

“Ellen G. White: Prophet or Plagiarist?”

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Elder William Fagal

Director, White Estate Branch Office, Andrews University

Editorial Comments

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Some of the comments received about our last Bible Study on “The Sabbath: A Sign of Belonging,” (No. 72), have made aware of the fact that some fellow believers view the Sabbath more as a commandment that must be observed, than a loving response to God’s gracious invitation to stop our work to allow Him to work in us more fully and freely.

Some of you informed me that for the first time you understood the Sabbath in a positive way, as a day to celebrate God’s creative and redemptive love—a day to experienced the awareness of God’s presence, peace and rest in our restlessness lives. I can only thank God for using this newsletter to enrich the understanding and experience of Biblical truths.

A SPECIAL ARTICLE BY ELDER WILLIAM FAGAL

The author of this newsletter is Elder William Fagal, whom I have known for many years as a helpful neighbor, gracious gentleman, and an esteemed scholar. For the past 17 years he has served as Director of the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University. In many ways he has become the clearing house for the many questions related to writings and ministry of Ellen White. He is always ready to help with calm and patience teachers and students seeking documents and information.

Elder Fagal wrote the article “Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?” for the last issue of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM (Spring 2001). The whole issue is devoted to the nature of Ellen White’s inspiration. If you do not receive ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, I would urge you to subscribe at your earliest convenience. The cost of the subscription is only \$9.00 for one year. Outside the USA the cost is \$12.00. You can subscribe by calling (269) 471-2300 or by email: info@adventistsaffirm.org You can also subscribe on line at the website: <http://www.adventistsaffirm.org>

ADVENTISTS AFFIRM was started in 1987 by a group of committed Adventist scholars who sensed the need to address some of the doctrinal and practical issues facing the church today from a Biblical perspective. The response has been very gratifying. Thousands of believers from all over the world have subscribed to this timely magazine.

RELEVANCE OF ELDER FAGAL’S ARTICLE

The choice of Elder Fagal’s article for this newsletter, has been largely dictated by the many requests I have received during the past few months to respond to the numerous allegations against Ellen White. Some have gone as far as preparing web sites exclusively devoted to prove that Ellen White was a false prophet.

My guess is that people who devote their time and efforts to discredit Ellen White, or a Bible write for that matter, most likely have a problem in accepting their admonitions. I found this to be true in my research of the Sabbath. Those who want to spend the Sabbath seeking for personal pleasure and profit, are inclined to develop a subjective theology to release themselves from its obligation.

The fact that Ellen White used various sources in her writings, tells me that she was not a “lazy prophet” but a diligent investigator of truth. This is proven by the fact that her library had about 2000 books—far more than most preachers or even professors have today.

Those who find fault with Ellen White using information from other authors, ignore that most of the information contained in the Bible was NOT communicated by God directly. In most instances, divine revelation assumed the form of guidance in the selection and evaluation of available information.

Moses, for example, was presumably guided by God in the selection and reconstruction of the oral tradition of patriarchal history. The author of Chronicles mentions explicitly some of the sources that he used in writing the history of the kings (1 Chron 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 12:15; 16:11; 20:34; 24:27). Luke wrote his “orderly account” of Christ’s life by gathering testimonies from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:2-3).

God does not encourage laziness by providing information already available. This helps us to understand why Ellen White spent countless hours seeking for the historical accounts of the events she had seen in vision. She recognized her limitations. When the revision was done of THE GREAT CONTROVERSY in 1911, she thanked the scholars who made the necessary corrections. I have reasons to believe that was she alive today, she would appreciate any additional corrections competent scholars could offer to her writings.

The same is true of Bible writers. For example, were the Gospels’ writers alive today, I have reason to believe that they would appreciate receiving help in correcting some of their inaccuracies. Incidentally, some of the inaccuracies are very glaring. For example, the Synoptic Gospels place Christ’s crucifixion on the day after Passover (Nisan 15), while John on the actual Passover day (Nisan 14). It would be nice if we could ask them to reconcile their differences and give us the exact date of the Crucifixion.

On a personal note, what has established my confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, is the fact that she speaks to my spiritual needs. For many years now, my wife and I, have been reading from the daily devotionals of Ellen White. For us they are a constant challenge and inspiration. Often we start the year with the devotional book of the year, but after few weeks, we switch to one of Ellen White. The reason is simple. No one seems to speak to our spiritual needs as Ellen White does.

