



Ella Louise Smith Simmons

Finding Equality at the Foot of the Cross

In her 2009 article, “The Galilean Jesus: Creating a Borderland at the Foot of the Cross,”¹ Sophia Park tells a gripping story of identity crisis and newfound hope. She asserts that the “Gospel’s invitation to join and participate in a ‘borderland community’ created by Jesus on the cross”² provides this new hope and identity.

Although Park’s case study deals with Asian immigrant women, it has relevance for all women. She regards *dislocation* as the key to comprehending both identity crisis and hope. For Park, dislocation represents the experience of those who have relocated to an unfamiliar place and includes a person’s physical, mental, emotional, and social being. Overcoming dislocation means finding one’s place and operating successfully in more than one culture. This process “often implies suffering caused by receiving ‘multiple and opposing messages.’”³

In addition, dislocation often marginalizes individuals, leaving them “voiceless, invisible, and powerless.”⁴ This describes well the plight of women in most situations throughout the world, including in the church.

Girls and women experience this dislocation and powerlessness in educational and work settings. According to a recent study, although females comprise more than 50 percent of the workforce and fill nearly 50 percent of the entry-level professional positions, they make up only 21 percent of senior executives, 17 percent of members of the U.S. Congress, and 15 percent of board directors. In addition, with little change from decades ago, women earn about 19 percent less for fulltime work in the United States than their male counterparts.⁵

Education statistics are dismal for girls and women in many developing countries. Reports from the United Nations indicate that two-thirds of the 120 million children who lack access to education are female; in 70

countries, no girls have access to education at any level in any formal setting.⁶

The fact that this is still true in the 21st century presents an imperative for teachers and educational administrators, particularly those who operate Seventh-day Adventist schools. Educators have a responsibility to actively resist gender stereotypes and to help girls realize their identity as children of God who are equal to their male counterparts. The church must work to ensure that all God’s children get appropriate education and encouragement in order to achieve God’s plan for their lives. As they collaborate to achieve this goal, educators will be a blessing to all of their students, the church, and to humanity in general.

Studies have demonstrated the value of women’s contributions—everything from children’s health to family economic status depends largely upon the education of the mother. Adventist education has an opportunity to make a real difference in the world by properly preparing girls for the roles and functions God has for them in the home, workplace, church, and community. Organizations with a significant number of women in leadership and gender-balanced work teams function more productively than those that favor either gender.⁷

In these last days, when the Lord wants to pour out His Spirit on all people and to accomplish marvelous works through both men and women, the contributions of both genders are needed in balance in the home and in the church, including in leadership. Recently, a male member of the General Conference Executive Committee pointed out the obvious gender imbalance in that body—the church’s second-highest decision-making entity. Similar disparities exist in many of the church’s other institutions, which tend to overlook or deny

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glass, "Principles and Philosophy." In *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1998), pp. 344-353.

5. _____, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publ. Assn., 1923), p. 119.

6. Kent L. Koppelman, *Understanding Human Differences: Multicultural Education for a Diverse America* (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2008).

7. James A. Banks and C. A. M. Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1989).

8. Ibid.

9. James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2008).

10. Margaret Zamudio, Francisco Rios, and Angela M. Jaime, "Thinking Critically About Difference: Analytical Tools for the 21st Century," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 4 (2008):215-229.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Drew Nesdale, "Social Identity and Ethnic

Prejudice in Children." In P. Martin and W. Noble, eds., *Psychology and Society* (Brisbane, Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press, 1999).

15. Thomas D. Yawkey and Jacqueline Blackwell, "Attitudes of 4-Year-Old Urban Black Children Toward Themselves and Whites Based Upon Multi-Ethnic Social Studies Materials and Experiences," *Journal of Educational Research* 67:8 (April 1974):373-377.

16. Michael J. Weiner and Frances E. Wright, "Effects of Undergoing Arbitrary Discrimination Upon Subsequent Attitudes toward a Minority Group," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 3 (1973): 94-102.

17. The quotations in the three-element response are taken from Mara Sapon-Shevin, "Speaking Truth and Acting Powerfully" in *Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2010), pp. xv, 267.

18. Beverly J. Gimmestad and Edith De Chiara, "Dramatic Plays: A Vehicle for Prejudice Reduction in the Elementary School," *The Jour-*

nal of Educational Research 76:1 (1982):45-49.

