

The Philosophy and Practice of Christian Service

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

*Helping students to
experience the
responsibility and
satisfaction of serving
others should be a major
concern for educators of both
public and private schools.*

*On Service Day, La Sierra University students
offer free blood-pressure screenings to
people at the Riverside Plaza Mall, California.*

*Students from Tri-City Junior Academy, in Saginaw, Michigan, made
lap robes for senior citizens as part of their Bible Labs.*

"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.

*"Clowns for Christ" from Wilson SDA Junior Academy, in
Michigan, visit residents of a nearby nursing home.*

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? Gaebelien 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

Students from Battle Creek Academy (Michigan) paint an elderly woman's fence as part of Paint Blitz, a city beautification project.

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, untrammled 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 peri-

ods, 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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Community Service Day, held quarterly at Walla Walla College, in Washington State, helps keep students in touch with the needs of the world in which they live.

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

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.³⁷ 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.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
13. FCE, p. 114.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 517.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 545.
16. CPTS, p. 176.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 534.
18. _____, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1913), p. 338.
19. _____, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1903), p. 154.
20. FCE, p. 514.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 431.
23. *Education*, p. 16.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
29. CPTS, p. 301.
30. *Education*, p. 265.
31. _____, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1905), p.
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.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M. Michael Doherty, *Dynamic Approaches to Teaching High School Religion* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1969), p. 69.
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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5. Frank E. Gaebelein, *Christian Education in a Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 273.
6. Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub., 1980), p. 87.
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9. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1913), p. 522. (Subsequently abbreviated as CPTS); _____, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assoc., 1923), p. 488. (Subsequently abbreviated as FCE.)
10. _____, *Counsels on Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1968), pp. 222, 114. (Subsequently abbreviated as CE.)

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education. 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-