NEW ATTRACTIVE COLOR FLIER

For long time I have been without a color flier descriptive of all my 16 books, cassettes, videos, and CD ROM recordings. The last color flier was printed about five years ago and I have been out of it for many months. The many demands on my time have caused me to postpone the preparation of a new attractive color flier. Finally, with a help of my son, Dany, who is a gifted architect, we prepared a nice four-colors flier which has a picture and a brief description of each book, as well as information about all my recordings.

Today, August 23, 2001, the printer delivered at our home an ample supply of this attractive flier which I would be glad to mail FREE OF CHARGE to all of you who can use it. If you need a supply of this color flier to pass out to your friends, and church members, please let us know how many you can use, and we will gladly mail them to you immediately free of charge.

Your personal effort to promote my timely books and recording is greatly appreciated. At this time my ministry is a venture of faith. I took an early retirement last July 1, 2000 at the age of 62 after over 30 years of teachings. The reason is that I want to devote myself more fully to research, write, and proclaim our timely message. Since for the next two years until I reach the age of 65, I will not receive any retirement benefit, support for my ministry comes exclusively from the distribution of my publications. Thank you for supporting my ministry by requesting and passing out this new attractive flier.

TWO NEW CD ROM RECORDINGS

For long time many people have asked me if my books and popular PowerPoint seminars would be available on a CD-ROM. Being a late comer to the computer scene, I have delayed any decision on the matter. Frankly, I thought that this project would require far more computer skills than I have. Providentially the Lord has placed me in contact with a computer professional who have already produced CD-ROMS recordings in the past. With his help, we plan to offer you within the next 4 to 6 weeks TWO CD-ROM recordings. Let me briefly explain each of them.

FIRST CD-ROM: IT CONTAINS ALL THE 16 BOOKS, 70 PLUS ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS, AND ARTICLES THAT I HAVE WRITTEN ON VARIOUS TOPICS.

This CD-ROM will come equipped with a search engine that will allow you to search for words, texts, or topics. This means that when you need to access my research on any topic that you may be studying for personal devotion, Sabbath school or witnessing, you can punch in the word, and you will have at your finger tip all what I wrote on that subject.

The CD-ROM is compatible with PC and APPLE computers. The retail price is \$70.00, postage paid. SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER UNTIL SEPTEMBER 15, 2001, FOR ONLY \$50.00, postage paid. Expected delivery date: September 30, 2001 or earlier.

Feel free to phone in your order at (616) 471-2915 or (616) 208-1942. You can also email us your order with your credit card number and address. We will not process your credit card until the CD-ROM is ready for shipment to your address.

SECOND CD-ROM: IT CONTAINS MY POPULAR POWERPOINT SEMINARS ON THE SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, AND CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

This CD-ROM has over 1000 PowerPoint slides which I use to present my popular seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle. I have already spent over 1000 hours preparing these PowerPoint illustrated lectures and the people are ecstatic about them. Many have asked me to put them on a CD-ROM.

I am working on this project every waking moment and by God's grace it should be completed within the next two weeks. Each PowerPoint Bible Study comes with the text of my presentation. This means that you can explain each slide using my words or modifying them according to your liking.

The CD-ROM is compatible with PC and APPLE computers. The retail price is \$70.00, postage paid. SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER UNTIL SEPTEMBER 15, 2001, FOR ONLY \$50.00, postage paid. Expected delivery date: September 30, 2001 or earlier.

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ADVENTIST PASTORS EMBRACING THE NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

This past week I have been saddened to learn of another two Adventist pastors who have embraced the so-called "New Covenant Theology" which reduces the Sabbath to an Old Covenant institution no longer binding upon Christians today.

One of the Pastors, Greg Taylor, served as a senior pastor of the Asheville SDA Church, a 500 members congregation in North Carolina. He has resigned from the ministry. I will be speaking in this district on the weekend of November 23-24 and I have been asked to meet with our local pastors to address some of the questions raised by these recent developments. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may help these brethren to understand the fallacies of this deceptive new theology.

