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The Concept of Social Justice in the Social Sciences, in the Bible, and in Adventism

The Adventist Church has been criticized for keeping silent in the face of social injustices in many contexts in the past, especially under totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, Communist Russia (Plantak 1998), the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the genocide in Rwanda. While there seems to be a renewed interest in social justice advocacy worldwide and within the Adventist Church, divergent views and theological arguments clash on whether the church should be involved in social justice advocacy and what this involvement should look like, while remaining faithful to Scripture and its prophetic mission. This article explores the concept of social justice in the social sciences, in Scripture and in Adventism, setting the stage for further study that can evaluate contemporary Adventist leaders' theological and missiological perspective on social justice.

Exploring Social Justice in Social Sciences

The United Nations defines social justice as “the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruit of economic growth” (United Nations 2006:7). The United Nations definition also states that “social justice is not possible without strong and coherent redistributive policies conceived and implemented by public agencies” (6). David Cohen views social justice advocacy as the act of pleading, not for one’s own interests, but for the respect and protection of human rights, the respect and preservation of the “dignity of all people from abuse, violence, and humiliation” resulting from acts or policies implemented by “communities and institutions including government, international financial institutions, and multinational corporations” (Cohen, de la Vega, and Watson 2001:7, 8). Social justice advocates, Cohen adds, are concerned with all situations that may lead to “violence and loss of dignity.” Those situations include “harassment and

threats to advocates' lives and safety, second class citizenship, disrespect for a person's humanity, disrespect for a person's or community's identity or expression of their culture" (7, 8).

Human Rights and Social Justice

The concept of rights has become a dominant way of speaking of justice in the 21st century, even though there still exist a variety of definitions, warrants, and applications of the term. The importance of the concept of rights lies in the fact that they were the anchor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which the United Nations issued in 1948 as a "reaction to dehumanizing policies of the Nazi and fascist governments during World War II" (Stackhouse 2011:689). The preamble of the UDHR stipulates that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" (689). The UDHR recognizes that all human beings have "the right to life, liberty, and security; to freedom from slavery, cruel punishment, and arbitrary arrest; to freedom of religion, thought, and association, and to marry, work, and have access to education" (687). Unlike civil rights, "which are those rights found in a system of traditional practices or establish in codes of a particular civil order," human rights are "principles of justice understood to stand over every cultural, social, or governmental institution" (688).

However, after the adoption of the UDHR, two broad worldviews clashed regarding its implementation, leading to the adoption of two international covenants and several conventions. This is not surprising considering that "cultures define rights differently. Some focus on individuals, others on communities" (Figueira-McDonough 2007:32). Depending on the underlying philosophy, "specific institutional mechanisms vary across countries and affect the practice of social justice in their own ways" (32). In the domain of civil and political rights and social and economic rights, the democratic West emphasizes the liberties that the state should guarantee to each citizen, while the socialist West stresses the responsibility of the state to provide for each citizen (Stackhouse 2011:689). In either case, "the search for social justice presupposes a functioning government" (Figueira-McDonough 2007:31). Yet, in liberal democracies, the role of government is minimal, while individual freedom is central. The United States, a prototype of liberal democracy, pursues the ideals of freedom and democracy. In the early years of the nation, European philosophers and Scottish and English thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and David Hume (1711-1776), as well as political theorist John Locke

(1632-1704) and populist idealist Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), influenced the American Founding Fathers in the implementation of these ideals. Thus, the American ideology comprises five core values: individual autonomy, work ethic, family ethic, community autonomy, and limited government (Figueira-McDonough 2007:32-35). She analyzes the tensions within liberal democracies over the right to freedom and the right to equality.

Privileging liberty tends to constrain equality. Conversely, giving priority to equality can restrict freedom. Laissez-faire societies often produce great social inequality, as happened toward the end of the nineteenth century. And democratic societies committed to equality are prone to develop an unwieldy, 'all thumbs' apparatus of central control. (35)

Thus, theories of social justice vary depending on the specific cultural, ideological, and historical context. A primary issue for social justice theorists "revolves around justifications for, and criticisms of, the precedence of one principle over the other" (37). Therefore, social justice advocates need to understand and take into consideration the culture and ideology within which they operate.

