked down her face. Two students from a Michigan junior academy, wearing happy clown faces and colorful suits, quickly knelt by her wheelchair. Each taking a hand, they asked if they could pray with her.

After thanking God for this special lady and asking Him to meet her daily needs, they softly sang "Hallelujah." Through eyes still swimming with tears but bright with appreciation and joy she repeated, "You're so beautiful!" As the girls moved quietly away to bring cheer to other residents of the nursing home, they thanked God for the beautiful experience of serving one of His suffering children.

Helping students to experience the responsibility and satisfaction of serving others should be a major concern for educators of both public and private schools. Adventist education must provide service-learning in order to prepare our students to take their role in the "Global Mission" of the church prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

Service-Learning in the Curriculum

Curriculum is much more than books and science projects. It covers every aspect of student learning and experience provided by the school. Service education can help Adventist schools achieve the ideal of a "balanced education" that combines theory and practice.

Public educators recognize the instructional advantages of service and its importance in

B Y E D W A R D M . N O R T O N

citizenship training. However, Christian educators have additional motivations for including service in the curriculum. In her book, *Dynamic Approaches to Teaching High School Religion*, Doherty writes that service programs "provide experiences that lead to a sense of responsibility: for bringing the Christ within. . . to others, especially the poor and neglected."¹ This emphasis on a Christ-centered life of faith and service makes Christian education unique. Human beings, created by God, find in Him their Father and in each other a brother or sister.

Jesus Christ was the perfect Revelation of the God who serves and cares. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus took His disciples aside and explained to them the principles of the heavenly kingdom. They were jostling for prestige, power, and position in Christ's earthly kingdom. Jesus lovingly rebuked them as follows:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV).²

The apostle Paul saw service to others as the essence of the Christian life. He offered this inspired instruction: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the

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sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13, NIV).

Freedom is a recurring theme in Christian literature. Originally, humans enjoyed union with God and the freedom that sprang naturally from love. However, such freedom also involved responsibility. Wolterstorff says:

We are responsible to God for how we act with respect to God. We are responsible to God for how we act with

respect to ourselves and our fellow human beings. We are responsible to God for how we act with respect to nature.³

The requirements for responsible action are found in the laws of God. Jesus explained God's moral law to a lawyer in these familiar words:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40, RSV).⁴

One's responsibility to fulfill this law of love involves love to God, respect for self, and service to others.

Christ Restores Freedom to Serve

As a result of sin, human beings lost both the capacity and desire to love and serve one another. To regain these traits, humanity needs to be transformed through Christ, whom God "presented . . . as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25, NIV). All of Christian restoration and accomplishment comes as a result of Christ's death on the cross, through which we have been reconciled to God the Father (2 Corinthians 5:19). Here Christian evangelism and Christian education become one.

How do evangelism and education work together? Gaebelein explains: "The transformation of human nature by the power of Christ cleanses the central spring of man's energies, changing his desires to accord with Scriptural ideals."⁵ The good news about salvation through Jesus Christ is therefore vital for Christian education if it is to become a training ground for service. It brings new life and a new capacity to share life. This is the meaning of Christian freedom. "To be free for God," writes Groome, "is to be free for others. To say yes to God and to obey God's will requires that we love and serve the people God loves and calls to freedom with us."⁶

Service in Christian Education

Christian fellowship involves nurture. The witness of the Christian community involves evangelism and service. One of

the most important ways that the church can fulfill its nurturing-witnessing responsibilities is through Christian education.

All too often the Christian community and its schools are occupied with items of lesser importance. When the members or students are not trained to be a witnessing-serving community, Russell calls it "miseducation." "Christian education" he says, "is missionary education by definition."⁷

Nothing in the educational process is more easily overlooked, however, than practice. Cognitive concerns often take precedence. Training for service, including practical experience, should become a designed part of the Christian curriculum. It must never be left to chance or it will be overlooked.

A tremendous responsibility rests upon the administrators and staff of Christian schools to clearly define their educational philosophy and to conscientiously plan and carry out a program of practical service. Lockerbie writes:

What we need in Christian schools are men and women, boys and girls, who are living examples of what the Bible teaches. This means calling upon administration, teachers, students, parents to put our knowledge of the Bible into practice in what the New Testament calls service. Loving God with our souls is no amorphous kind of piety; it shows itself in concrete action. Someone has said, "The way we treat others is the way we treat God."⁸

To accomplish this goal, the Christian school must break out of its overemphasis on the "city of refuge" syndrome and reach out to a needy community and world. The motivation for such service comes from a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and an identification with His purpose for living. The love of Christ for erring humanity becomes the

Christian's motivation for service.