THINKING ABOUT HOME

Several of you expressed appreciation about the 3ABN program THINKING ABOUT HOME, where Kathy Matthews interviewed me, especially about the Christian and Music. Unfortunately, I deleted your messages before passing them on to Mrs. Matthews. She would love to hear what you have to say. This will help her plan for future programs.

Feel free to email to me your comments, and I will be sure to pass them on to her this time. Thank you.

THE POWER OF THE PRINTED PAGE

You might appreciate reading this letter I just received from a non-SDA professor. It reminds us of the way the Holy Spirit can use the printed page.

From_: sendmail Wed Aug 22 16:31:01 2001
Dear Dr. Bacchiocchi

I am not a Seventh-Day Adventist church member. However, I had the pleasure to writing to you while I was in the US in the 1990's, teaching French at the University of Northern Iowa, in the library of which university I happened to read From Sabbath to Sunday, which I have always considered a masterpiece.

Since then, you have completed a number of studies, and I would be happy to order the whole set of your (16) books. I suppose you have a special offer for the whole package. Thank you for informing me of the price of such an order and the shipping rates you practise to Luxembourg, Europe, where I currently reside. I would be glad to send you a bank transfer for the amount requested (a bank account and full bank address would be appreciated in this matter).

Your study and dedication to sound doctrine and the Sabbath issue in particular has always been a scholarly and spiritual example to me over all these years. The Sabbath is one of the major lost truths believers outside your denomination have trouble getting back to. Truth is never an easy companion when (dis)obedience is in the lead. The Sabbath does not belong to anybody, but to God only, and obeying this commandment makes it a sign of belonging to Him. Hence its importance.

I happen to be an English-French translator and I translate many Bible books and commentaries into French. I remain at your service regarding the translation of any of your books into French.

I thank the Lord for the courage and light He has gifted you with.
Best regards in Christ,
Alexandre Piscevic

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of August and September 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet many subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminar. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometime next year. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle are now presented with PowerPoint slides which give added realism to our message. If you have attended one of my seminars in the past, you will find the new PowerPoint version to be substantially improved, with hundreds of fine pictures and graphics.

AUGUST 25: ORLANDO, FLORIDA: WALKER MEMORIAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 1410 W. Avon Boulevard, Avon Park, Florida 33825

For information call Pastor Douglas Jacobs at (863) 453-7110 or (863) 453-6641

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 1: LOS ANGELES, CA: TEMPLE CITY SDA CHURCH

Location: 9664 Broadway, Temple city, CA 91780

For information call Pastor Ben Del Pozo at (626) 286-5437 or (626) 292-2249

SEPTEMBER 7-8: MIAMI, FLORIDA: LAUDERHILL SDA CHURCH

Location: 4100 NW 11th Court, Lauderhill, Florida 3313

For information call Pastor Leroy Liburd at (954) 485-2529 or (954) 730-7016

SEPTEMBER 14-15: LEXINGTON, SC: COLUMBIA-FIRST SDA CHURCH

Location: 243 Riverchase Way, Lexington, South Carolina 29072

For information call Pastor Tony Cirigliano at (803) 791-4600 or (803) 791-1135

SEPTEMBER 21-22: DENVER, CO: ARVADA SDA CHURCH

Location: 7090 West 64th Avenue, Arvada, CO 80003

For information call Pastor Gordon Anic at (303) 464-9749

SEPTEMBER 28-29: LOMA LINDA, CA: UPLAND INDONESIAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 11100 Cedar Avenue, Bloomington, California

For information call Pastor Fred Macarewa at (909) 423-0406 or (909) 874-7697

“ELLEN G. WHITE: PROPHET OR PLAGIARIST?”

William Fagal, Director, White Estate Branch Office, Andrews University

About twenty years ago, many Adventists were shaken by claims from a Seventh-day Adventist pastor that Mrs. White had plagiarized her writings from others. In a book he later published, the pastor arranged passages from her writings in parallel columns with the earlier works of others, claiming that she had “copied” their writings and that therefore her claims to having received her instruction from God were a lie.

The results were devastating to the faith of some. People disposed of their Ellen White books in yard sales and trash cans. Some left the Seventh-day Adventist church, while others stayed but took pride in rejecting some of its teachings and practices which Ellen White had strongly endorsed. Even those who did not give up their faith in her writings were, in some cases, uneasy and uncertain about the charges. The effects of this controversy linger to our day.

