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*White, Ellen Gould*

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Chapel Talk Given by Elder M. L. Andreasen  
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A few weeks ago I spoke in Los Angeles at the White on the subject of the Spirit of prophecy. I have been asked to repeat that speech. I do not know that I can do that, but I'll do my best.

I became an Adventist as a young man. I was not brought up an Adventist--you might say not a Christian either. When I accepted the truth, I accepted it without knowing all that was involved as a part of a general program.

I soon came face to face with the question of the Spirit of prophecy, as revealed in the writings of Sister White. I read her published volumes and found them to be very good, but I didn't find any special inspiration in them. Indeed, I did not know they were supposed to be inspired. However, I considered them very good writing. At that time I was taking work in Chicago University, and majored in English. As you can hear, I'm a foreigner. I came to America as a young man and hence did not grow up here. If I were American-born, I would be a teacher of English today, for I love the language.

The first time I became conscious of the beauty of language and of poetry was when a teacher in the university quoted this line: "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank." I said to myself, "The writer is evidently attempting to say that the moon is shining. Why not say so?" The teacher seemed to read my mind and almost quoted my thoughts when he

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said, "You might ask why he didn't say that the moon is shining. That would be a fact, but it wouldn't be poetry." Then he gave illustrations. The poet could have written, "How sweet the moon shines." That would have been better than the first statement. "How sweet the moon shines upon this bank," would be still a little better, but not yet poetry. But when he said, "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank," something happened to me. That moment I saw a beauty in poetry that I had not seen before, and as he enlarged upon it--that many things in this world could never be said except in poetry--then I woke up to the fact that I was losing out on something, and that men, real men, could love language and poetry without losing any of their manliness. This was a revelation to me and was the beginning of my love for language and poetry.

In the hymn today we sang, "The cedars of Lebanon bow at His feet; the air is perfumed with His breath." That is poetry, a beautiful poetic representation. We are not to take such words in a literal sense, nor are we to make prose out of poetry in the Bible.

I had read Desire of Ages before I came to the University of Chicago, where I took a class in the life of Christ. We had many books for collateral reading, and I chose Desire of Ages as one of them. This gave me an opportunity to read it carefully day by day. I found there a beauty of expression that caught my attention, and I said to myself, "I do not see how Sister White could ever have written that; she was a woman of but little education, and hence would be unable to produce such a work." I said to myself again and again, "She never wrote that."

I was interested not only in her language, but also in her theology. If you have ever attempted to write on the life of Christ, you have no

doubt found many places where it was easy to make a misstep. Chicago University was not at that time any more than now noted for its orthodoxy and correct theology, but some of the men had some good work on the life of Christ. As I read Desire of Ages, I found that Sister White had treated certain subjects in such a consistent way, avoiding some pitfalls and stepping over others, that I again said to myself, "Sister White could never have written that."

In another class I was attending, I was asked to collect as many "immortal lines" from Shakespeare as I could find. This gave me an idea. "Why not try to find immortal lines in Desire of Ages?" I did this, and found more immortal lines in Desire of Ages than in Shakespeare. That may have been because of my limitation or prejudice. I shall leave that an open question.

When I began to preach, I came directly face to face with the question of Sister White. If I were to teach others, I felt I must know for myself. Believing in direct action, I went out to California to see Sister White. She received me graciously and I stayed for some months. I told her what I had come for. She listened kindly to me and said that I might have access to her writings. I said, "I am not interested in that which has been printed. I think I have read it all. I want to know in what form it was before it was sent to the printer." I believed at that time that her copyists and proofreaders had fixed it up, for it seemed certain to me that she could not have written it in the form it appeared in print. I had with me a number of quotations that I wanted to see if they were in the original in her own handwriting. I remember how astonished we were when Desire of Ages was first published, for it contained some things that

we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity which was not then generally accepted by the Adventists. Some of the quotations concerned theology, others I had selected for their beauty of expression. I wanted to see how these quotations looked before they were corrected by the proofreaders.