Social Development and Social Movements

For Susan C. Mapp, social development "can be defined as encompassing interventions and programs to improve social conditions" (2007:10). Mapp highlights the fact that social development is proactive rather than reactive, seeking to empower people, mainly at the macro-level, to prevent problems rather than alleviate their effects. She notes, however, that "when social development is too focused on economic development, it leads to distorted development (10). By distorted development she means a situation in which certain populations within a country are left out of social development due to discrimination, poverty, and/or lack of access to education. They have limited access to life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom, which, according to economist Goulet, social development should offer. She adds, "These barriers make it difficult for these people to make basic decisions as where to live, whom to marry, how to earn a living, and with whom to engage in sexual relations. The barriers can lead to social problems such as AIDS, refugees, and slavery" (15).

According to Gemma Edwards, "Social movements are those collective efforts oriented toward social change that points to circumstances in which creative human action shapes and alters social structure, rather than being shaped by them" (2014:1). Edwards identifies four conceptual distinctions of social movements largely accepted in the field of social movements study: (1) they are collective, organized efforts at social change, rather than

individual pursuit of change, (2) they occur over a period of time, rather than being “one-off” events, (3) their members have a collective identity, rather than just working together, (4) they pursue change by employing protest (4, 5). Edwards challenges the “conceptual distinction made between individual and collective efforts toward change.” He argues that all individuals, whether or not they are part of an organized movement, “have the ability to react to social and political injustice” (248).

Robert K. Schaeffer notes three developments resulting from social movements: “the rise of republic, the democratization of republic and the expansion of citizenship in the republics” (2014:1, 2). However, while social movements have caused an expansion of liberty, inequality still persists. Cohen highlights the reality of “ordinary people” who continue to suffer from contemporary colonialism, and the breakdown of society caused by laws such as apartheid, abusive behavior by institutions, harassment and threats, second-class citizenship, disrespect for a person’s humanity, and disrespect for a person’s or community’s identity or expression of their culture (Cohen et al. 2001:7).

Schaeffer developed a model to explain how social change occurs. He identified three types of social movements: aspiring, altruistic, and restrictionist. Aspiring social movements are orchestrated by the people on the margins, as they aspire to societal changes that will improve their situation. Historically, they constituted the multitude, living at the bottom as “subjects in dynastic states and colonial settings, by denizens and subjects in republic” (2014:157). They have been at the forefront in the human rights movement, and are credited for the “ascent of slaves, women, and youth” (158). Since people on the margins are not always successful in pursuing their goals, they are described as “aspiring” social movements. However, due to lack of legal standing, educational, political, and financial capacity, low status aspirants are unable to act on their own and make their voice heard. They need “altruistic” groups with the means to support their causes. Altruistic social movements support and assist the change process. Restrictionist movements resist the change. In history, they are those who rejected “popular sovereignty, championed oligarchy, and defended inequality” (157-159).

Addressing Global Social Injustices: Two Different Approaches

There are two significant theories that attempt to explain the origin of inequalities among the nations and how to solve these inequalities. Modernization theory, which emerged during the 1950s, emphasizes internal causes of poverty such as lack of education, technology, and entrepreneurship. The theory is qualifiedly optimistic because it believes progress and

development will happen through the application of a recipe—educate the population, boost technology, build infrastructure, democratize the political system, provide access to free market, etc. (Mapp 2007:10). Modernization theorists believe that “private property and private commerce go hand-in-hand with personal freedom and human rights” (Easterbrook 2003:252). The theory is also ethnocentric, believing that the West’s model of development is the ideal and needs to be exported to the developing world. Easterbrook made a prediction, “But as regards to resources at least, it seems possible that eventually, everyone will live like Americans and Europeans, with the world containing billions of passenger cars and detached homes, huge numbers of big-box retail stores, and truly, utterly frightening numbers of fast-food restaurants” (253).

On the other hand, dependency theory emphasizes external causes of poverty, global interactions between nation/states, mainly colonialism, and the exploitation of poor countries by the wealthier countries. Unlike modernization theory, dependency theorists, are pessimistic and consider it impossible to break out of underdevelopment without addressing the power imbalances among the nations (Mapp 2003:10).

Summary

Social justice is about respecting every person’s humanity and dignity, and protecting human rights. However, implementing social justice is challenging considering that every culture has its own definition of rights, depending on the dominant philosophy, ideology and historical context. In liberal democracies, two views of social justice co-exist, one prioritizing freedom and the other emphasizing equality. Social justice advocates must study carefully the society where they work.