Not First. Though such claims were new to many twenty years ago, the pastor who popularized them was not the first to have made them. Just a few years before, in the 1970s, an Adventist historian had written a book examining Mrs. White’s involvement in health concerns. He concluded, among other things, that her health counsels were not new or unique. She had drawn them from others, he said, despite her claims to having received them in vision. (The Ellen G. White Estate prepared a detailed, almost point-by-point response to his book.)

Over the years various people inside and outside the church have set forth similar claims. The most influential of Ellen White’s critics was probably Dudley M. Canright, a prominent minister and evangelist in our early years. After withdrawing from the ministry four times in doubt and discouragement and coming back each time, Canright finally left the ministry and the church in 1887. In 1889 he published a book against Seventh-day Adventist teaching, and in 1919, the year of his own death and four years after hers, his book against Mrs. White was published. Prominent among his accusations was that Mrs. White had copied the works of others.

But interest in this issue even predates Canright’s claims. In the *Review and Herald* of October 8, 1867, Mrs. White responded to the question, “Did you receive your views upon health reform before visiting the [non-Adventist-operated] Health Institute at Dansville, N.Y., or before you had read works on the subject?” Mrs. White replied that she had indeed received her visions first, but the question implied the other possibility—that the source of her instruction may have been human rather than divine.

How does a prophet convey God’s messages? Was Mrs. White honest in describing how she conveyed them, particularly regarding her use of sources? Did she get her messages from other people and claim they were from God? These questions deserve a careful look.

HOW DOES A PROPHET CONVEY GOD’S MESSAGES?

Many people seem to believe that a prophet who receives instruction from God delivers it *exactly as God gave it*, without reference to other materials of any kind. Some in the evangelical world believe that God even gave the prophet the *very words* in which to speak and write the messages. They view the prophet as a passive secretary who merely transcribed the Holy Spirit’s words. While Seventh-day Adventists have never adopted that view, having in fact gone on record in General Conference session against it as early as 1883,¹ some church members may hold such a view, perhaps without ever having actually thought it through.

Clearly, while the Bible writers received their messages from God, they did not typically receive the wording from Him, or one would expect them all to sound pretty much the same. We can easily tell John’s letters from Paul’s epistles, just by the style and vocabulary. Their own minds are at work, framing and shaping their God-inspired messages into words of their own choosing.

Furthermore, Bible writers borrowed language from one another and even from non-biblical authors to make the points they wished to put across.² And we note that the first three gospel writers have much material in common, some of it—but by no means all—using exactly the same words. These things suggest that the wording did not come from God, and that the Bible writers were free to draw on the words not only of other inspired writers, but even of common authors, to convey the messages they were inspired to tell.

Gathering and Selecting. What is more, in the introduction to his gospel, Luke tells us that he gathered his facts from those who “from the beginning were eyewitnesses” and who “delivered them to us” (1:1-4). In his case, inspiration helped him to select from others and accurately record the information about Jesus that God wanted conveyed.

In light of these examples from Scripture of how inspiration works, on what basis can we insist, as the pastor-critic of Ellen G. White seems to do, that if the material is not original to the prophet, if it shows any relationship to previous writings, the prophet’s use of it is therefore not inspired? On the basis of what we find in Scripture, we must conclude that *originality is not a test of inspiration*.

Interestingly enough, this very point appears in a book which Ellen White owned and valued, one which was written during her childhood. The introduction to the book, *The Great Teacher*, by John Harris, contains this statement:

Originality Impossible. “Suppose, for example, an inspired prophet were now to appear in the church, to add a supplement to the canonical books,—what a Babel of opinions would he find existing on almost every theological subject!—and how highly probable it is that his ministry would consist, or seem to consist, in the *mere selection and ratification of such of these opinions as accorded with the mind of God. Absolute originality would seem to be almost impossible.* The inventive mind of man has already bodied forth speculative opinions in almost every conceivable form; forestalling and robbing the future of its fair proportion of novelties; and leaving little more, even to a divine messenger, than the office of *taking some of these opinions, and impressing them with the seal of heaven.*”⁸

The 1883 General Conference session recorded the belief of our pioneers: “We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.”⁴ The precise words, then, were not their focus. They looked carefully for the thought being expressed. If the words aptly conveyed the thought, it did not matter under these circumstances whether the prophet had thought them up herself or adapted them from some other author who had phrased matters well.

