

Special # 20 April 1971.



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

A CRITIQUE

RE: Graybill, Ronald D., E. G. White and Church Race Relations, Washington D. C., Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1970

This book, as well as a series of articles by Dr. Roy Branson appearing in three consecutive Review & Heralds,¹ appears to have as its objective the mitigation of certain clear-cut statements from the pen of Ellen G. White concerning race relations. However, it is a source of encouragement to know that the "way out" impression left by the Branson articles has been successfully refuted by an eminent research worker in a more recent Review.²

The articles by Dr. Branson introduced Graybill's book, which was soon to be released for sale,³ and in many ways served as a summary of the research done by Mr. Graybill. However, the sweeping evaluation on the part of Branson in regard to the Ellen G. White statements and their application now, was in direct contrast to the scholarly tone which marked Graybill's objective. The two statements from the Spirit of Prophecy which cause the most concern are as follows:

In regard to white and colored people worshipping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party - especially in the South.⁴

The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people.⁵

Concerning this latter statement, Branson writes that "it cannot be said too emphatically that Mrs White's statement. . . was not talking about the possibilities of social and civil integration in the United States of the 1970's".⁶ Graybill, however, sets forth in a reserved manner the objective of his book. In the

preface, he wrote:

This book does not discuss the contemporary relevance of Ellen White's counsel. It is an attempt to answer the question What did she say? not the question What does it mean to us today? This should not be understood to imply that the answers to these two questions are always different, but that the *questions are different*, and therefore may or may not have different answers.⁷

Graybill's approach to the Spirit of Prophecy and Church Race Relations is to seek to demonstrate that the clear cut statements made in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9, do not mean what they say, when considered against the back-drop of similar statements made in letters written to individuals a decade or so previous to the publication of the volume. Under some circumstances this might be a valid approach. But in this instance such an approach misses the mark.

Sister White herself supervised the gathering of the material that made up the section on the Race question, as well as the rest of the book. This is acknowledged by Graybill.⁸ The question then is simply this - when Sister White was gathering this material in regard to the Color Line, was she merely gathering material which was relevant only for that point of time, or was she bringing together basic principles from material previously written which was to guide the church as it faced the future till the end of time, or "until the Lord shows us a better way"?⁹

Graybill goes to great lengths to show when and under what circumstances the paragraph which contains the sentence relative to the negro seeking to be placed on an equality with a white man was written. He shows that two of the sentences were from a letter to A. F. Ballenger, but admits that he has been unable to discover the exact date when the key sentence was first written.¹⁰ This in reality proves the opposite of Graybill's intent. It indicates that this paragraph in Testimonies, Vol. 9, which is so disconcerting to the negro agitators and white integrationists in our midst, is indeed a compilation of thought brought together by Sister White herself from previous letters. This lifts the

concepts above context to serve as a guide-line for the church in dealing with the race question. In fact the two sentences identified by Graybill from the letter to Ballenger are actually two paragraphs apart!

The material in Testimonies, Vol. 9, on the color line is contained in just twenty-eight pages. At the time that this was being compiled, the material found in the publication - The Southern Work - had already been printed, and was available for complete inclusion, if Sister White had deemed it adviseable. But she did not! She chose rather to bring together basic guide-lines for the church in days to come, for she was aware that the spirit of prejudice was growing stronger.¹² She saw no change that would alter the basic counsel until the time of the loud cry when the Holy Spirit would be poured out.¹³ Anyone who has an elementary knowledge of race relations in the United States today should realize that this question is far from solved, and carries a very potential backlash. It is true that under government pressure there are things being carried out which would appear to signal a different attitude. However, there is a seething beneath the surface in the North as well as the South, so that when a reaction sets in, which will surely come, some of the prophecies in the Inspired Testimonies that the liberals in our midst sneer about on the subject of slavery will be literally fulfilled. If we are wise, we will be happy in that hour that we had the grace to accept the guide-lines of Testimonies, Vol. 9, for just what they said, even in face of the mounting pressure to ignore them at the present time.

Graybill has performed a real service in documenting the exact reason for the disturbance at Yazoo City, Mississippi, which involved our faithful brethren who were trying to better the lot of the negro. He pointed out that it was the negro preachers who incited the whites due to the fact that some of the members of their churches were accepting the Adventist teachings including the Sabbath.¹⁴ The charge that would solicit the greatest support from the white community in-

volved the idea and practice of social equality. This our brother - J. F. Rogers - who was laboring in Yazoo City emphatically denied stating - "We DO NOT believe in social equality, neither do we teach or practice it."¹⁵ How closely he followed this policy is explained in detail. He wrote to the editor of the local paper as follows:

We have never adopted any colored girls nor do we ever expect to do so. None have ever eaten at our table or spent evenings in our parlor. True, we have servants and treated them as such. We have ever been cautious to observe the customs of this place and be governed by them.¹⁵

This position of J. F. Rogers was not condemned in the Spirit of Prophecy. No letters are produced in Graybill's research where Sister White ever challenged Roger's policy. Neither has Graybill produced a single line where Sister White ever practiced social equality as defined by Southern norms. She followed in her own life the guide-lines inspiration caused her to set for the church.

In the matter of equality of the races, Graybill concludes:

Perhaps her [Ellen G. White] clearest statement of "equality" was made. . . in 1896, when she described the Negroes as "men standing in God's broad sunlight with mind and soul like other men, with as goodly a frame as has the best developed white man."¹⁶

Here is a statement made in 1896 that can be understood against the back-drop of the times. There were among the whites those who denied that the negro was a human being, and rather considered him as a animal. This concept Sister White condemned by stating clearly that a colored man does have a mind and soul. But to conclude that she is stating equality of mind and perception with the white man is to read too much into what she did say. All that she stated that was equal between the races was the physical frame!

What were the basic concepts of Sister White on the color line? She did oppose any and all forms of slavery whether of body or mind. She advocated equal opportunity and noted "that the Lord marks the longing of many souls for privi-

leges that they might be better informed and better clothed."¹⁷ This does not involve social equality, neither is it so stated. That the negro might realize economic and educational opportunity, the guide-lines of the Spirit of Prophecy need not be mitigated. Thus the counsel stands firm and unalterable. It clearly states:

The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people.⁵

In regard to white and colored people worshiping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party, especially in the South.⁴

Opportunities are continually presenting themselves in the Southern States, and many wise, Christian colored men will be called to the work. But for several reasons white men must be chosen as leaders.¹⁸

Roy Branson, "Racist or Champion of Equality", "Slavery and Prophecy", "The Crisis of the Ninties", Review and Herald, April 9, 16, 23, 1970

Julia Neuffer, "How Activist Were Adventist Abolitionists?", Review & Herald, September 10, 1970

Roy Branson, Review & Herald, April 23, 1970, p. 5

Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9, p. 206

Ibid, p. 214

Branson, Op. Cit.

Ronald D. Graybill, E. G. White and Church Race Relations, p. 8

Ibid., pp. 23, 61

White, Op. Cit., p. 207

Graybill, Op. Cit., pp. 57-58

See The Southern Work, p. 84

White, Op. Cit., pp. 204-205

Ibid., p. 209

Graybill, Op. Cit., p. 71

Ibid., pp. 79-80

Ibid., p. 110

Ibid., p. 92

White, Op. Cit., p. 202

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