Exploring Social Justice in Scripture

Social Ethics in the Old and New Testament

The following discussion of Old and New Testament social ethics is based on Scott B. Rae’s book, *Moral Choices* (2000). Rae notes that the social ethics in the Old Testament (OT) were upheld by the law, which mandated individual behavior, and in doing so, structured the society. The key function of the civil law was to govern social relationships and established institutions that would ensure order and maintain justice within the society (Exod 20:12-17; Lev 18-20, 25; Deut 19-25). Further, the prophets developed the social dimension of OT ethics, acting like “social justice” advocates, frequently accusing Israel of oppression, perversion of justice, and

exploitation of the poor (Amos 4:1, 5:11-13; Mic 2:2; Hab 1:4). In their writings, the prophets looked forward to the consummation of the kingdom which includes social dimensions of ethics. The forthcoming kingdom of God, ruled by the Servant of the Lord, would bring a rightly ordered society as well as a people who worship God appropriately (Isa 42, 49, 50, 53).

In addition, the social dimension of OT ethics was reflected in institutions and laws such as the Sabbatical year (Lev 25:1-7), the Year of Jubilee (25:8-24, 35-46), the law of redemption (25:25-34, 47-55), the law of gleaning (Lev 19:9-10), prohibition of usury (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-37), moving boundary stones that delineated a person's property (Deut 19:14, 27:17), and perverting the legal system by showing bias, accepting bribes, or committing perjury (Exod 23:1-2; Deut 18-20).

The New Testament (NT) does not emphasize "institutional morality and social ethics" as much as the Old Testament. It focuses more on "a morality for the church," rather than on society at large (Rae 2000:26). Scott Rae has observed that, although the NT church was not interested in implementing social institutions, contemporary Christians have established institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, churches, and seminaries, because they are deemed necessary for the advancement of the gospel (27). In the NT, ethical principles and rules are intended for members of the kingdom of God, blending together ethics and discipleship as "little distinction is made between the moral and the spiritual life, except that the former deals mainly with the believer's responsibility to the church and the world, while the latter relates to one's worship of God" (29). NT ethics leaves a special place for the poor. They will always exist in society (Matt 26:11), they are the special recipients of the gospel (Matt 5:11; Luke 4:18), and they are blessed (Luke 6:20). The church should care for the poor and treat them with esteem (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:1-7, 9:1-15; Jas 2:1-13).

For Rae, love is the "central focus" of NT ethics, arguing that "Jesus and the apostles take the central command of the Law, 'Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' (Deut 6:5), and develop an ethic of love" (30). The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and Paul's summarizing "the entire Law under the heading of love" in Rom 13:8-10 and Gal 5:14 exemplify and reinforce the idea that love fulfills the Law.

However, Richard B. Hays argues that love is not the "unifying theme for New Testament ethics," although love is "a distinctive element in the Christian life" (1996:200). Hays surveys the books of Mark, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation, and concludes that "a synthesis of the New Testament's message based on the theme of love drives these texts to the periphery of the canon" (202). He adds, "The image of community, cross, and new creation more adequately bring these texts into focus along with

the rest of the canonical witnesses” (202). One reason Hays gives to deny love as a focal image is because many have trivialized the term and used it to “cover for all manner of vapid self-indulgence.” Hays cites Stanley Hauerwas who has observed, “The ethics of love is often but a cover for what is fundamentally an assertion of ethical relativism” (202). Love has often been used as an argument against “disciplines of economic sharing or sexual fidelity,” and as a pretext to condone “sexual relations outside of marriage or the use of violence.” Hays reminds us that “authentic love calls us to repentance, discipline, sacrifice, transformation (200).” On this last comment, Hays and Rae agree, because the latter acknowledges the NT ethics as an ethic of virtue, emphasizing the development of the character and virtue, made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ being the model (Rae 2000:31).

Scot McKnight brings another perspective to the topic of social ethics. He links the Atonement to social justice. Studying the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), the *Benedictus* (vv. 67-79), along with the inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16-21), Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist (7:21-23), and the Early church (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35), McKnight concludes that “Jesus’ kingdom vision and atonement are related; separating them is an act of violence” (2007:13). He also states that the “atonement creates the kingdom” (13), understood as a society where God’s will is fulfilled in terms of “equality, social justice, economic availability to and liability for one another, and fellowship” (14).

Social Justice Advocacy in Scripture

God repeatedly called advocates to denounce oppression, injustices, and wickedness in earthly political regimes. God sent Moses to Pharaoh to advocate for the deliverance of Israel from an oppressive system. Queen Esther, pushed by her uncle Mordecai and concerned for the survival of the Jewish community, went to meet king Ahasuerus, risking her life and advocated for the life of her people, forcing the king to suspend and replace an edict that doomed the existence of the Jews (Falk 2015:293).

