

SOCIAL JUSTICE

A YOUNG ADULT'S ENCOUNTER WITH ELLEN WHITE *. . . ON SOCIAL JUSTICE*

I never thought a lot about Ellen G. White. I knew she existed and was highly regarded within our church. I had read a few required readings here and there during my school years, but I never really paid much attention to any of it until I found the following passage: "Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. . . . He came to give [men] health and peace. . . . None who came to Him went away unhelpt. . . . The Saviour's work was not restricted to any time or place. His compassion knew no limit. . . . Wherever there were hearts ready to receive His message, He comforted them with the assurance of their heavenly Father's love. . . . His life was one of constant self-sacrifice. . . . Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching." ⁸⁹

*Two years ago I started to work online with teens in crisis. Some are pregnant and unmarried and don't know where to turn; some are in abusive homes or relationships. But all of them are looking for someone to care, someone to let them know that it will be OK in the end. And what better person to show that than Christ? And what better place to read about how He helped people than in the book *The Ministry of Healing*?*

The principles from the chapter "Helping the Tempted" are so relevant to my work. I cannot help these kids by pointing out their mistakes to them. I can't preach at them and tell them what they

did wrong and throw them back out on the street. They need someone to reassure them that someone still loves them and that they still matter. And after reading The Ministry of Healing, by Ellen G. White, I have learned through Christ's example, as explained in the book, to go about that in a better way.

—Jodi, age 21

SCRIPTURE

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you (Isaiah 58:6-8).

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-46).

Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble (Psalm 41:1).

Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3, 4).

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him (Proverbs 14:31).

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full (Proverbs 19:17).

In Matthew 25 Jesus identifies Himself with His suffering people. Jesus is hungry and thirsty. Jesus is the stranger. Jesus needs clothes. Jesus is sick. Jesus is in prison. When you are enjoying a wide variety of delicious food, Jesus is famishing in farm worker housing not far from you.

Jesus says, "When you closed your door in My face, while your beautifully decorated rooms were unoccupied, I had no place to lay My head. When your closets were filled with trendy and expensive outfits, purchased with money that could have helped the needy, I had no comfortable clothes. When you were enjoying health, I was sick. While you roamed free, misfortune cast Me into prison, disillu-

sioned Me and stigmatized Me, depriving Me of freedom and hope.”

What solidarity Jesus expresses between Himself and His suffering children! He makes their case His own. Their misery is His misery. Take note, selfish Christian: Each neglect of the needy poor, the homeless, the fatherless, the prisoner, is neglect of Jesus.⁹⁰

When you doled out the small pittance of bread to the starving poor, when you gave those flimsy garments to shield them from the biting frost, did you remember that you were giving to the Lord of glory? “All the days of your life I was near you in the person of these afflicted ones, but you did not seek Me. You would not consider friendship with Me. I know you not.”⁹¹

The poor have as much right to a place in God’s world as have the wealthy. The principles from the book of Leviticus are given by our merciful Creator to lessen suffering, to bring hope and sunshine into the lives of the destitute and oppressed.

The Lord says Stop! to the inordinate love of property and power. Great evil results from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy becomes a monopoly, and the poor, though in every way fully as worthy in God’s sight, are considered and treated as inferior to the more prosperous. The sense of this oppression arouses the passions of the poorer class. There is a feeling of despair and desperation that demoralizes society and opens the door to crimes of every description. The regulations God established in Leviticus were designed to promote social equality.⁹²

God’s Word prohibits policies that will enrich one class of persons through the oppression and suffering of another class. The person who takes advantage of someone’s misfortunes for monetary benefit, or who seeks a profit through another’s

weakness or incompetence, breaks the law of God.⁹³ Society abandons the poor to misery and degradation, not caring that many have been brought to the depths of poverty by illness or misfortune, often through the dishonest scheming of those who live by preying upon the less fortunate.⁹⁴

There are entire communities in which families live in substandard housing, with little furniture and clothing, without books or equipment for work, destitute both of comforts and conveniences and means of culture. These families must be educated to the potential for improvement. How can this be done where poverty is prevalent, where long-held habits and attitudes of defeat must be met at every step? Certainly, this work is difficult. The necessary reformation will never be made unless men and women are assisted by a power outside themselves. While helping the poor in temporal things, always keep in view their spiritual needs.⁹⁵ It is God's purpose that the rich and the poor shall be closely bound together by the ties of sympathy and usefulness. Those who have money, talent, and ability are to use these gifts in benefiting humanity.⁹⁶

Real charity helps men and women to help themselves. If someone asks you for food, you should not turn that person away. True philanthropy means more than mere gifts. It means a genuine interest in the welfare of others. We should try to understand the needs and environment of the poor and distressed and give them the help that will benefit them most. To give thought and time and personal effort costs far more than merely giving money. But it is the truest charity.⁹⁷

Often, the most effective way to help the poor is to offer education in practical lines, providing opportunities for job placement training, cooking classes, and personal finance. Those who are taught to earn what they receive will more readily apply fiscal responsibility. In learning to be self-reliant, they are also empowered and equipped to help others.

Many persons who struggle financially would benefit from learning economic management. Teach the importance of living up to the potential Christ gives to each person.⁹⁸

Jesus sought to correct the world's false standard of judging the value of men and women. He took His position with the poor that He might lift the stigma from them. He has stripped the prejudice from poverty by blessing the poor and inviting them to inherit His kingdom. He points us to the same path He walked, saying, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).⁹⁹

We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect blessings back to us. The law of mutual dependence runs through all classes of society.¹⁰⁰

Each of you can find something to do for the less fortunate. "You always have the poor with you," Jesus said (John 12:8). Each of you can find opportunities to help. Millions and millions of human beings, ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never heard that Jesus loves them. What if their condition was ours, and ours were theirs? What would we want them to do for us? The answer to that question is what we are obligated to do for others. Christ's rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).¹⁰¹

(For additional reading on this subject we recommend *Gospel Workers*, *The Ministry of Healing*, and *Welfare Ministry*.)

THINK ABOUT IT

Identify several things we can do for young adults who are abused and hurting.

1. How did Jesus suggest we could help those with special needs? (See Matthew 25:31–46.)
2. Briefly characterize several principles of “real charity.”
3. If you were poor and destitute, what would you want most from others? Rank your three most desirable choices.
4. In “that great judgment day,” what will Christ present before the nations as the basis of our salvation?