WAS MRS. WHITE HONEST IN DESCRIBING HOW SHE CONVEYED HER MESSAGES, ESPECIALLY ABOUT HER USE OF SOURCES?

In answer to another question in the same *Review* article we referred to above, Mrs. White wrote, “Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.” The pastor who accused Mrs. White of copying turned this statement against her, claiming that the words are not “her own” but were taken from the writings of others. He questioned her honesty in reporting how she worked.

What She Claimed. But in the context, Mrs. White was not claiming originality but *responsibility*. The question she was answering had to do with supposed conflicts among her descriptions of the length of the Reform Dress she had seen in vision. In response, she observed that she had never been given the length of the dress in inches nor in any other terms she had used to describe it. She had been *shown* the dress but was left to describe its length *in words of her own choosing*. This is what she meant by “The words are my own.”

So then, in fulfilling her responsibility to convey the concepts God had given her, did Mrs. White at times draw from the words and expressions of others, even without giving credit? Yes, she did. And she made no secret of it. In fact, she stated it plainly in the introduction to one of her most widely-circulated books, *The Great Controversy*, and gave her reasons for doing it:

“The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are *not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority*, but because his statement affords a *ready and forcible presentation of the subject*. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works” (pp. xi-xii, emphasis mine).

Wesley’s Practice. John Wesley, the 18th-century founder of Methodism (in which Ellen White grew up), described his own practice regarding documenting his sources. “It was a doubt with me for some time,” Wesley wrote, “whether I should not subjoin to every note I received from them the name of the author from whom it was taken; especially considering I had transcribed some, and abridged many more, almost in the words of the author. But upon further consideration, *I resolved to name none*, that *nothing might divert the mind* of the reader from keeping close to the point of view, and receiving what was spoke[n] only *according to its own intrinsic value*.”⁶

Ellen G. White’s outlook seems similar to Wesley’s. Her primary interest was that people understand her message. She felt no need to cite other writers “as authority.” What they had written might serve simply as “a ready and forcible presentation *of the subject*.” To put it in Wesley’s words, she wanted nothing to “divert the mind of the reader from keeping close to the point of view.”

Standards of the Day. Was such practice acceptable in Mrs. White’s day? Yes. One of our Bible commentary editors found it to be common among 19th-century religious authors. “While editing the *SDA Bible Commentary*,” he wrote, “I had occasion to compare thirty nineteenth-century Bible commentaries on the Book of 1 Corinthians. The first thing I noticed was the extent to which these nineteenth-century writers, many of them well known and respected, copied significant amounts of material from one another without once giving credit. I concluded that nineteenth-century literary ethics, even among the best writers, approved of, or at least did not seriously question, generous literary borrowing without giving credit. Ellen White frankly acknowledged borrowing from various historical writers in the process of writing *The Great Controversy*, sometimes with and sometimes without credit. It is not fair to a nineteenth-century writer to judge him (or her) by our standards today. We must judge them by their standards and accepted practice of their own days.”⁶

Ellen White’s son and principal helper in the latter part of her life, William C. White, reported that God revealed to her that in the writings of others she would find truth expressed in an acceptable manner which would help her convey the messages she had been given. “In her early experience when she was sorely distressed over the difficulty of putting into human language the revelations of truths that had been imparted to her, she was reminded of the fact that all wisdom and knowledge comes from God and she was assured that God would bestow grace and guidance. She was told that in the reading of religious books and journals, she would find precious gems of truth expressed in acceptable language, and that she would be given help from heaven to recognize these and to separate them from the rubbish of error with which she would sometimes find them associated.”⁷

This ability to distinguish truth from error brings us to our next point and the testimony of a non-Adventist scientist.

The key question comes down to this:

DID MRS. WHITE GET HER MESSAGE FROM OTHER PEOPLE AND CLAIM IT CAME FROM GOD?

Dr. Clive McCay, a noted nutrition authority half a century after Mrs. White's day, said that you could not account so easily as this for what she wrote. Dr. McCay, a Unitarian who taught the history of nutrition at Cornell University, received a copy of *Counsels on Diet and Foods* from an Adventist graduate student. He was astonished at what he read there, each statement identified by the year of its publication. For any given year, Dr. McCay *knew* who had been writing on nutrition and what they had written. "Who was this Ellen G. White," he asked, "and why haven't I heard of her before?"

