

# HE UPHOLDS THE CAUSE OF THE OPPRESSED AND GIVES FOOD TO THE HUNGRY. THE LORD SETS PRISONERS FREE, THE LORD GIVES SIGHT TO THE BLIND, SUSTAINS THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOW BUT HE FRUSTRATES THE WAYS OF THE WICKED

Jesus charges His church to be salt and light in a world compromised by spiritual decay, disease, suffering, and social unrest.<sup>1</sup> Our Christian calling requires us to demonstrate His compassion and to minister to hurting humanity. Jesus' profound solidarity with the dispossessed provides a glimpse into the very heart of God and enlightens us regarding our duties toward others. Throughout history, through social engagement, Christians have taken seriously their Master's command.

## Roots of Christian Social Engagement

The church's teachings on social engagement are rooted in Old Testament anthropology, prophetic calls for righteousness and justice, the life and teachings of Christ, and the New Testament call for love and service. The biblical account of Creation informs us that humankind was made in God's image (Genesis 1:26, 27). Therein lies the basis of the inherent dignity and worth of all humans, with serious implications on how we treat one another. We are duty bound to honor, respect, and give priority to the needs of human beings, as well as the rest of God's creation.

God cares for humankind and the relationship we have with one another, and has defined this concern in terms of the core values of righteousness and justice. Through Moses, God told the emerging community of Israel that they were not to take advantage of the weak or strangers among them (Exodus 22:21). They were not to allow the perpetuation of poverty and debt (Leviti-

cus 25). They should periodically observe the Year of Jubilee, marking the celebration by freeing the slaves and proclaiming liberty to all, thus providing a corrective to human debt and fractured relationships.

God's extraordinary concern for the oppressed and poor is clearly portrayed in Psalm 146, where David reflects on the inherent goodness of God, which was to remain as an enduring part of Israel's social fabric: "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, . . . sustains the fatherless and the widow, . . . but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (vss. 7-9).<sup>2</sup> God is concerned with the suffering and hurt of humanity, and He expects no less of His followers. A claim of allegiance to God, such as Christians make, demands that they embrace their social engagement with the spirit of righteousness, love, justice, caring for the needy and the poor, and relating with dignity with the less fortunate—all for the glory of God and in celebration of the knowledge that as humans, we all share the same divine image.

The prophets of Israel can, indeed, serve as models for engagement with the poor; they often expressed God's interest in and care for the poor and the oppressed. Amos calls God's people to justice and righteousness: "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (5:24). Micah raises a fundamental question about the divine expectation of every person. The answer is a direct and fundamental call for human duty: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). In refer-

# PEDAGOGICAL MODELS FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

BY RAMONA L. HYMAN AND ANDY LAMPKIN

ring to fasting—a common religious practice—Isaiah subjects it to God’s new definition: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (58:6, 7). Jeremiah reminds us that God hears the cries of the captives, downtrodden, and oppressed and promises a time of peace and security, respite, and restoration (30:5-11).

These and other prophetic statements express God’s overwhelming concern for humanity and His special concern for “the least” among us (see Matthew 25:40). The scriptural references

cited above also emphasize God’s compassion and concern for human wellbeing. These references do not support a dichotomy between spiritual and physical wellbeing. They clearly indicate that God values human beings and wishes them well.

Nowhere is this more exemplified than in the life and teachings of Jesus, which provide numerous examples of His concern for humankind. Indeed, the primary motive of Jesus’ coming into the world is well summarized by one of the best-known passages in the Bible: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The same disciple who wrote those words tells us that “having loved his own who were in the world,” Jesus “loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

The Gospels record many examples of Jesus’ love in action. Matthew tells us that when Jesus “saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matthew 14:14). Matthew also records that when Jesus saw two blind men, He “had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him” (20:34). Luke takes Jesus’ own words to define the Savior’s mission in terms of social engagement: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (7:22).

The first Christians attempted to model Jesus’ acts of compassion and taught one another to do the same. In Colossians 3:12, Paul exclaimed, “Therefore as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” In writing to Ephesians, Paul re-

minded Christians to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you” (4:32). Peter also expresses the duty to be compassionate: “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8).