19. Kathleen Ernst, *Trouble at Fort La Pointe* (Middleton, Wis.: Pleasant Company Publications, 2000). Additional books such as Yukio Tsucheya's *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People and War* (English translation: Houghton Mifflin, 1988) regarding the events at the Tokyo Zoo in 1943, and Margaret Barbalet's *The Wolf* (Ringwood, Victoria: Puffin, 1994), about an Australian family's life, can be used to help introduce students to the realities of hardship and poverty, and help them take a stand against prejudice and discrimination. Mara Sapon-Shevin's book, cited in Endnote 17, contains a variety of creative ideas.

20. Mary van Ments, *The Effective Use of Role Play*, 2nd ed. (London, England: Kogan Page Publishers, 1999).

21. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, op cit.

22. Nancy J. Ramsay, "Teaching Effectively in Racially and Culturally Diverse Classrooms," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8:1 (2005):18-23.

23. Ibid.

24. Adapted from Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, op cit., p. 69.

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membership to women, who comprise the majority of the church's membership and could contribute richly to church, school, and administrative boards at all levels. Ensuring that they receive appropriate training to fill these roles will help ensure a more appropriate balance, thereby illustrating our belief in the equality of all people in Jesus Christ.⁸ Cindy Tutsch, in her book, *Ellen White on Leadership*,⁹ describes the "clarion call" that "is threaded throughout [Mrs. White's] counsels to educators, administrators, parents, and pastors" for the restoration of God's image in humanity. She notes that Ellen White's progressive social voice and her egalitarian views of leadership caused her to reject personal attributes, including gender, as "predictors or limitations to God's leadership calling."

Two Seventh-day Adventist emphases have far-reaching implications for recognizing and developing the gifts and talents of every young person: the belief that all our children shall be taught of the Lord,¹⁰ and the current focus on revival and reformation. These require that the church recognize and empower all, male and female, to answer God's call to service, no matter where it may lead.

Park asserts that "Galilee in Jesus' time was a place where various Mediterranean cultures intersected. From [the dominant] religious perspective, Galileans were seen as impure and suspect. The Galilean Jesus represents the dislocated who live in liminal space and for whom he envisions new life."¹¹ We must catch that vision for new life in 21st-century Adventism as well.

Truly, Adventist education must be available to all of our children and youth, and genuine revival and reformation must include organizations as well as individuals. When we consciously endeavor to empower all to fulfill their God-given potential in the ministry to which God calls them, He can bless without restraint and will empower the church to finish His work.—Ella Louise Smith Simmons.

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2. Ibid., p. 420.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Center for Work-Life Policy. May 21, 2010; Bobby Childers, "Women in the Workplace: Overcoming Gender Stereotypes," *Harvard Business Review Blog Network* (June 1, 2011); National Public Radio, "Women in the Workplace Still Face Inequality" (October 19, 2009); United States Department of Labor; *Pyramids, The Catalyst Pyramid: U.S. Women in Business* (October 2011).

6. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, *Children out of School: Measuring Exclusion From Primary Education* (Quebec, Canada: 2005); Gordon Brown, United Nations High Level Segment on Education, *Education for All: Beating Poverty, Unlocking Prosperity, Speech* (Geneva, Switzerland: July 2011) and <http://www.campaignforeducation.org>.

7. Childers, "Women in the Workplace: Overcoming Gender Stereotypes," op cit.; David Brown, "A Mother's Education Has a Huge Effect on a Child's Health," *The Washington Post* (September 16, 2010); Pedro Portes, "Maternal Verbal Regulation and Intellectual Development," *Roeper Review* 11:2 (December 1988):106-110; Pedro Portes, Tito E. Cuentas, and Madelon Zady, "Cognitive Socialization Across Ethnocultural Contexts: Literacy and Cultural Differences in Intellectual Performance and Parent-Child Interaction," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 161:4 (March 2000):79-98; United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report, *Education Counts: Towards the Millennium Development Goals* (New York and Paris: UNESCO, 2011).

8. See Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:26-28; Romans 10:11, 12; and Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1898), p. 403.

9. See *Ellen White on Leadership* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2008), pages 124 to 127.

10. Joel 2:16; Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1952), p. 234; _____, *Child Guidance* (Nashville: Southern Publ. Assn., 1954), p. 307.

11. Park, "The Galilean Jesus," op cit., p. 420.