Impressed. Dr. McCay was so impressed by Ellen White's writings on nutrition that he authored a three-part series of articles for the *Review and Herald*. Note a portion of his summation at the end:

"To sum up the discussion: Every modern specialist in nutrition whose life is dedicated to human welfare must be impressed . . . by the writings and leadership of Ellen G. White.

"In the first place, her basic concepts about the relation between diet and health have been verified to an unusual degree by scientific advances of the past decades. Someone may attempt to explain this remarkable fact by saying: 'Mrs. White simply borrowed her ideas from others.' But how would she know which ideas to borrow and which to reject out of the bewildering array of theories and health teachings current in the nineteenth century? She would have had to be a most amazing person, with knowledge beyond her times, in order to do this successfully! . . .

"In spite of the fact that the works of Mrs. White were written long before the advent of modern scientific nutrition, no better over-all guide is available today."⁸

In the years since Dr. McCay made his observations, scientific advances have confirmed his conclusions—and Ellen White's concepts about the relation of diet and health—all the more strongly.

Salt. Dr. McCay referred to the difficulty of successfully selecting the right counsel from the mass of incorrect teachings afloat in Mrs. White's day. One example is the use of salt. Some physicians were literally killing their patients with large doses of salt. Others, such as Dr. Trall, a health reformer popular with Seventh-day Adventists, recognized the cause of these deaths and reacted by forbidding any salt at all, saying that it was a poison.

What was Mrs. White's stance? "I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me" (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 344). She was not always given the reason, the "whys and wherefores," but the counsel was sound and safe to follow.

And her counsel has stood the scientific test of time. Confirmation, however, is not always immediate. It took about 120 years for science to establish the truth of her warnings about tobacco. And some things she taught have not yet been confirmed by science. But her “track record” is strong enough that we need not reject those counsels just because science hasn’t proven them yet. And this track record also makes it untenable to say that she just got her ideas from others and called them her own. As Dr. McCay observed, she could not have done this so successfully.

Not New. Some Seventh-day Adventists have believed—mistakenly—that Mrs. White’s health counsels were new ideas, unheard-of prior to her receiving them. We have seen already that this was not usually the case. Our pioneers, in fact, specifically denied that in health matters Mrs. White was first to set forth the principles she taught. In 1866, Elder J. H. Waggoner wrote in the *Review and Herald*, “We do not profess to be pioneers in the general principles of the health reform. The facts on which this movement is based have been elaborated, in a great measure, by reformers, physicians, and writers on physiology and hygiene, and so may be found scattered through the land. But we do claim that by the method of God’s choice [the visions given to Ellen White] it has been more clearly and powerfully unfolded, and is thereby producing an effect which we could not have looked for from any other means.”

Elder Waggoner went on to make an important point about her health principles: “As mere physiological and hygienic truths, they might be studied by some at their leisure, and by others laid aside as of little consequence; but when placed on a level with the great truths of the third angel’s message by the sanction and authority of God’s Spirit, and so declared to be the means whereby a weak people may be made strong to overcome, and our diseased bodies cleansed and fitted for translation, then it comes to us as an essential part of *present truth*, to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril.”⁹

Motivation. This connection between health and holiness provided a strong motivating factor which helped people to make the needed changes in diet and living. Other health reformers of Mrs. White’s day, and since, did not offer such motivation, and their work showed far less effect. Dr. McCay commented on the difference, apparently without recognizing its origin. One of his other summary points was, “Everyone who attempts to teach nutrition can hardly conceive of a leadership such as that of Mrs. White that was able to induce a substantial number of people to improve their diets.”¹⁰

As a result of the instruction she received in vision, Mrs. White had a God-given message to convey. Others might have made some of the same points before. She could even use or adapt their language for making those points. But she put the material into a structure that was her own, and thus it had new import and new power.