### **Pedagogical Models of Social Engagement**

Adventists, from their early beginnings, recognized their Christian duty to serve hurting humanity. The Millerite Adventists were quite vocal in their opposition to the evils of slavery in the U.S. and spoke out forcefully against it.<sup>3</sup> Some were quite actively involved in its abolition.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, early Adventists were outspoken against the harms of alcohol and provided key leadership to the temperance movement.<sup>5</sup> They also provided leadership in national religious-liberty debates.<sup>6</sup> Former president of the world church, Jan Paulsen, stresses the importance of social justice in the formation and practice of the Seventh-day Adventist worldview: “I want Seventh-day Adventists to be known as people who lift high their commitment to hope and peace. Let us speak from the pulpit and show through our actions that we oppose anything that instills hatred or inflames violence.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, promoting social justice and social engagement are very much a part of the tradition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In addition to Adventist faith and practice, in America, the social gospel and American civil rights movement emerge as pedagogical models of Christian social engagement. The social gospel movement, conditioned by biblical faith, had as its goal to ameliorate the social ills that confront society, particularly the plight of the poor. The Afro-American church in the 1950s and 1960s fueled the civil rights movement, supplying much of the leadership, financial resources, and vision.

If the next generation of Adventists is going to continue the noble Christian tradition of social ministry and engagement, administrators and teachers must include these activities in the curriculum. In this regard, it is helpful to examine what other institutions have done.

Throughout history, a number of institutions have taught students the importance of social responsibility. One example from the civil rights movement that can serve as an international model is the successful collaboration of educational and church organizations to achieve social engagement, as was demonstrated in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. Faculty at Alabama State University educated their students about the moral wrongs of segregation as an affront to the dignity and worth of all human beings. One of the professors who modeled the pedagogical model of teaching students how to be socially engaged was Jo Ann Robinson. In December of 1955, when Rosa Parks was arrested for breaking the bus segregation law, many of Robinson’s students protested and agitated against the violation of Parks’ human rights.

Stirred by her religious, political, and professional convictions, Robinson organized her students. Together they circulated 50,000 leaflets encouraging Montgomery citizens to boycott city buses on Monday, December 5, 1955. The leaflet read: “Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for

*“In the Christian faith the final law in which all other law is fulfilled is the law of love.”*

—Reinhold Niebuhr,  
*Christianity and Society*  
(Summer 1950).

a white person to sit down. It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing [sic]. This has to be stopped. Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you. . . . This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off of all buses Monday."<sup>8</sup>

The students at Alabama State University, with their professor, supported the idea of fairness and democracy through social engagement and became student activists, thus aiding in the desegregation of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama. This call for integration and racial equality slowly spread across the nation, until the U.S. Congress passed several laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



**Oakwood University students preparing to engage in community-centered activities on Agape Day.**

In the larger American context, movements like the Montgomery Bus Boycott are models of how the teachings of Jesus can inform the struggle for the rights and welfare of all people.

### Seventh-day Adventist Models

Pedagogical models of social engagement that seek to improve the condition of humankind are being replicated today in Seventh-day Adventist institutions.

- Each year the faculty, students, and administrators at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, come together to engage in community-centered activities on Agape Day, when the college family volunteers in the community. They participate in a variety of programs, such as tutoring at elementary schools and volunteering at a food bank. These real-life experiences help to sensitize students and faculty alike to the needs of the communities where they are called to bear witness and serve. One former student, Toson Antwan Knight, says, "This program has helped me to realize how important it is to give back to your community. I had the opportunity to volunteer at an elementary school. Participating in Agape day has taught me to love and care for everyone, even if I am not getting paid to do so."<sup>9</sup>

- Another example of a successful student/faculty partnership illustrating social action is the National Association for the Prevention of Starvation (NAPS). Founded by Dr. Anthony Paul, its stated mission is "to mitigate hunger, poverty, and disease, and to improve education and food security among suffering people, both nationally and internationally, regardless of race, religion, or nationality."<sup>10</sup> Following the teachings of Jesus, NAPS, through collaboration among faculty, students, and administrators, has launched several campaigns to relieve the suffering of hurting humanity, nationally and internationally. NAPS members assisted with the clean-up and recovery after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. They provided relief to survivors of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and have built schools in remote villages around the world. Closer to home, they have engaged in local service efforts in the Huntsville, Alabama, area and the desperate poverty-stricken Afro-American belt region in the South. NAPS is a successful model for socially conscious partnerships between



**Above: The Enactus team from Washington Adventist University was named a regional champion at a March 23, 2013, competition held in Baltimore. Right: A Loma Linda University dental student participates in SIMS.**



faculty, students, administrators and community needs.

- The Community-Academic Partners in Service (CAPS) sponsored by Loma Linda University (Loma Linda, California—LLU) provides community service, volunteerism, and service-learning opportunities for LLU students. Among its many outstanding programs are the Healthy Neighborhood Project, in which university students mentor primary and secondary school students; and Project Hope, which links expectant teen parents with student mentors who together attend health and parenting classes.