The Prophet Isaiah spoke in a context marked by evil and oppression, absence of justice, widespread violence and wickedness. “For ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts” (Isa 3:14, 15). Ellen White comments on the book of Isaiah saying:

Justice was perverted, and no pity was shown the poor. . . . The outlook was particularly discouraging as regards the social conditions of

the people. In their desire for gain, men were adding house to house and field to field. Even the magistrates, whose duty it was to protect the helpless, turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and needy, the widows and the fatherless. (1917:306)

Isaiah expressed God's frustration and astonishment for the absence of intercessors or advocates: "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore, his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him" (Isa 59:16).

God expected his servants to raise their voice in defense of the voiceless and the oppressed. God is heart-broken when there is no advocate. None of the prophets of the Old Testament—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, etc.—remained silent in the face of injustices. They all understood that when the weak, the poor, the stranger, the fatherless, the widow are unjustly treated or when their rights are violated or not protected by the political authorities, it was their responsibility as God's representatives to stand up and demand justice.

Social justice advocacy in the Bible is often overlapped with advocacy for righteousness. Respecting, protecting, and caring for individuals, regardless of their social, physical, economic, and racial status is both a matter of social justice and righteousness. Among many ethical and spiritual principles which the Bible emphasizes and which should be part of the Christian's advocacy mandate was the defense of the widow, the stranger (alien), and the fatherless. Tom Evans calls these three categories of vulnerable people "God's special trio" (2016:1) and highlights the specific instruction God gave concerning them: "His people were not to take advantage of them, such as depriving the foreigner and fatherless of justice or taking the cloak of a widow as a pledge (Deut 24:17)" (2016:1).

Summary

Social justice is a key theme in the Bible. The Old Testament provides an ethical framework for just and harmonious social relations in Israel based on the Law. OT prophets advocated the application of the social dimension of the Law, pleading the cause of the poor, the widow, the stranger, and the oppressed. The Sabbath, the Jubilee, the sabbatical year, and others, were all institutions aimed at guaranteeing social justice. The NT social ethics is primarily aimed at the followers of Christ, rather than social institutions, mandating the disciple's relation to the church and the world, and to God. NT ethics stresses the importance of love, which is the fulfillment of the Law, calling for right conduct and virtuous character propelled by the dynamic of the Holy Spirit.

Exploring Social Justice in Adventism

Christian organizations and churches are often on the frontlines of promoting and defending human rights. Seventh-day Adventists are no exception. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was often silent concerning social injustices, and primarily focused on Jesus Christ's Second Coming during its formative years (1839-1888). It eventually attended the immediate needs of its members and the community through welfare and disaster relief interventions (Schwartz and Greenleaf 2000:460-462). Towards the end of the 20th century, the church started displaying a prominent social interest (Plantak 1998:125). In 1984 the Adventist Church established the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) which, according to Wagner Kuhn, "has been chosen as a primary tool in the work of 'exposing,' 'discrediting,' and trying to address social distortions and depravation" (2013:202, 209). ADRA's statement on social justice emphasizes "individuals rejected by society" and commits to "break down barriers of prejudice through community training and by promoting inclusive policies" (ADRA 2017b). In its development effort, ADRA attempts to "reach out to vulnerable communities around the world, helping them gain the strength to put their lives back together" (ADRA 2017b).

Charles Scriven wrote in 1992, "It's a mistake to think that winning converts is the church's only business. God's wish is to heal all of life" (17). "He did not act as many of His fellow Jews expected the Messiah to act, He certainly condemned social and political abuses" (18). David Pendleton argues that separation of church and state does not forbid the believer to speak up in the public square, nor does it relieve him or her from "urging government to act with wisdom, justice, and righteousness. And it clearly should not bar personal involvement in matters of law and public policy" (2004:20). Joy Butler links advocacy for human rights to the search for peace by declaring:

The work of defending the rights of the weak and marginalized is peace work. Far from being a passive attitude, peace is active in breaking through the silence that perpetuates the violation of human rights on a daily basis. Christians must speak with the loudest voice and take the most daring steps to denounce any violation of the human being, made in the image of God. (2008:44)

Similarly, reacting to the Charleston church shooting in 2015, C. Wesley Knight exhorted the church to speak up and be mad like Jesus "in the context of social injustice and racial terrorism" (2015:17).

However, the change in Adventist thinking regarding social ministries has prompted concerns from many who fear that the spiritual strength of the church may be weakened as it happened in the World Council of Churches (Schwartz and Greenleaf 2001:462).