Seventh-day Adventist Schools to Be Model Schools

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and subsequently its educational system were established because of a conviction that the return of Jesus Christ was imminent. Time and again Ellen White repeated such phrases as "time is short," "Christ's coming is near," and "the perils of the last days are upon us."⁹ In anticipation of this great event, "the last warning message to a sinful world"¹⁰ needed to be spread quickly. Thus children and youth had to be educated, trained, and sent out to serve.

Both then and now, Adventist schools are to prepare students to carry out God's grand design—"the great work of saving souls."¹¹ The following series of statements clearly indicate the objectives of these schools:

1. "All should feel that our schools are the Lord's instrumentalities, through which He would make Himself known to man."¹²
2. "Our schools are to be educating schools and training schools."¹³
3. "The education that is needed now is one that will qualify the students for practical missionary work."¹⁴
4. "He [God] calls upon our young people to enter our schools, and quickly

fit themselves for service."¹⁵

5. "In these last days, children's voices will be raised to give the last message of warning to a perishing world. . . . Our church schools are ordained by God to prepare the children for this great work."¹⁶

6. "Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these youth may be educated and trained so that all the powers will be given to God's service."¹⁷

Ellen White envisioned education as preparing young people to serve humanity in a worldwide mission program. In view of the soon return of Jesus Christ, and to prepare students for the duties of everyday life, the church's comprehensive education was to have a singular purpose—service to humanity.

The Great Controversy Theme

To Ellen White, spiritual issues could be understood only in the context of the great controversy between good and evil raging in the universe. The central point of that contention has never been God's power. Rather, it is His character.

In heaven one of the highest created beings rebelled against God and sought to misrepresent His government and character.¹⁸

Unselfishness, the principle of God's kingdom, is the principle that Satan hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the great controversy he has endeavored to prove God's principles of action to be selfish.¹⁹

An understanding of these basic issues is essential to comprehend Ellen White's philosophy of redemption and education.

Christian Education—A Preparation for Service

Christian education must concern itself with the student's conversion and character development. Since education and redemption are one, restoring the loving

nature and unselfish character of God in the student must precede action.

The student's conversion. Ellen White is definite about the basic foundation principles of Christian education. "The converted student has broken the chain which bound him to the service of sin, and has placed himself in the right relation to God."²⁰ In order for the love of God to be their motivation for living, young people must have an experiential relationship with Christ.

This divine love entering the soul inspires it with gratitude, frees it from its spiritual feebleness, from pride, vanity, and selfishness, and from all that would deform the Christian character.²¹

The Christian teacher has a responsibility that goes far beyond a grasp of academic subjects, as important as such knowledge may be. "Every instructor of youth is to work in harmony with this prayer (John 17:1-3), leading students to Christ."²² Restoration of the image of God in humanity is "to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life."²³

The student's training for service. No method of education better develops character and unselfishness than service to others. Ellen White's most-often quoted statement on service to others presents four basic principles of Christian education:

*Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.*²⁴

Another quotation from the last page of the same book emphasizes the importance Ellen White placed on service as the goal of education:

In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found—witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew "the riches of the glory of this mystery;" "which is Christ in

TAXONOMY FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

An evaluative criteria for Christian service, based on a Christian educational taxonomy, can help define the motives of the staff and students, as well as the nature of the service projects themselves. This can help to raise them to the conscious level through identification and evaluation. There are three levels of motivation with ascending sublevels: Individual-Selfish, Corporate-Ethical, and Individual-Selfless.

Individual-Selfish

(Based on individual self-centered choices—"What's in it for me?")

1. **Use people:** Manipulate and obligate them, seek to get something in return
2. **Self-approval:** Get a good feeling, receive attention from others
3. **Security:** Help others in order to receive help in return
4. **Remuneration:** Invest money, goods, time, services to receive in kind
5. **Fear:** Motivated by fear of the group, political system, religion, God
6. **Cover guilt:** Attempt to drown feelings of guilt or inadequacy
7. **Dissatisfaction:** Desire for practical action rather than theoretical-abstract experiences
8. **Competition:** Seek to outdo others, earn points
9. **PR:** Get a good write-up, publicity.