Like many other Adventist colleges and universities, LLU provides opportunities for its students to engage in short-term mission service. Its program, Students for International Mission Service (SIMS), enables students to provide basic health care to underserved populations worldwide. Through its partnership with more than 40 Adventist hospitals throughout Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania, SIMS makes it possible for LLU students to serve the global community.<sup>11</sup>

- The Enactus team from Washington Adventist University (WAU) in Takoma Park, Maryland, formerly Students in Free Enterprise, was named a regional champion at a March 23, 2013, competition held in Baltimore. The event was one of 10 regional competitions being held across the United States during March and April where college students showcase how they use business ventures to help others in their communities.

“Our students presented three local projects they were involved with to a panel of judges under a rigid set of competition standards,” said Weymouth Spence, WAU president. Spence expressed pride that the 44 WAU students and their projects were among 62,000 from 38 countries representing 1,600 universities and 7.3 million project volunteer hours towards a common commitment. Participating students use business concepts to develop

community outreach projects, transform lives and shape a better, more sustainable world. During this academic year, the WAU team organized eight projects in the Takoma Park community, including Job Quest, a partnership with Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington that provides job-readiness training for unemployed residents.<sup>12</sup>

- La Sierra University in Riverside, California, has recently been named a Presidential Awardee in the 2013 President’s High Education Community Service Honor Roll, which was presented to university President Randal Wisbey during the annual meeting of the American Council on Education. This is the highest honor a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service learning, and civic engagement. The university was cited for its efforts during the 2011-2012 school year to aid southeastern California residents through various outreach programs, including service-learning classes.

Programs in which La Sierra University students have recently participated include the Home and Homelessness Class (History Department), which works with local residents to better understand the challenges of housing for those who are homeless, and helps people in group homes to assess their financial and personal situations in order to help them get into some type of housing. La Sierra students also work with Operation Safehouse, a temporary group home for street kids and runaways, helping the residents earn their high school diploma and acquire employment skills. Social work students get involved in government Lobby Days, when they make a trip to the state capitol to lobby for changes that benefit society.<sup>13</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has many other educational models of socially engaged evangelism. Continuing to educate our students in the challenges of life and their duty to help make the world a better place remains an implicit purpose of the church. Seventh-day Adventist schools and houses of worship are spiritual and educational outreach centers; they function as beacons of life that provide respite in a troubled world. ✍



**As part of a service-learning history class on the Vietnam War and its aftermath, students from La Sierra University (Riverside, California) partnered to interview veterans and record their personal oral histories. At the end of the quarter, the students and veterans joined in an event (above), during which the students presented personal gifts to “their veteran” and reflected on how much they had learned and how deeply the experience had affected them.**



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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Matthew 5:12-16.
2. All Scripture passages in this article are quoted from the New International Version. Scripture quotations credited to NIV are from The Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
3. Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd.; and New York: St. Martin’s/Palgrave Press, 1998), pp. 74-77. See also Charles Teel, Jr., “Bridegroom Cry” or ‘Babylon Call’: The Millerites Mainstreamers or Marginals?” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 57:1 (October/November 1994):23-29.
4. Ibid.
5. “Temperance,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1976).
6. Plantak, *The Silent Church*, op. cit., pp. 14-16.
7. Jan Paulsen, “Five Things the World Needs to Know About Us,” *Adventist World* (May 2008): <http://www.adventistworld.org/index.php?issue=2008-1005>.
8. Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*. David Garrow, ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 46. This is the original content of the leaflet distributed throughout Montgomery prior to the boycott on December 5, 1955. The content underscores the idea that the boycott was a community effort; Rosa Parks was not alone in her protest. Before her, Claudette Colvin had been arrested.
9. E-mail message to the author, May 1, 2010.
10. National Association for the Prevention of Starvation Website (May 5, 2010): <http://www.napsoc.org/about-us>.
11. Visit the SIMS Website (<http://www.lluglobal.com>) for news stories, videos, and photos.
12. Adapted from [http://www.columbiaunion.org/article/1249/news/2013-news-archives/march-27-2013-wau-s-enactus-team-wins-at-u-s-regional-competition#.UVxgyl\\_D-ot](http://www.columbiaunion.org/article/1249/news/2013-news-archives/march-27-2013-wau-s-enactus-team-wins-at-u-s-regional-competition#.UVxgyl_D-ot).
13. E-mail message from Susan Patt to the JAE editor, April 4, 2013; and information from Darla Martin Tucker, La Sierra University Public Relations.