So I was given access to the manuscripts. I stayed in California several months. Being a reasonably fast reader, I read nearly all Sister White had written in her own handwriting. I was particularly interested in the statement in Desire of Ages which at one time caused great concern to the denomination theologically: "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived." p. 530. That statement may not seem very revolutionary to you, but to us it was. We could hardly believe it, but of course we could not preach contrary to it. I was sure Sister White had never written, "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived." But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published. It was so with other statements. As I checked up, I found that they were Sister White's own expressions.

Were there no corrections made in her manuscripts? Yes, corrections were made. She wrote rather fast, yet her writing was quite legible. But she would make spelling mistakes at times. There were also errors in punctuation. To her, punctuation was a minor matter. At times she would leave out not only a comma and semicolon, but also periods. This would cause difficulty at times to decide where the period should be. In all cases where Sister White wrote by hand the manuscript would be taken by the copyist and commas or periods inserted; then it would be taken to Sister White for her approval or correction. In the final analysis it was her work all the way through.

In the mornings I would often sit with Sister White and visit. She began her work early, as you will find mentioned in her writings again and again. She got up at six o'clock, or at five, or four, and even earlier.

As I asked her all manner of questions she would sometimes say, "My mind does not work along that line today." At other times she was ready to speak on almost any subject. I was pleased to find that Sister White could both smile and laugh. I had thought of her being always serious. I confess that to begin with I was a little scared, but tried not to show it. I found her to be very congenial, with a delicate sense of humor. At times she would laugh, not one of those heavy laughs which we sometimes hear, but a tingling, girlish, beautiful laugh.

Once we got to talking about olden times. She had asked my counsel on a certain chair she had purchased. It was a rocking chair, and a sister who had visited her had reproved her for her extravagance in buying such a chair. She had asked me if I thought she was extravagant. A few days previously I had tried to gather up courage to tell her that I thought she needed some new furniture, but I didn't dare tell her. Her office furniture was antiquated, not modern. Her house was in the old New England style---clean, neat, hand woven rugs on the floor. I thought that when the opportunity should come I would tell her what was on my mind.

This morning we got to talking about this rocking chair. "It is second-hand," she said, "and I paid eight dollars for it." I assured her that I did not think the price extravagant. "It is comfortable to sit in," she said, "and I have a lap board in front of me so I can sit here and write." I then told her a story of a young Methodist couple

who had been given a rocking chair as a wedding present. In my innocence I had thought rocking chairs had always been in existence. I didn't know they were a new invention, and that only in the latter part of the 18th century they came into common use.

This young couple had been given a rocking chair, which the elders considered a questionable piece of furniture. To sit in a rocking chair and rock back and forth and not get anywhere--such was surely of the Devil. Hence real Christians did not have rocking chairs. When, therefore, these young Methodist people accepted the present of the chair, the elders of the church felt something should be done about it. They appointed a committee to visit the two. Later, in presenting their report, they stated that when they left the rockers had been removed and the chair stood on four legs as a good Christian chair ought to stand. Sister White laughed, and we had a pleasant time talking on various matters.

She told me about her husband bringing a bedspring to campmeeting once. Many here are not old enough to remember the kind of beds we slept in fifty or more years ago. At times the beds were just board with no springs at all, or they might have ropes stretched, or consist of slats on which straw was placed. Only comparatively lately have springs come into existence. At first they were not the kind of springs we have now, but curly springs, the kind that sags in the middle. Brother White had bought one of those springs. Being a new-fangled invention, it was highly debatable whether it was right to use one. When he arrived in camp in his lumber wagon and brought the springs, the brethren felt that something should be done about it. So they had council and talked with him about it. He escaped censure by stating that Sister White was not very well and needed the springs to sleep on. He was permitted to keep

the springs, but never brought them to campmeeting again. I enjoyed the story.

Mostly we discussed serious matters. I had become profoundly impressed with the fact that Desire of Ages was really her work. I could account for the writings of Sister White only on the basis of inspiration.