Corporate-Ethical

(Based on *phileo*—human affection—love, humane treatment, and group ethics: humanistic, political, and religious)

1. **Requirement:** Force, coercion—physical or psychological
2. **Mutual survival:** Help each other to maintain existence
3. **Habit:** Environmental, cultural motivations—it's popular, others are doing it
4. **Political:** To promote the good of the state or church
5. **Respect:** Ranges from tolerance to a recognition of the worth of others
6. **Democratic principle:** Unity in diversity, cooperation, responsibility, caring, justice as motivations
7. **Satisfaction of human needs:** Concern for less fortunate, philanthropy

Individual-Selfless

(Based on *agape*—divine principle—love, possible only as the individual responds to God's grace and power, resulting in conversion and transformation of moral nature, reflecting the nature, motives, and self-sacrificing life of Christ.)

1. **Freedom:** Release from dominion of selfish, sinful nature (not free as yet from sinful habits, inherited and cultivated tendencies), free to love and serve others
2. **Joy:** Share "good news," inner peace, and happiness
3. **Gratitude:** Share God's gracious gifts
4. **Responsibility:** Use God-given talents, time, and skills for benefit of others
5. **Human worth:** Regard self and others as children of God, redeemed at an infinite price through the blood of Christ
6. **Impartial:** Serve others regardless of race, creed, color, status, etc.
7. **Self-sacrificing:** Lose self in needs of others—friend or enemy—regardless of approval, ridicule, abuse, persecution
8. **Glory to God:** Desire the whole world to know what God is like: He loves, He cares, and gives even to the sacrifice of Himself.

Such an instrument, once fully developed, might provide an appropriate means for evaluating the people and the programs involved in the service projects by the faculty, curriculum committee, and service-projects committee.

A Taxonomy for Christian Service (Edward M. Norton, doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, 1985, pp. 246-248).

you, the hope of glory."²⁵

Such an education is also the source of happiness and fulfillment for the student. "Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty."²⁶ Such unselfish characteristics are best developed by doing. In applying the principle to Christian education, Ellen White presented two interrelated principles: (1) skill is gained in the work itself²⁷ and (2) "acquaintance . . . awakens sympathy, and sympathy is the spring of effective ministry."²⁸ She believed that by personally helping someone in need students would develop skills and a caring attitude.

The "Eventful Period"

Ellen White felt that youth was the time of greatest social consciousness and concern about the needs of others. Educators should not neglect this "eventful period."²⁹ They should utilize the energy and social consciousness of youth.

"Even in seeking a preparation for God's service, many are turned aside by wrong methods of education," Ellen White wrote. "Life is too generally regarded as made up of distinct periods, the period of learning and the period of doing—of preparation and of achievement."³⁰ Education is not just preparation for life. It should include both learning and doing, study and practice. The same thought is brought out in "True Education a Missionary Training."³¹

Overflowing with energy, eager to test their untried capabilities, they must find some outlet for their superabounding life. Active they will be for good or for evil.

To surround them with such influences as shall lead them to choose a life of service, and to give them the training needed, is our first duty. . . .

It is the use they make of knowledge that determines the value of their educa-

*tion. To spend a long time in study, with no effort to impart what is gained, often proves a hindrance rather than a help to real development.*³²

Ellen White believed that young people with varied talents from all cultures and walks of life were called to prepare themselves, through Christian education, to serve God and society. She wrote: "They all need an education that they may be fitted for usefulness in this

*accountants, skillful artisans, successful tradesmen. It is his ambition to inspire them with principles of truth, obedience, honor, integrity, and purity—principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society. He desires them, above all else, to learn life's great lesson of unselfish service.*³³

Ellen White saw a singular purpose for Christian education and a world view for its ministry. Through a consecrated and educated people the God who has been maligned and misunderstood was once more to be revealed as He really is.

Ellen White believed the youth of the church had a right to this kind of education. In fact, she went so far as to teach that "Those who reject the privilege of fellowship with Christ in service, reject the only training that imparts a fitness for participation with Him in His glory."³⁴ Under the direction of consecrated teachers, students would respond. Their lives and service to others would reveal God's loving character, thereby helping complete Christ's ministry of reconciliation to a lost world.

Summary

Service to others, according to divine revelation, is an integral part of Christian education. Adventist education should be Christ-centered, Bible-based, and service-structured.

Through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, God made it possible for humanity to be reconciled and set free. In that freedom we can once again love and serve others.

