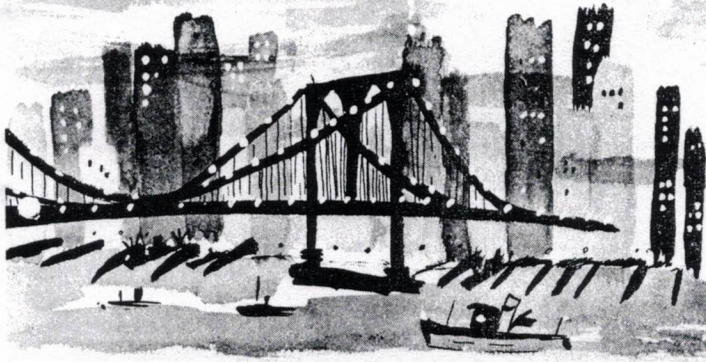


October/71.



"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

THE ISSUE

In Christianity Today, Dr. Stanley G. Sturges - the Adventist missionary of Nepal fame - authors an article entitled, "The Growing Quarrel Among Seventh-day Adventists".¹ In the first two paragraphs, Dr Sturges briefly outlines certain beliefs and practices as taught by the church which mark us as a "peculiar people". Then he asks a question - "How does a church with these strict practices survive in a day of permissiveness?" To his own question, the doctor replies - "The answer lies chiefly in the guidance given the church by its prophetess, Mrs Ellen G. White, But herein lies a problem."

As the problem is analyzed by Dr. Sturges, he groups various shades of thought regarding the work and inspiration of Sister White into two principal categories. One, he terms "the ultra-conservative" Adventist viewpoint which states, "that what Mrs White said in any particular situation a century ago applies with equal force today, no matter how much times have changed." The other is described as those who carry "on a vendetta severely critical of everything Mrs. White ever wrote or did." He indicates that "new currents of understanding" which are being promoted in the church through two periodicals, Spectrum, and Perspective, may alter the "rigid stance of the Adventist Church"; but "the main issue of reorientating the church to a more rational attitude toward Mrs. White is evaded; it's too loaded a topic."

What is Dr Sturges' solution? Referring to the two principal attitudes, he says:

Both attitudes do her a grave injustice. By her creative leading the Adventist church became a stable organization. It is too bad that Adventists can't pay her the respect she deserves and then continue where she left off. . .

The Adventists face the challenge of accepting the fallibility of Mrs White while at the same time preserving the church's commendable characteristics.¹

As if anticipating this unusual article by Dr Sturges, the editors of the Review - the official organ of the church - published a paper written by Professor Roderick S. Owen, an educator in the church from 1883 to 1927.² The gist of Owen's position was that "while the Bible is infallible and is the basis of all Christian faith, it needs to be infallibly interpreted to avoid confusion and division." The conclusion based on this thesis is inescapable - the writings of Sister White *are* that infallible interpreter of the Bible for the Seventh-day Adventist church!

This doctrine - an infallible Bible needs an infallible interpreter - is the basic element in the Catholic church's dogma of papal infallibility when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* regarding faith and morals. On this point Cardinal Gibbons has written:

If the Catholic Church were not fortified by this Divinely-established supreme tribunal, she would be broken up, like the sects around her, into a thousand fragments and religious anarchy would soon follow. But by means of this infallible court her marvelous unity is preserved throughout the world. This doctrine is the keystone in the arch of Catholic faith.³

Elder Owen, in his presentation, makes no attempt to hide the fact that the position he is expounding is basic Catholic doctrine. He fortifies his thesis by referring to Cardinal Manning's justification for leaving the Church of England to return to the Roman fold. Owen wrote - "Hence, Cardinal Manning said in substance, 'An infallible Bible is of no value without an infallible interpreter.'"² It sounds good, but is it a valid position to take, and can we accept this doctrine as applied to the writings of Sister White?