I cannot define inspiration as regards her work any more than I can define inspiration as applied to the Bible. I accept her writings as being given by God; I believe she was divinely guided and inspired. This is not the same as infallibility. Even the Bible we do not accept as verbally inspired.

Sister White had great difficulty in bringing to the people the message as she intended it. Again and again men would take certain things in their extreme meaning, and she had to correct it. And she did correct it.

Before speaking of this, however, may I digress and say that when I became connected with the Seminary, and was asked if I would teach there, I said to them, "Yes, on one condition. That is that I be permitted to read again carefully and critically all that is in the Vault." By the Vault I mean the place where these writings are kept in their original form. I was by that time thirty years older and presumably had better judgment and a little more critical ability. I reasoned that if I was to teach teachers I must know of a surety what I teach, definitely and absolutely. Accordingly, I spent three summers going over everything thoroughly. I give it as my testimony that I believe those writings to be divinely inspired, that God guided Sister White in the writing of them. They are not to take the place of the Bible. We are not to preach Sister

White. We are to preach the Word! As Protestants it must always be the Bible and the Bible only. But I must also take the stand that I cannot afford to neglect these writings given by God. I do not put Sister White on a pedestal. I do not worship her. I worship God. I can use her writings as a help and I am doing it continually. But I must not put them above the Bible. The Bible must always come first. There are statements in the Testimonies I cannot understand, as there are statements in the Bible I cannot understand. I have a compartment in my brain for which I arranged while yet a young man. There I put questions I do not understand. For a long time I worried over questions I could not fathom. As a teacher I felt that I must answer every question put to me. It was a helpful revelation to me when I found out that it was far better to say, "I don't know," when I don't know rather than to attempt an answer. When I now come across a statement that I do not understand, instead of worrying over it I put it in my special compartment--in storage, as it were. At first I had the naive idea that the questions would shortly come out again and all be clear. Well, once in a while one answer gets out and the problem clears up; but for every one that gets out, ten go in, and my compartment grows larger and larger. In fact, I'm gathering questions "for eternity." I would advise others to do the same.

You will constantly find questions you cannot answer. The Bible contains principles for our guidance but does not go into detail. To illustrate: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." That settles the question of the day. But how are we to apply the commandment in detail? That is left for the individual. I remember the time when we discussed the question what a doctor should do on the Sabbath. Should he answer calls? And if he did, should he charge for such calls? Some



thought that would be wicked. It would be earning money and working on the Sabbath. Some doctors decided not to charge for work done on the Sabbath. That worked, but only for a short time. Everybody got sick on the Sabbath because it didn't cost anything. And then the doctors did not know what to do. They tried different methods but no set rule was decided on. It was left for each to apply the principle for himself.

Chickens lay eggs on the Sabbath. What can the farmer do about it? Some feel they cannot profit by the chickens working on the Sabbath. On this and other problems our farmers have had no end of trouble. There are no specific directions in the Bible concerning eggs. The principle is there; it is for each to apply it. The trouble arises when one applies the principle to someone else. Apply it to yourself. Be as strict as you please, but don't attempt to force somebody else to do as you think. God has left each to decide for himself.

Take the liberty question. "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." This is a clear principle, but you will find a thousand applications of it, and opinions differ. The trouble comes when somebody tries to apply it to someone else. Again, take tithe paying. The principle is clear. But there are a thousand questions that come up, and again the trouble arises when one attempts to apply his own ideas to someone else.

It is so about health reform. The principle is very clear. But when it comes to certain questions, you better not apply your idea to somebody else. At two campmeetings in California three years ago two different sisters came to me. "Do you eat butter?" I confessed that I did. "Then you don't believe the Testimonies." I answered, "Fine day today, isn't it?" for I find it little use to argue the question. Do

not the Testimonies bear positive testimony against milk, butter, and eggs? They do. Let us think this through. I was in the Far East this year. I saw there what I saw here in this country years ago. In milking the cows, a small stream of milk would trickle down the not-too-clean arm down into the pail. When we got the milk in bottles later on, we were very careful in pouring it out so we wouldn't get the last eighth or quarter of an inch, for that was simply black dirt. There was no inspection of cattle or milk, and no pasteurization. When I was in certain countries I did not drink milk. I, also, would bear positive testimony against that kind of milk.