Lawyer’s Testimony. Vincent L. Ramik, a prominent and respected copyright attorney in Washington, D.C., noticed this power. In 1981, in the midst of the newly-reborn plagiarism charges, the General Conference legal office (the Office of General Counsel) used privately-donated money to hire Ramik to research the case law and the literary evidence to see whether Mrs. White was guilty of plagiarism, literary piracy, or copyright infringement. Ramik, a Roman Catholic, spent some 300 hours reviewing cases and reading the literary evidence. In addition to examining the critics’ case, he sampled what he called “a great cross section of her books,” even reading *The Great Controversy* all the way through. On the legal matters, he concluded, “If I had to be involved in such a legal case [regarding charges of plagiarism, piracy, and copyright infringement against Ellen White], I would much rather appear as defense counsel [for Ellen White] than for the prosecution. There simply is no case!”

An important part of his legal opinion was his observation regarding *how* Mrs. White had used the writings of others. “Ellen White used the writings of others,” he said, “but in the *way* she used them, she made them uniquely her own, ethically, as well as legally. And, interestingly, she invariably improved that which she ‘selected’! . . . She stayed well within the legal boundaries of ‘fair use,’ and all the time created something that was substantially greater (and even more beautiful) than the mere sum of the component parts. And I think the ultimate tragedy is that the critics fail to see this. . . .

“The bottom line is: What really counts is the *message* of Mrs. White, not merely the mechanical *writings*—words, clauses, sentences—of Mrs. White. Theologians, I am told, distinguish here between verbal inspiration and plenary inspiration. Too many of the critics have missed the boat altogether. And it’s too bad, too!

“I, personally, have been moved, deeply moved, by those writings. I have been changed by them. I think I am a better man today because of them. And I wish that the critics could discover *that!*”¹

CONCLUSION

We have seen that a prophet proclaims God’s messages not in words given by God but in those of the prophet’s own choosing, which may include drawing on the language of others. Mrs. White openly declared that she had sometimes used the writings of others to help her convey effectively the messages she had been given. Her manner of doing so accorded well with the accepted practice in her day. And she was the master of her materials, not their slave, adapting them to *her* purposes rather than parroting theirs.

The writings of Ellen G. White speak powerfully even today, far more powerfully than the writings from which she drew various words and expressions. As we honor the content of her writings, we also have nothing to be ashamed of in her mode of writing them.

NOTES

1. In voting to reprint the existing volumes of *Testimonies for the Church*, the 1883 session action noted that many of the *Testimonies* had originally been prepared in haste and had certain grammatical imperfections. The delegates voted, "WHEREAS, We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the *enlightenment of the mind*, thus *imparting the thoughts*, and *not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed* [emphasis mine]; therefore,

"Resolved, That in the republication of these volumes, such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought; and further,

"34. Resolved, That this body appoint a committee of five to take charge of the republication of these volumes according to the above preambles and resolutions" (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 27, 1883, p. 741. Reproduced in *Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy* [Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1961], p. 54).
2. The marginal references in many Bibles offer cross-references to other passages of Scripture which a writer may be quoting or alluding to. In Acts 17:28 Paul cites Epimenides the Cretan (6th century B.C.) and the poet Aratus (c. 270 B.C.), a friend of Zeno, founder of the Stoics; in Titus 1:12 he quotes Epimenides again.
3. John Harris, *The Great Teacher*, 2nd ed., 1836, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv, emphasis mine.
4. See note 1.
5. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948 reprint), Preface, p. 8, emphasis mine. Also quoted in F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, p. 406.
6. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Literary Relationship between *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White, and *The Life of Christ*, by William Hanna" (1979), p. 6. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.
7. W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White," Ellen G. White Estate "Elmshaven" Office, 1933, p. 5; reprinted as a supplement to the *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1981, and available from the Ellen G. White Estate.
8. Clive M. McCay, "Adventist Health Teachings Further Confirmed," *Review and Herald*, February 26, 1959, p. 10. A reprint of all three articles is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.
9. J. H. Waggoner, "Present Truth," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 7, 1866, p. 77, emphasis his. Elder Waggoner was a prominent minister and editor. His son E. J. Waggoner is better known today for his part, with A. T. Jones, in presenting fresh views of righteousness by faith at the 1888 General Conference session.
10. Clive M. McCay, "Adventist Health Teachings Further Confirmed," *Review and Herald*, February 26, 1959, p. 10. A reprint is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.
11. "There Simply Is No Case," interview with Vincent L. Ramik, *Adventist Review*, Sept. 17, 1981, p. 6, emphasis his. A reprint is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

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