Following the 1983 WCC Assembly meeting in British Columbia and the next session in Canberra, Australia in 1991, Adventist writers observed that the spiritual strength of the WCC was weakened because it had defined evangelism in terms of its social implications rather than to save people from sin. Its goal was to promote a “just, participatory and sustainable society. Given this observation, Adventists may have questioned why ADRA and its predecessor, SAWS, became so involved in humanitarian and community projects. (463)

Kenneth H. Wood pointed to the “unique mission” the church has to perform—“to carry the message of salvation to all men in all lands” (1971:2). Wood stated this:

Christ’s kingdom is not of this world, hence the organized body of Christ must avoid entanglements with governments, and with efforts to bring in the kingdom of God by human legislation. The church must marshal all its resources and focus all its energies on the task of setting forth clearly the vital issues in ‘the great controversy,’ and of preparing the world for the imminent return of Christ. (1971:2)

Although the general tone of the editorial indicates a concern regarding “division, disunity and schism” that often result when church leaders are split over political matters, there is an implicit warning against involvement in social advocacy aiming at breaking down unjust systems and policies in governments. For C. Mervyn Maxwell, advocacy in the public arena is permitted only in the context of religious freedom. He recommends Adventists to “demonstrate to the world by our faith and action that we believe we have a far more effective remedy for its ills than mere human legislation and handout dollars” (1976:1).

In reaction to an article published by the *Adventist Review*, reporting the first Oakwood University Social Justice award given to U.S. Congressman John Lewis for his decades-long efforts promoting equal rights, Dwayne V. Turner wrote in the *Adventist Review*, “The fight for social justice has made its way into God’s Remnant Church, but let me be clear, it only happens when God’s counsels are ignored; not followed.” He particularly accused movements such as Black Lives Matters to be a form of “wrestling against the flesh” where our battle should be spiritual, according to Eph 6:12 (Turner 2015).

There is a certain ambiguity around the concept of advocacy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as it may mean different things

depending on who you ask. Lenart Falk cites John Graz, former director of the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, who provides an official definition of advocacy: “Being the voice of the voiceless, the sign of the kingdom of God in the world” (2015:296). Among other roles, PARL, founded by the Adventist Church in 1901, “works in cooperation with other church departments to advocate public policy positions on issues in areas as diverse as health, education, peace issues, environmental protection, women’s issues, children’s issues, the rights of prisoners, and aid and development” (PARL 2017).

Falk notes that the social advocacy endeavor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been confined so far to position statements on chosen topics such as “violence, war, religious fanaticism, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, or social issues like abortion or human trafficking” (2015:296). Those positions are usually reactive rather than proactive. Falk wrote that the position statements of the Seventh-Adventist Church “could be described as ‘information sharing,’ but they do not qualify as advocacy in the proper sense. Rather, they are a first step in a much longer process of advocacy” (286). Plantak adds that he sees inconsistencies and contradictions in Adventism’s dealing with human rights issues, with an emphasis on reaction rather than advocacy (1998:208).

In his book chapter entitled “Social Justice and the Adventist Dilemma,” G. Russell Seay compares Ellen White and Martin Luther King Jr.’s approaches to racial issues in the United States, and suggests that “a person’s perspective is shaped by his or her life context” (2017:56). Seay notes that they were both grappling with two opposing approaches on how to tackle the Negro’s plight in America. One approach, proposed by Booker T. Washington (1858-1915), “called negroes to abandon for the time being the push for political power so that they could concentrate on education and entrepreneurship” (55, 56). The goal was for black people to “earn the respect of whites by demonstrating their worthiness” (56). This approach’s ideal was to “cement the friendship of races and bring about hearty cooperation” (56). The other approach, proposed by W. E. B. Dubois (1868-1963), who “grew impatient with the gradualism inherent” in Washington’s strategy, called people “to fight for civil rights, voting rights, and education opportunities” (56). According to Seay, Washington and Dubois represent two persistent approaches to black betterment—accommodation, and self-determination.