My father used to tell me about cheese making in the old country. In those days they had no milk separators. The milk was simply put out in a shed where the wind blew and all manner of things happened to it and the cream. I'm afraid the milk was not free of bacteria. From this kind of milk they made cheese. Having made the cheese, they dug it down in the ground where it stayed for months to ripen. It did ripen, and when it came out it was indeed ripe! Under conditions such as these, the statement about milk, butter, and eggs holds true today as much as ever. But when conditions changed, Sister White herself began to use milk, butter, and eggs. When conditions change, we should not apply certain statements to these changed conditions that are not applicable.

I passed through the health reform period in the early part of the century. We took health reform seriously and in its extreme meaning. I lived practically on granola and water only. Some of you may not know what granola is. It looks like toast ground up, but it is better than toast. I used neither milk, butter, nor eggs. My older daughter was ten years old when she first tasted butter. We used no meat, of course,

like  
Grape  
Nuts  
cereal

nor milk, butter, or eggs, and almost no salt and sugar. We did not have much left but granola. I canvassed on granola. It never occurred to me to accept an invitation to a meal. I carried my granola with me in a sack. I sold granola also. That was part of health reform. I ate my granola and drank water three times a day. Then my attention was called to the fact that two times were better and so I ate granola twice a day. You might think I would have suffered on such a diet but I didn't. In fact, I prospered and grew stout.

But I got tired of granola alone after a while. I wondered if it would be all right to eat raisins with it; and so I bought some raisins with a little trepidation and anxiety. Now it was granola and raisins, but my conscience smote me, so I gave up the raisins. Then I bought a pineapple and ate all of it, with the result that my mouth became sore. I took that to be punishment for eating pineapples. So I went back to granola again. Then I read somewhere in Sister White's writings that people eat altogether too much. I applied that to my two meals of granola a day. That statement in itself is true, but not true under those conditions. I cut down on my granola and henceforth lived mostly on granola and a few simple vegetables and peanuts, not for a day or a month or a year, but for ten years.

We were serious and honest in doing this, and thought we had testimony for it--not testimony in its broad application but only in that narrow sense which some apply today. The principles in the Testimonies in regard to health reform are true and applicable now as they were then, under like conditions. Let no one set aside the Testimonies. They are given of God. But let all beware lest they apply to conditions other than those under which they were given.

Sister White has written much on playing games, and many have gone to extremes in making application of sound principles. Note what she says:

"In plunging into amusements, match games, pugilistic performances, they declared to the world that Christ was not their leader. All this called forth the warning from God. Now that which burdens me is the danger of going into extremes on the other side."--Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 378.

Some condemn games of all kinds and quote Sister White. Then she reproves the extremist and says that now her burden is the extremes on the other side. In everything you will find a beautiful balance in the Testimonies. I believe that what Sister White has written was true under those conditions and that they are true now wherever like conditions prevail. We are to use the sense that God has given us, and there is danger of going to extremes on both sides.

We ought to take exercise. We have a right to play, but the moment you make play the chief thing in life you are on the wrong track. When you go to extremes in anything, however good it may be in itself, you are wrong.

"Probably there has not been an important movement or reform for the benefit of fallen man, which would, if properly conducted, result in his own spiritual advancement, that has been free from extremes. There are always many who move too slowly, and that testimony necessary to urge them to duty, is always sure to be taken advantage of by some who have more zeal than caution. While Satan tempts the many to be too slow, he always tempts those to be too fast. Mrs. W.'s labors are made very hard, and, sometimes perplexing, by reason of the course of extremists, who think the only safe position is to take the extreme view of every expression she has written or spoken upon points where different views may be taken.