How do we reconcile this viewpoint - that the writings of Ellen G. White constitute an infallible interpretation of the Bible - with the statement from the Writings themselves which indicates what the best interpretation actually is. Observe the statement carefully:

The Bible with its precious gems of truth was not written for the scholar alone. On the contrary, it was designed for the common people, and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus.⁴

Froom in his questionable book - Movement of Destiny - also discusses *the issue* of the writings of Sister White in respect to the development of the truths of the Advent Movement. He writes with emphasis:

*No MAJOR doctrinal truth or prophetic interpretation of the Advent Faith was initially introduced among us through the agency of the Spirit of Prophecy - that is, through the instrumentality of Ellen White.*⁵

[We might ask the honorary doctor if he can show evidence where a man or a group of men among us in their study of the Scriptures outlined the truth of the eternal, underived, pre-existent Deity and Equality of Jesus Christ with the Father prior to the statement by Sister White - "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived."⁶]

To support his contention concerning the role of the Spirit of Prophecy in the development of the truths of the church, Froom resorts to what is the hallmark of his whole book - either misrepresentation, or omission and deletion of material that does not fit his prescribed and preconceived dictums. He quotes Sister White's testimony as to how the foundation of our message was laid, and deletes the section that would nullify the thesis set forth as quoted above. Here is the whole quotation in strict context: [Froom's deletion is in italics]

Many of our people do not realize how firmly the foundation of our faith has been laid. My husband, Elder Joseph Bates, Father Pierce, Elder Edson, and others who were keen, noble, and true, were among those who, after the passing of time in 1844, searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible,

in order that we might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power. When they came to a point in their study where they said, "We can do nothing more," the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.

During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the word of God. The brethren knew that when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted as light direct from heaven the revelations given.⁷

This recital of our early history by Sister White was given at the turn of the century at the time of the alpha apostasy under Kellogg. In this same testimony is found the unequivocal assertion that "the foundation . . . was laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the word *and by revelation.*"⁸

Let us face the fact that this Movement is based on the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ which is the Spirit of Prophecy. We do not need to make unfounded assertions just to make our faith more palatable to the Evangelicals; neither do we need to adopt a basic doctrine of Romanism to sustain the abiding gift of prophecy.

The Issue was succinctly stated at a convention of Self-Supporting Workers last year in the following two propositions:

1) If God's plans which He gave us by revelation decades ago are no longer relevant, no longer practical, no longer workable, then we need, very much, a [new] revelation because only by revelation can God guide His church in these important matters. "By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved."

2) On the other hand, if God did indeed have plans that were workable when He gave them, and those plans are still workable, is it not the height of folly to sit in committee meetings, or conventions, or institutes, and think up new ideas of how to do what God told us to do long ago?⁹

How can *The Issue* be resolved? What answer can we find to the problem? How shall we relate ourselves to the writings of Ellen G. White? The discussion of these questions must await another thought paper.

¹Stanley G. Sturges, "The Growing Quarrel Among Seventh-day Adventists", Christianity Today, June 18, 1971, pp. 12-13

²Roderick S. Owen, "The Source of Final Appeal", Review, June 3, 1971, pp. 4-6

³James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of Our Fathers, p. 125, Eighty-eighth Edition, (Paper Back)

⁴Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 331

⁵Leroy E. Froom, Movement of Destiny, p. 107

⁶Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, p. 530

⁷Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 2, pp. 56-57

⁸Ibid., p. 57

⁹W. D. Frazee, "Precious Stones or Stubble?" A taped recording of a study given October 30, 1970, Convention of Self-Supporting Workers, Wildwood, Ga.

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Note:- Inasmuch as this thought paper and the one following are intricately related, they are being sent together. Thus the October issue will arrive later than scheduled, and the November issue will be somewhat earlier than the schedule set for its release.

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IV-7 (Oct.- 1971)

Published by the Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc. This Foundation is tax-exempt, - and all gifts to it are tax-deductible.