Ellen White, on one side, was more inclined toward Washington’s position, for she “consistently and persistently counsels against actions and activities that would antagonize the social structures that perpetuate negro oppression in favor of activities that help transform the individual negro

into candidates for the heavenly kingdom" (56). Martin Luther King Jr., on the other side, aligned himself with Dubois' self-deterministic approach, "insisting that negroes participate in direct activities to civil rights, voting rights, fair housing, and equal education opportunities" (56). Seay further notes that White and King's positions were shaped, not only by their social location in terms of space and time, but also by their eschatology. The report on Evangelism and Social responsibility (1982), undertaken jointly by the World Evangelical Fellowship and Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, suggests that one's understanding of the millennium affects the way one views the world (Plantak 1998:43). White was a pre-millennialist—"shaped by Jewish and Christian apocalypticism," focusing on the urgency of Christ's return, while King was a post-millennialist—"shaped by liberal reading of classical eighth-century prophets," focusing on bringing about the "beloved community" and "correcting the social structures that perpetuate the cycle of racism, classism, and militarism" (Seay 2017:57). In face of the 'Now, But Not Yet' dilemma that the Adventist Church is grappling with in the early part of the 21st century, Seay recommends a combination of "the pre-millennial urgency with the post-millennial social activism in order to remain essential Adventists but also relevant to our contemporary context" (57).

Although White's eschatology was preeminent, she seems to have understood the importance of dealing with social issues in her time. In his book *Working with the Poor* (2007), Rudi Maier has compiled selected passages from Ellen White on social responsibility. He regroups her statements under six broad strategies she proposed to fight poverty: (1) teaching self-reliance, (2) industrial training, (3) training to serve, (4) relieving necessities, (5) teaching discipline, and (6) practical training (2007:323-361). These solutions centered on the individual rather than the social and political system, and fit well within an *accommodationist* approach. However, when it came to slavery laws, Nicholas Miller notes that "White called for civil disobedience, the breaking of federal law, in order to protect the human rights of African Americans" (2017:24). Miller cites White's *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, "the law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey" (1948:202) (in Miller 2017:24). Such a position clearly has a *self-deterministic* resonance.

The challenge for the Adventist Church in the 21st century is to find the best combination of approaches between silence, official statements, accommodation, and self-determination that enables the church to fulfill both its social responsibility and its prophetic mission. To this end, it is necessary to evaluate the four broad categories of approaches to social justice from a biblical and missiological perspective.

Summary

Adventists understand their mission to include both evangelism and social responsibility, although the focus in the beginning was on the Second Coming of Jesus as the primary remedy to the world's problems (Schwartz and Greenleaf 2001:458). As social justice advocacy has become more prominent among Adventists since the second half of the twentieth century, opposing views have emerged that have divided the church on this crucial topic. One perspective favors accommodative solutions in direct support of victims of social injustices. Another perspective advocates a self-determination approach, which implies social and political activism by joining human rights movements. In between, a third perspective teaches that social justice advocacy is too political and too dangerous and urges the church to stay away from it. However, there has been no in-depth Adventist study of the biblical and missiological implications of each perspective.

Exploring Missiological Responses to Social Justice

Social Justice as an Integral Part of the *Missio Dei*

Plantak asserts that “the creation story is the primary basis for human rights” (1998:164). He cites Richard Harries who pointed out that “God makes man in his own image and respects the worth and dignity of what he has created. . . . Such is the value of human persons in the eye of their maker that he himself becomes a human person” (164). Accordingly, social justice advocacy, to the extent it aims to restore and uplift humanity’s God-given dignity and freedom, is both an expression of God’s character and a core strategy of the *missio Dei*. The church’s role in the context of the *missio Dei* includes walking in the footsteps of Old Testament prophets and Jesus by “cooperating with God in the call of all people always and everywhere, to justice, peace and the integrity of creation” as part of the “prophetic dialogue” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:369).

Bevans and Schroeder define “prophetic dialogue” as a synthesis of three strains that “grounded mission theology in the last quarter of the twentieth century: mission as participation in the life and mission of the Trinity; mission as continuation of the mission of Jesus to preach, serve and witness to justice of God’s ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ reign; and mission as the proclamation of Christ as the world’s only Savior” (369).

In addition, Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross identify five marks of mission in the 21st century: (1) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, (2) to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers, (3) to respond to human

needs by loving service, (4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society, and (5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth (2008:*xiv*).

Regarding engagement in social transformation work in communities, David Korten, observed a continuum of what he terms “generation of practice.”