"These persons will often hang upon their interpretation of an expression, and push matters at all hazards, and utterly disregard what she has said of the danger of extremes. We suggest that these loosen their hold of some of her strong expressions designed to move the tardy, and for a while suspend their whole weight upon some of the many cautions she has given for the benefit of extremists. In doing

this, they will be more safe themselves, and will get out of her way, that she may speak freely to those who need urging to duty. Now they stand between her and the people, and paralyze her testimony, and are the cause of divisions.

. . . . .

"Mrs. W. needs the help of all who can help in the cause of truth and reform. The people generally are slow to move, and hardly move at all. A few move cautiously and well, while others go too fast. The work of reform is not brought about in a single day. The people must be helped where they are. They can be helped better by one standing on the line of truth nearest them, than on the side the greatest distance from them. It is best for them to be taught on all points of truth and duty by persons of judgment and caution, and as fast as God in His providence unfolds them to His people. He who is but partly reformed himself, and teaches the people, will do some good. He who sees the duty of reform and is full strict enough in any case, and allows of no exceptions, and drives matters, is sure to drive the reform into the ground, hurt his own soul, and injure others. Such do not help Mrs. W., but greatly burden her in her arduous work. We invite, yea, entreat, such to get out of the way, and let Mrs. W. come to the people.

"She works to this disadvantage, namely: she makes strong appeals to the people, which a few feel deeply, and take strong positions, and go to extremes. Then to save the cause from ruin in consequence of these extremes, she is obliged to come out with reproofs for extremists in a public manner. This is better than to have things go to pieces; but the influence of both the extremes and the reproofs are terrible on the cause, and bring upon Mrs. W. a three-fold burden.

"Here is the difficulty: What she may say to urge the tardy, is taken by the prompt to urge them over the mark. And what she may say to caution the prompt, zealous, incautious ones, is taken by the tardy as an excuse to remain too far behind.

"We say to those who wish to help Mrs. W. in her work, you will not find her far ahead of the people, with a few extremists. No, she is back with the people, tugging away at the wheel of reform, and has to lift all the harder because of your extreme advance. Come back, good, wholehearted souls, and stand by her side, and lift where she lifts. What can you do there at such a distance from the people? Come back. You must meet the people where they are."--by Elder James White to "A Brother at Monroe, Wisconsin," and printed as an editorial in the Review and Herald of March 17, 1868. Vol. 31, No. 14, p. 220.

In regard to health reform, be as strict as you please, but do not judge others by your standard. What you need is to straighten yourself up and guide your life by what has been written. You do not need any

encouragement in being more slack; rather, be more strict, but with yourself. As I think of this and of some other things, I wish that we could come back to the faith once delivered to the saints--to a balanced view, not extremes on one side or the other. As stated, you will find that Sister White was well balanced. You cannot bring a single statement to me written anywhere of which I cannot say, "I believe that." But I must also have in mind that there are balancing statements and that we may not take extreme views.

I have no intention of deceiving you nor deceiving myself. I believe, friends, that we ought to give heed to the messages God has given, apply them to ourselves and not judge others. Oh, the intolerance of some who think they are right! Let them be right. But do not judge others.

I believe we have come to the time when Sister White must be given a definite place in our teaching. We must not place her above the Bible, nor must we reject her. We must use the sense God has given us, the sense that James White used when he wrote what has been quoted above. Be cautious of your application and your assertions. Never say that because someone disagrees with you that he does not believe the Testimonies. He may not believe your interpretation of them, but still he may believe them as fully as you do, and have a more balanced view.

Men and women, you have a message to the world, a health message, a medical message. You must see to it that the writings of the Spirit of prophecy are held in reverence, and given their rightful place. They are given for us to read and to study, and they will be a help to us. I hope that what I have said today may strengthen your faith in these writings. Also that it may make you cautious of your judgment of others, and that you will take the view of them which I believe God would have you take so that we unitedly can go forward, believing the whole truth, and believing in the gift God has given to His people.