Christian education has been designed to aid in this restoration; it is a divine support system for the home and the church. Adventist schools are to lead children and youth to Christ and to train them for service to others—the privilege of freedom. This means broadening the curriculum to include experiential edu-

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life, qualified for places of responsibility in both private and public life."³³

The Teacher's Role

Teachers should model the life of Christ and choose subjects and experiences that direct their students toward the goal of service-structured education. They "should have the true missionary spirit, for the children are to be trained to become missionaries."³⁴

The true teacher is not satisfied with second-rate work. He is not satisfied with directing his students to a standard lower than the highest which it is possible for them to attain. He cannot be content with imparting to them only technical knowledge, with making them merely clever

survive. They are also more likely to use birth control.—Reported by *American Demographics*, May 1991.

Apprenticeships for Success

In olden days, a youngster learned to make a living by serving an apprenticeship with a skilled craftsman. Apprenticeships remain a common practice in Europe today, even for young people who attend college.

U.S. students aren't so lucky. "For the 50 percent of our young people who leave school with a high school diploma or less, there are few viable paths to the future," states a new report on vocational education. "Poorly educated, unskilled, and unprepared for the future, these young people drift from one low-wage job to the next."

Helping young people avoid this future and obtain the training necessary for good-paying jobs is the goal of *Youth Apprenticeship, American Style: A Strategy for Expanding School and Career Opportunities*, published by the Consortium on Youth Apprenticeship, Jobs for the Future, 48 Grove St., Somerville, MA 02144 (Send \$4 to receive a copy).

To improve vocational education, the study recommends a mix of academic and occupation-related instruction "at a level of quality sufficient to certify the ability of individuals to perform entry-level tasks in skilled occupations." Specifically, the study recommends a three-year apprenticeship program that encompasses the final two years of high school and—to ensure the education level needed in today's technical workplace—one year of community college.

The proposed apprenticeship model could begin as early as seventh grade, when students would begin to "explore a wide range of occupations and careers, through site visits, work 'shadowing,' job sampling, and employer visits to schools. In tenth grade, students [would] begin to receive career counseling, interview employers, and seek apprenticeship openings."

An actual apprenticeship would last

three years. In 11th and 12th grade, students would spend part of each week learning academic, technical, and occupational lessons relevant to their chosen field. They would also spend part of each week in on-the-job training. After graduation, they would attend a community college for one year, but spend "the bulk of their time at the work site developing their skills in preparation for their final certification examination."

The report flatly rejects the idea that an apprenticeship program would limit students' futures. "Some 50 percent of our young people . . . are tracked right through . . . school and then simply shunted out into the world of work without the skills to survive there."—Reported by *The American School Board Journal*, May 1991.

Community Service and Grades

In a report by Terry Anderson on San Marcos, California, community-service programs that stressed values, educators reported that within three years test scores were up 26 percent for eighth graders and 29 percent for high-school seniors. The dropout rate was 1.9 percent compared with the state average of 21.2 percent.—Reported by Donald Ratcliff and James A. Davis, ed., in *Handbook of Youth Ministry* (Religious Education Press, 1991), p. 195.

Guest Editorial

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to the Christian principle of selfless service to and affirmation of others.

A Different Schedule

A different educational philosophy requires a different daily and weekly schedule. Class time has to be adjusted to include service-learning activities. Though this is one of the most difficult tasks facing the administrator and curriculum committee, it can be accomplished if teachers and administrators

make it a priority.

One aspect needs special attention—that of bringing together the school, the church, and the home to serve the needs of the community. In addition to the service-learning experience at school, the Sabbath needs to be rediscovered and utilized in the manner patterned by Christ, to do good to others.

A Different Training of Student Leaders

Peer pressure is a dynamic influence on campus. Young people look up to student leaders and listen to their advice. This presents a challenge to the staff. They must provide training and guidance to help the student "stars" become models of compassionate concern and unselfish love to others, rather than simply being celebrated for their captivating personalities, athletic skills, or academic achievement.

A Different Student Recruitment Program

Perhaps the reason why many schools are struggling financially is that parents and church members fail to see a significant difference between the Adventist school and public school. This would change if the school challenged students to live out their Christian commitment through service to others. The spiritual atmosphere of the school and the changes in student attitudes would inspire parents and young people to support and join this dynamic Christian community. Using this philosophy as the basis for student recruitment just might ensure the survival of Christian education! ✠

Based on Edward M. Norton, Implications for Service-Learning in the Curriculum, doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, 1985, pp. 240-254.