The first generation of practice response to crisis situation in the form of welfare and relief, here, the external agent, be it the church or non-governmental organization (NGO), plays the role of initiator. Second generation practice refers to what he terms ‘community development’. It takes the form of local development projects carried out in communities to meet particular needs such poverty, unemployment, or lack of food security. Here, the external agent plays a facilitative role, engaging with community members in setting up the project. Korten, recognizing the limitations of these forms of engagement, has argued that for our work in communities to be truly transformative, there needs to be work at the level of changing policy and procedures (what he terms third generation practice), and at the level of mobilizing movements of people for social change (fourth generation practice). (in Walls and Ross 2008:81)

Evangelization and Social Justice

Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent point out that although Christians have always been known as compassionate people, toward the end of the 19th century various theologies contributed to the polarization of approaches to mission. On one side, “liberal groups relativized the message of the Bible and questioned the necessity of evangelism. The postmillennial social gospel emphasized inner-worldly improvements to usher in the kingdom of God” (2010:138). On the other side, the premillennialists—prominent among evangelicals—who were persuaded of Christ’s imminent return and ensuing judgement, stressed the “urgency of evangelism” at the expense of social programs (138).

J. F. A. Ajayi, in Dana L. Robert, writing on the work of evangelical missionaries in West Africa during 1706-1914, observed that evangelicals’ failure to “give some thought to the implications of foreign missions for the wider societies that would be affected, even transformed, by the activities of the missionaries and the resulting congregations of Christians” was due to ideological aversion to politics, and to “the assumption that such societies would be wholly transformed into ‘civilized’ Western societies that should be governed in the same way that Christian Western societies were governed” (Robert 2008:244, 245). For example, in 1902, Robert E.

Speer denounced as “mischievous doctrine” any proposal calling foreign missions to reorganize the social fabric. He defended the view that “missions should implant the life of Christ in the hearts of all people and leave the results to God” (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010:138).

Ajayi studied the case of a community of Brass in Niger which became a Christian state in 1879 and highlighted the missiological harm caused by the missionaries’ non-intervention in socio-political matters. Brass, a compact and prosperous community before embracing Christianity, was now struggling due to the Royal Niger Company’s stifling trade and impoverishment of the local people. While “the missionaries were unable or unwilling to help, the Traditionalists gradually took over” (Ajayi 2008:245).

Evangelicals’ attitude toward socio-political involvement shifted around the 1960-1970s, although “the appearance of Carl F. H. Henry’s *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* in 1947 signaled an early shift in evangelical social ethics” (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010:138-139). The conclusions of the Congress on the Church’s Worldwide Mission held in Wheaton in 1966 and the Workshop on Evangelicals and Social Concern held in Chicago in 1973 are evidence of that shift. One factor aiding the change in John Stott’s thinking was “his international travel in the 1960s and early 1970s to Majority World contexts where the reality of poverty and oppression were inescapable and could not be ignored by evangelicals committed to evangelism” (Stott and Wright 2015:41). In 1992, John Stott, on behalf of the Lausanne’s Theology Working Group, convened a consultation on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility under the auspices of the World Evangelical Alliance. The report highlighted three types of relationships: (1) social action as a consequence of evangelism; (2) social action as a bridge to evangelism; and (3) social action and evangelism as partners. Stott underlines the third relationship as the most important:

They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakona* (service) went hand in hand. . . . His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be of ours. . . . Indeed, so close in this link between proclaiming and serving, that they actually overlap. (Stott and Wright 2015:43, 44)

In Paragraph 5 of the Lausanne Covenant on “Christian Social Responsibility” there is a similar statement. “Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary

expressions of our doctrines of God and humankind, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ" (42).

Timothy J. Keller, in *Center Church*, calls for a break in the liberal/conservative paradigm: "Rather than emphasizing mainly evangelism (as conservative churches do) or mainly social justice (as liberal churches do), we intentionally set out to give a very high emphasis to both—employing a holistic approach that connects the people in our church to the city through both evangelistic proclamation and ministries of justice and mercy" (2012:292).

Examples of Mission-Focused Responses to Social Justice

William Carey, the father of modern mission organizations, remains an inspiration for many due not only to his commitment to evangelism, but mainly for his relentless and successful dedication to social reforms (Kuhn 2013:124). Indian society was plagued with social evils such as slavery, infanticide, widow-burning or *sati*, and burning of lepers. Due to Carey's advocacy efforts, a Regulation (VI of 1802) was passed and made unlawful the inhuman practice of infanticide. In 1829, after more than 30 years of missionary and social advocacy work in India by Carey, other missionaries, and native Indian reformers like Raja Ram, *sati* was banished by law (129).

