

Photo: Pono Lopez/Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



Young members from the Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Inglewood, CA, walk through their community with shirts that say “Adventists for Black Lives Matter.”

Love and Politics

BY MAÏGANE G. DIOP

As COVID-19 continues to change the face of our society, it has brought long-understood racial disparities back into the limelight. As a glimpse into this issue, according to a recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), in a representative sample of 580 hospitalized patients with lab-confirmed COVID-19, White and Hispanic patients are underrepresented in the patient population relative to their percentages in the community, while Black patients are overrepresented compared to their representation in the outer community.¹ The death rates follow a similar trend, with rates highest among Black people and almost triply lower in White and Asian populations.²

In addition to the burden this places on the Black

community, the recent police murders—murders, not simply deaths—of 46-year-old George Floyd and 26-year-old Breonna Taylor, as well as the murder of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery by a former police officer and his son, have reignited public demands for our government and society at large to address the inequities that Black people face on a quotidian basis in America. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has received refreshed energy from millions of people across the world. They understand that until we acknowledge and act to remedy the systems in place that allow for the abuse of Black people, persistence of health disparities, and unpunished murder of Black lives, particularly by police, all lives do not matter in the eyes of our society.

However, much of the rhetoric and exhortative calls

have been missed by persons in the worldwide Christian community.³ Many Christians use “Love” as a blanket term in response to the brutal murder of Black people in America. However, “Love your neighbor” is not a passive command. Instead of understanding the problem and the terminology of the movement, many shift to the tone-deaf retorts of #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter, or they deviate to messaging that denigrates protestors—peaceful and violent.

Worst of all, some rescind any personal responsibility and use their Christianity as an excuse. Whether it’s “We need to love each other” or “Only God can solve this” or “I’m heartbroken and praying” or “These are senseless deaths and we must pray that God changes the hearts of these people,” the messaging is clear: I’m sad about this, but my passive reaction is enough and all I need to do is pray and send feelings of love and healing. I’ll wait for God to do the rest.

Is that true Christian love? Frankly, no. We claim to follow a God who plainly said that He “hates” the sacrifices and feasts dedicated to Him by a people who rejected justice and righteousness in their lands (Isaiah 1). We claim to follow a God who promised to exact vengeance on a people that deliberately engaged in corruption (Isaiah 2). We claim to follow a God who emphatically pleads with His people to do right by the weak and oppressed so that they may avoid the desolation that evil always brings (Jeremiah 22). We claim to follow a God who tells us to seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (Micah 6). We claim to follow a God who detests the despicable “noise” of the worship of His people who abused the oppressed and rejected justice (Amos 5). Rather, He calls for “justice to run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24). Our prayers must be buttressed by action.

Furthermore, we claim to follow Jesus Christ, whose

entourage included those whom society despised, who purposefully ministered to those ostracized by the main society. Christ challenged the laws and customs of His time, calling people to rise above in their interpersonal relationships. And He did this out of love. God’s love meant sending prophet after prophet after prophet to His people in the Old Testament to warn them of the spiritual and physical consequences of rejecting justice

and righteousness. Jesus’s love meant praying for those who suffer, but also ministering to them and speaking out against evil. Jesus’s love meant pointing out shortcomings in the customs of the time and calling people to a higher code of ethics, as is evidenced by His many interactions with the Pharisees, His disciples, and gentiles.

God’s love is a love that makes its presence known. It’s a love that led Jesus to die very publicly in order that His death might serve as a testimony of God’s very loud love. A love with which being a passive bystander to the abuse and murder of your neighbors is incompatible.

Many would argue that Adventists should not be involved

in the political system at all, for reasons including but not limited to: the imperfection of all earthly governance systems, certain values that all parties hold that may be against one’s belief (in other words, incomplete alignment with one’s beliefs), and lack of faith in the political system’s ability to enact change. Some would even argue that engaging in politics has nothing to do with our Christianity.

However, consider that our politics have everything to do with our Christianity.

Christianity is a religion of interpersonal relationship, as evidenced by the “love your neighbor” command, six of the ten commandments referring to interpersonal relationships, Christ telling us that whatever we do for our fellow man we do to Him (Matthew 25:31-46),

Until we acknowledge and act to remedy the systems in place that allow for the abuse of Black people, persistence of health disparities, and unpunished murder of Black lives, particularly by police, all lives do not matter in the eyes of our society.

God's love is a love that makes its presence known. It's a love that led Jesus to die very publicly in order that His death might serve as a testimony of God's very loud love. A love with which being a passive bystander to the abuse and murder of your neighbors is incompatible.

the many biblical indications that we will be judged by how we treat our fellow humans, and God's Old Testament judging of Israel based on how they treated (or mistreated) the oppressed in their society (widows, migrants, strangers, etc.). You can find indications of this last point in any of the prophet books (e.g., Amos, Habakkuk, Isaiah, etc.) and through Jesus's speeches. Thus, God doesn't want empty words that support Him, but for us to show our belief in His message via our actions towards our fellow humans.

Our politics is one of the most important ways in which we show our code of ethics regarding interpersonal relationships. We vote for people who best match our personal ideals. When we vote for a certain party, person, judge, representative, district attorney, etc., we vote to support their perspective on 1) how we treat the homeless [housing policy], 2) how we treat migrants [immigration policy], 3) how we treat the poor [policy for government welfare/social programs], 4) how we treat the uneducated [education policy], 5) how the government takes money from the poor, the rich, and those in between [tax policy], 6) how those funds are distributed [congressional and state/local budgets], 7) how we address societal inequities [civil rights policy], 8) how we treat those who commit crimes [criminal justice and carceral policy], 9) how we treat the sick [healthcare policy], and many other ways. All of these have to do with how we treat our neighbors. When you vote, you are showing how you think your neighbors should be treated. Avoiding engagement in government can oftentimes be synonymous with apathy and bystandership.

Given that our politics are the means through which

we express and contribute to the enactment of how we believe our neighbors should be treated, and Christianity is heavily centered on how you treat your neighbor, your Christianity and code of ethics has everything to do with your politics.

Now is a time for introspection amongst all Christians. Do we truly believe that every human has inherent, intrinsic, and infinite worth as we Christians claim? Are we willing to defend this Christian belief? Are we harboring biases towards Black people that lead us to dismiss the verified and abundant claims of abuse? Are we resistant to taking the initiative to learn more about systemic racism and how we contribute to it? Are we willing to call out injustice when we see it, regardless of perceived political affiliations? Are we complacent? Are we committed to modeling God's love in our own lives and circumstances? Or are we more committed to being comfortable?

Endnotes

1. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e3.htm?s_cid=mm6915e3_w
2. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-deaths-race-ethnicity-04162020-1.pdf>
3. <https://sojo.net/about-us/news/some-evangelicals-struggle-black-lives-matter-movement>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/08/09/how-ferguson-widened-an-enormous-rift-between-black-christians-white-evangelicals/>



MAÏGANE DIOP is a second-generation Seventh-day Adventist Christian, MD/PhD student, and singer/songwriter.