

Social Justice Handbook

Small Steps for a Better World | By Mae Elis Cannon | Reviewed by Chip M. Anderson

As the director of finance and planning services for a community action agency, I spend my working hours “engaging the community to end poverty.” Yet, it is my belief that the Bible calls upon the Christian community to be associated with the economically vulnerable and, as part of church life and discipleship, to seek to address the issues of poverty. It is my passion to connect Christians to those affected by poverty and to help the Christian community to think about the ways they can engage the issues of social justice. In *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World*, Mae Elise Cannon provides an invaluable resource for the Christian community, for both those who are committed to the issues of poverty and social justice and, as well, for those who need convincing. Cannon is senior director of advocacy and outreach, Middle East, for World Vision USA; an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church; and former executive pastor of Hillside Covenant Church in Walnut Creek, California. Through the *Handbook*, she presents a biblical basis for the Christian responsibility toward the issues of social justice and traces Christian engagement in social justice throughout church history, presenting examples from early colonial America, the Great Awakening, and through nineteenth- and twentieth-century social-justice movements. Cannon offers numerous individual examples that model how the Christian and the church can be engaged in the issues of social justice.

The *Social Justice Handbook* is divided into two parts. The first sets the “Foundations of Justice,” that is, as God’s “love is experienced and understood, Christ’s followers will have a better sense how to put it into action in their immediate circles of influence and beyond” (18). This section of the book provides a biblical framework for justice, arguing that God’s justice and righteousness “are inextricably linked throughout the Scriptures” (19) and that God’s justice is strongly associated with his standards that determine our relationships to each other and to the world. Simply, the “gospel cannot be dichotomized into spiritual provision or material deliverance” (29). She writes that justice “is the right exercise of power—God is the ultimate power and authority in the universe, so justice occurs when power and authority [are] exercised in conformity with his standards” (39). Cannon focuses the center for expressing this conformity to God’s standards in the community of faith, pointing out that “compassion was embodied in the local church, which was the primary place where benevolence was expressed” throughout history (44).

In part 2, Cannon presents an alphabetically arranged list of more than eighty “social justice issues,” providing a reference guide for action. The topics range from abortion to education, healthcare to homelessness, politics to poverty, race to sex trafficking, and water to work. Each is

joined to a short reflection exercise and “take action” steps to move the reader to engage the issue being described. Cannon adds a helpful, brief bibliography for further study on each topic.

Cannon includes, throughout both sections, numerous ministry profiles of individuals (e.g., William Wilberforce, 50), movements (e.g., New Monasticism, 140), and organizations (e.g., Salvation Army, 62). These profiles offer examples and motivating stories that not only provoke thought, but also inform how people have addressed injustice, poverty, and social problems. She provides a wonderful set of appendixes that include organizations, books, documentaries, and movies, linking the reader to more resources for connecting with the issues of social justice.

In the *Handbook*, Cannon moves the reader—more accurately, the local church body—from “Apathy to Advocacy” (ch. 4) to be the true advocates of justice. She rightly asserts that the “body of Christ must be mobilized to enter into heart-transforming relationships with all people” (79) and to “stand up for the poor and the oppressed” (100). It is an expression of faith, she argues, for Christians to be “intercessors and advocates for the least in society” (100) and, as part of the faith community, to be “change agents” who transform the unfortunate circumstances that the vulnerable face everyday.

In the *Social Justice Handbook*, I identified with the passion Cannon has for social justice and the burden she has for drawing others to engage in compassion and action to address the issues and causes of injustice and poverty. Cannon succeeds in connecting her readers to issues of social justice, providing them with resources to help them to engage their immediate spheres of influence as “change agents” on behalf of the least among us.

CHIP M. ANDERSON, a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, is ordained by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He authored a lay commentary on Philippians and serves as director of finance and planning services at NEON, Inc., a community action agency in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Originally published in [*Priscilla Papers*, Volume 26, Number 1 Winter 2012, p. 29.](#)

[Purchase your copy today!](#)