Carey's strategy consisted of five elements: (1) prayer, (2) teaching the Bible, (3) research in order to know and document an issue, (4) publish, and (5) collaborate with other activists. Concerning prayer Kuhn wrote that "since his early years of life Carey had prayed earnestly for the abolition of slavery" (129). Carey taught the Bible, in one case, in order to combat child marriage. Carey sought to undercut the immoral roots of such a social evil through the teaching of the Bible (An Indian Christian 2017). Carey's use of research can be demonstrated in the following example. *Sati* was one of the worst evils that prevailed during Carey's time. He collected data on *sati* and found that about 300 widows were burnt alive around Calcutta and 10,000 in all India within a short period of time (Haldar 2015:2). Carey made use of publishing in order to deal with *sati* as well. Carey also collaborated with other social advocates and public authorities in order to win the battle against the practice of *sati*. Carey worked collaboratively with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who was also a great social reformer. He also maintained good relations with Governor General Lord Wellesley to whom he submitted the report on *sati* (An Indian Christian 2017). Kuhn found that Carey was not alone in his advocacy endeavor. "Other missionaries, as well as governors and Indian reformers, gave much needed aid in order that the practice of burning widows be forbidden" (2013:129).

A second example of best practices in missionary advocacy is the Temperance Movement in early Adventism. Adventist pioneers viewed alcohol consumption as the cause of much social harm—domestic violence, poverty, the rising prison population. They decided to promote both personal abstinence and public prohibition. Douglas Morgan reports on the strategy they used:

In addition to rallies, Adventists organized local temperance societies, distributed literature, and canvassed for signatures to a temperance pledge. Adventist young people were mobilized through the weekly publication, the *Youth's Instructor*. Special temperance issues were published in the 1910s and the Instructor's Temperance League formed with the goal of placing copies in every home. In the final drive for a Prohibition amendment, Adventist gave indefatigable support to the cause. (Morgan 2001:63).

A third example of best practices in social justice advocacy utilized by the Adventist Church is the *Enditnow* campaign to end violence against women. The goal of the campaign was to “raise awareness and advocate for the end of violence against women and girls around the world (ADRA 2017a). The main strategy of the campaign consisted in collecting 1,000,000 signatures from more than 200 countries, followed by a presentation of these signatures to General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon at the United Nations. The activities undertaken included women holding rallies in communities, going door-to-door, going to supermarkets in order to collect the maximum amount of signatures possible (Boyd 2015:280).

A fourth example of best practices in social justice advocacy is the work of the International Justice Mission (IJM), an agency which has been established to provide global ministries where field workers can entrust the stories shared with them by victims of social injustices. Field workers are expected to “develop the eyes to see and the ears to hear about injustice in their community” and “aid the victims of abuse by helping them to articulate their story” (Haugen 1999:185). Those field workers are in an ideal position to act as “responsible stewards of the burden that has been shared with them by passing it along carefully to those who might come to the victim's aid” (185). Frontline workers are supposed to know people in the community—civic leaders, lawyers, or advocates—who have the authority, capacity, and resources to investigate the matter and help the one who is suffering abuse. Yet, in some instances, field workers may not know whom to turn to with the information, and in some situations turning to the wrong persons might have dire consequences; hence, the importance of International Justice Mission. The International Justice Mission “will consult with the ministry about where to turn, or will take on the matter

as a case referral and independently pursue an investigation and intervention on behalf of the victim” (Haugen 1999:185). It is worth noting that in any best practice of missionary advocacy, “social analysis, Bible study, and prayer should precede advocacy efforts” (Boyd 2015:283). Falk notes that the best advocacy efforts thrive in “an atmosphere of peacebuilding, trust, and negotiation,” rather than in a confrontational and ‘watchdog-like’ tone (Falk 2015:288).

Conclusion

Social justice is included in the mission of God to redeem and restore humanity. While in the early years evangelicals viewed social justice with suspicion, considering it subordinate to evangelism, since the second half of the 20th century, social justice has gained momentum among evangelical Christians who have become favorable to a more holistic approach to mission. William Carey had already set the tone in the 19th century as his work in India included missiological responses to social justice concerns. Other more recent and similarly mission-focused social advocacy work followed, such as the Temperance Movement in early Adventism, the ongoing *Enditnow* campaign to end violence against women and girls, and the work of International Justice Mission, just to cite a few. However, a mission-focused social justice advocacy must be based on clear principles and guidelines. For example, one of PARL’s methods or principles is this: “Just because we can say something, doesn’t mean we have something to say” (PARL 2017). “As we determine on an ongoing basis the issues we will focus on, we keep in mind our relevant expertise, the level of unanimity of our members on a given issue, the level of resources already invested on a given issue, and whether speaking publicly in a specific instance is the best means to accomplish our goals (PARL 2017).

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