Finding at the Foot of the Cross

In her 2009 article, “The Galilean Jesus: Creating a Borderland at the Foot of the Cross,” 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” 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.’”

In addition, dislocation often marginalizes individuals, leaving them “voiceless, invisible, and powerless.” 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.

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.

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.

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 equality at the foot of the cross.
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. Cindy Tutsch, in her book, *Ellen White on Leadership,* describes the “clairon 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, 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.” We must suspect. The Galilean Jesus represents the dislocated who live in liminal space and for whom he envisions new life. “11We must

Ella Louise Smith Simmons, Ed.D., serves as a General Vice President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid., p. 420.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.