

## Modelling Christ: Our Responsibility

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*Several years ago, I received "Counsels on Education" by Ellen G. White from my mother. As I read through, I was struck with the significant role that I have, and that we each have, to be a co-labourer with God as Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I share these reflections upon the counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy, with the hope that we all can be edified.*

### **Patience and Love**

"Since man cost heaven so much, the price of God's dear Son, how carefully should ministers, teachers, and parents deal with the souls of those brought under their influence. It is nice work to deal with minds, and it should be entered upon with fear and trembling. The educators of youth should maintain perfect self-control. To destroy one's influence over a human soul through impatience, or in order to maintain undue dignity and supremacy, is a terrible mistake, for it may be the means of losing that soul for Christ" (Counsels on Education, 33)

Business theory suggests that the most important person to an enterprise is the customer or client. The next most important person is the worker who is closest to the customer, be it the customer service representative or the front-line factory worker. As we consider this, we realise that the students are the most important people in our schools, not just because their tuition pays our salaries, but more so because God bought each and every one of them, at an inestimable price. "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life." (John 3:16 New Century Version)

Keeping in mind that the students with whom we interact in our classrooms, our offices, and on the campuses have been purchased by God, the way in which we deal with them must consistently demonstrate that high value. The call is for patience, love, and respect, particularly for those of us in whom pride is an area of struggle. If we believe that our positions give us the right to demand obedience and respect from others, then we will be elevating ourselves. We recall that our example, Jesus Christ, made himself a servant, and it is His example that we strive to follow. "He gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born to be a man and became like a servant." (Philippians 2:7)

Elevating ourselves above our students, and giving them the feeling that they are not valued as God values them, will give them good reason to reject the God we claim to represent. Let love be the guiding principle.

### **Modelling Christ**

"All connected with the college must be men and women who have the fear of God before them and His love in their hearts. They should make their religion attractive to the youth who come within the sphere of their influence. The professors and teachers should constantly feel their dependence upon God. Their work is in this world, but the Source of wisdom and knowledge from which they must continually draw is above. Self must not obtain the mastery. The Spirit of God must control. They must walk humbly with God, and they should feel their responsibility, which is not less than that of the minister. The influence which professors and teachers exert upon the youth in our college will be carried wherever these youth may go. A sacred influence should go forth from the college to meet the moral darkness existing

everywhere." (Counsels on Education, 33)

The most important thing we can do as Christian educators is to devote ourselves to God. The time we spend preparing our lessons, grading exams, cooking meals, paying bills, and serving others, is of little value if the attitude and method that we convey does not demonstrate a fresh supply of God's love and grace. "Let everyone see that you are gentle and kind. The Lord is coming soon." (Philippians 4:5) We are all youth ministry workers. We are all a part of God's plan to influence the young people who come under our care. Each of us has a part to play in transmitting the redemptive healing love of Christ and serving as older brothers and sisters in the faith to the lambs placed into our care. We may never know the effect of God's work through us, but as we devote ourselves to Him and allow Him to use us, we may rest assured that our efforts will not be in vain.

### **Redemptive Discipline**

"We need individually to open our hearts to the love of God, to overcome selfishness and harshness, and to let Jesus in to take possession of the soul. The educator of youth will do well to remember that with all his advantages of age, education, and experience he is not yet a perfect overcomer; he is himself erring and makes many failures. As Christ deals with him, he should endeavour to deal with the youth under his care, who have had fewer advantages and less favourable surroundings that he himself has enjoyed." (Counsels on Education, 34)

Much has been written about the importance of redemption in education. Everything we do must have the salvation of our students as its objective. If what we are doing does not lead to redemption, we need to seriously consider its purpose and place in our philosophy of education. The uproar over the transgressions of former President Clinton had an interesting spin-off: many in government who had similarly erred admitted or were forced to admit their sins, in some cases because they were bold enough to criticise the President. We, who have sinned, and experienced God's forgiveness, should not forget how God has treated us. "When people sin, they earn what sin pays - death. But God gives us a free gift - life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) God is merciful, and we who are to be perfect like Him, must show mercy too.

Within the context of living a life of grace, let us be sure that in the way we deal with students who may not know better, that we are gracious to them. Let us explain, with patience and compassion, the principles behind our policies. Let us be gentle, yet firm. Let us ensure that justice is served, but with mercy. Let us not be like the ungrateful servant of Matthew 18:21-35, but let us show mercy as we administer justice. Let us pray like Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

### **Reaching Out**

"The opportunities of attending Sabbath school, and listening to the sermons from the desk, are indeed precious privileges; but they may be passed by all unheeded, while if one with true interest should come close to these souls in sympathy and love, he might succeed in reaching them." (Counsels on Education, 37)

The example of Jesus was to mingle and interact with the common men and women of his day. He was no respecter of persons, and did not pass by those whom the elite of his day marginalized. Rather, he took the time to give attention to those most in need. We too have the privilege of following in his footsteps in this respect. In fact, it is an obligation we have, to reach out to those in our schools who would be drawn to Christ by our influence. It's good to have chapel services, dorm worships, weeks of prayer, or lunchtime gatherings. But let's face it - many of our students are not going to be reached by these services

to the extent they would be reached if we took personal interests in their spiritual lives. By modelling Christ, and by interacting with the students on a deeper-than-superficial level, we can make long strides in our evangelistic quest. Let's each take the challenge to form a deeper spiritually nurturing relationship with at least one more student than we did in the last year.

### **Respected by Respecting**

"The teacher who is severe, critical, overbearing, heedless of others' feelings, must expect the same spirit to be manifested toward himself. He who wishes to preserve his own dignity and self-respect must be careful not to wound needlessly the self-respect of others. This rule should be sacredly observed toward the dullest, the youngest, the most blundering scholars. What God intends to do with those apparently uninteresting youth you do not know." (Counsels on Education, 68)

As the first section of this article expressed, God values our young people. And he has plans for them that we may not know of. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "I say this because I know what I am planning for you...I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future." Let us love our students, place their interests before our own. Some of us have experienced difficulty with students because of the way we present ourselves. Let us humble ourselves as Jesus did, and "wash our students' feet" through our actions. By our love, we may win them for Jesus, building relationships for eternity.

### **Resources:**

- White, Ellen G. *Counsels on Education*. Oshawa, Ontario: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1968.
- *The Inspirational Study Bible - Life Lessons from the Inspired Word of God - New Century Version*. Vancouver: Word Publishing, 1995.