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cation. Practice adds focus and purpose to theory.

The critical "ingredient," of course, is the teacher. Our teachers need the training and the freedom to include service-learning in the educational program. They need the encouragement and support of church members and administrators to accomplish this sacred task. As one sophomore student wrote after sev-

eral years of service-learning:

It's so exciting to be involved in a great work such as this and I hope and pray that every school in the world can take on a program such as Bible Labs. It's a blessing that lingers with you forever. It also helps you to be more prepared, happy, and enthusiastic young people to carry on the most sacred and special work on earth. It's like a fire, a fire that starts very small, but becomes bigger and bigger until everyone can see it and witness it, and feel it. Bible Labs may be the start of that fire. It ignites our spirits and nurtures it until it becomes a roaring fire and it cannot be contained. It spreads everywhere leaving its path and influence behind for all to see. It's God's fire and with His help we are His flames."—Tammie Kroehler, Wilson Junior Academy, Wilson, Michigan. ❧

Dr. Edward M. Norton, coordinator for this issue, is Associate Superintendent of Education for the Michigan Conference of SDA, Lansing, Michigan. He has had major responsibilities for Bible Labs in the Washington and Michigan conferences, and has served on the General Conference Bible Textbook Steering Committee. A former teacher at all levels from elementary through tertiary levels in the United States and Argentina, Dr. Norton's doctoral dissertation dealt with service-learning. His enthusiasm, persistence, and hard work helped make this issue on service-learning a reality.

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2. Texts in this article credited to NIV are the *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.
3. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), p. 9.
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27. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
29. CPTS, p. 501.
30. *Education*, p. 265.
31. —, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1905), p. 32.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 396, 402.
33. CE, p. 193.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
35. *Education*, pp. 29, 30.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
37. Bible Labs, a service-learning program was first piloted in the Washington Conference of the North American Division. Subsequently, Michigan and about 12 other conferences have been in-serviced in the program. For further information, correspond with the author of the article, Dr. Edward M. Norton, Associate Superintendent of Education, Michigan Conference of SDA, P. O. Box 19009, Lansing, MI 48901. Telephone (517) 485-2226.

Sharing Pictures of Jesus

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years of marriage. He asks to have his name removed from the church books. The students carefully choose Bible verses to write on cards they have made. Two older students deliver the cards. He takes the cards and quickly walks off, leaving the students wondering if he is offended. Later a friend tells us that he was fighting back tears, and quickly went into the house where he read and reread the pile of cards.

Three eighth graders travel to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, with Sue, our substitute teacher. Her brother, who works in Russia, has asked that they visit a Russian teenager with a rare blood disease. They bring him a small gift and a card and return with a gift box of candy from Russia and a large book on Russian art.

The drivers say that the ride back to school after Bible Labs sounds like a beehive. The children share experiences with the people they have visited.

We meet immediately upon returning from Bible Labs to share the

afternoon's events. The children talk freely about their day. Though most of the activities have gone well, some have experienced difficulties. The teachers acknowledge and empathize with the students. They ask the class for suggestions and ways to solve the problem.

Effects on Students' Lives

Do the students think Bible Labs have made a difference in their lives? We talk about that once a quarter. Students say that Bible Labs have helped them to be less selfish. The program has helped them to think of ways to be of service on their own outside of school. The students also say that Bible Labs help them to organize and plan their daily lives. They are less fearful in new situations.

I have also observed a growth in social skills and personality development. Their "people" skills improve the longer they are involved with Bible Labs.

Our Bible Labs coordinator models the love and joy of service. She spends many hours of volunteer time on the phone, driving the students to their destination, and participating in the activities. She sees the results of her planning and the impact of a structured service program on everyone involved. She too shares the rewards of serving.

Scheduling Activities

Not every school is able to obtain a coordinator for the Bible Lab program. Even without a coordinator, many activities are fairly easy to schedule. There are always cards to be made. My students have literally made hundreds of cards for the sick, discouraged, or mourning and for prayer pals.

Set up a schedule to visit a local nursing home using regular drivers. Or sponsor an orphan, as we do. Once a month the students bring a dollar they have earned. This provides enough money to pay for half a sponsorship for Milca, a little girl in an orphanage in Central America.

Whatever service activities you choose, do them with commitment and love. Help the students understand that they are spreading pictures of Jesus to the community by their actions. Start small; the Lord will bless your efforts and open doors for your students to serve. ❧

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