

Divine Revelation:

A REVIEW OF SOME
OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S CONCEPTS

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THE SOURCE OF REVELATION

"No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."² Thus did the Apostle in one sentence state the essence of the doctrine of revelation: revelation is necessary because of the separation — no man has ever seen God; revelation has taken place — God has been made known; revelation has been personal — by the Son in the bosom of the Father. In stating the *need*, in asserting the *reality*, and in declaring the *means*, John has made a threefold declaration identifying the *subject* of revelation as being God.

Throughout history man has been more aware of the gulf between himself and his God than he has of the fact that this gulf has been bridged. Men speak freely of the One whose name is holy and who inhabits eternity, but they are reluctant to concede that his presence in the human heart is just as authentic and more perceptible. However, this is the awesome proclamation of God through the prophet: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit."³

The tendency to accentuate the distance between God and man, the heavenly and the earthly, the unseen and the seen, becomes evident in the epistemological concepts of conservative Christianity. A distinction is usually drawn between knowledge attained by reason or experience and knowledge received through revelation. The universe and its observable processes are supposed to constitute the source of "ordinary" knowledge, and God is supposed to be the source of "revealed" knowledge.

Although the separation which exists between man and God within a

world in rebellion against him is undeniable, of equal, indeed of far greater, importance is the fact that this separation may be *transcended* by all who are "of a contrite and humble spirit." If God is one, and if the natural universe is an expression of his power, character, and nature, then all truth, whether learned by "ordinary" or "revelatory" means must say something about him. Perhaps the visible and the invisible worlds are closer than is generally recognized. Could it be that all real knowledge is a revelation of the one God? This concept is basic to the following assertions:

From God, the fountain of wisdom, proceeds all the knowledge that is of value to man, all that the intellect can grasp or retain.⁴

Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite.⁵

Things in this world are more intimately related to heaven and are more directly under divine control than is usually realized. This holds true not only in spiritual matters but in the advancement of knowledge. Helpful inventions and improvements, the physician's skill and knowledge of the human mechanism, the ability of the carpenter, the strength of the blacksmith have their source in God.⁶ Whenever, wherever, however man learns, to the extent that he finds truth or attains helpful skills God is revealed in him.

God has revealed a transcript of his character, his will for humanity, and the principles of the divine government.⁷ However, the revelation of God is not all in the past, and mankind is not dependent solely on revelatory records. All spiritual illumination has God as its source. Who can say that the potential for divine revelation today is not as great as it ever was? "God can communicate with His people today, and give them wisdom to do His will, just as He communicated with His people of old."⁸ The communication between heaven and the soul of man may be a free and open process by which the light and glory of God are granted abundantly to man. The fact that the human race still lives is evidence that it actually is happening. Communication with God is a necessity to human survival.⁹

A formidable obstacle to the formulation of a viable doctrine of divine-human communication is the lingering residue of nineteenth century Protestant orthodoxy, which insists that revelation is different in kind and process from inspiration, and that the former is to be found only in the Bible. Ellen White suffered from no such arbitrary presuppositions. For her, divine revelation was not a dogma but a dynamic, vibrant, continuing ex-

perience essential to the redemptive process. Her concepts were so broad that they can be treated only in miniature here.

THE PURPOSE OF REVELATION

When Isaiah was granted a vision of God and his glory, he cried out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"¹⁰ This must always be the effect on a human mind confronted by the Deity. What man can continue in self-glory after an experience that lays bare the concealed deformity of his soul?¹¹ Revelation makes man aware of his slavery to sin and captivity to evil, leads him to hate sin,¹² and enables God to expel it from his soul. Thus, revelation breaks the shackles of his bondage, lifts his mind from its degradation to an appreciation of eternal reality, and restores his soul to liberty.¹³

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If revelation resulted only in self-abasement, however, its desirability would be in question. When Christ dispels the darkness of evil, the bondage of guilt is broken, and God is revealed as dispensing forgiveness through his infinite mercy.¹⁴ The slaves of sin are liberated to become sons of God. In place of the master-slave relationship in sin, the new Lord-disciple communion develops and deepens into a similarity of mind and character.¹⁵

Even this similarity, however, does not meet the full intent of revelation. It must culminate in a oneness between humanity and divinity. Revelation is not merely a passing on of knowledge; it is an imparting of the divine nature so that in God human nature may be made complete.¹⁶ A union between God and man is accomplished so that the Deity dwells in humanity and activates the powers of body, soul, and spirit.¹⁷ This union of the human and the divine through a personal knowledge of God is climaxed by earthly man gaining entrance to heaven and mortal man achieving eternal life.¹⁸

This is the ultimate purpose of revelation. Contingent values may be identified, but they are incidental to the primary purpose: to make man god-like and to unite God with man.

SPECIAL AND GENERAL REVELATION

The idea that special communications are sent by God to certain individuals has dominated thinking throughout most of the history of the church. That God is revealed by his handiwork in creation in a more general sense has also been a long-accepted belief. The revelation in nature

alone, however, has always been considered inadequate to fulfill the redemptive purpose of the divine disclosure. At least three limitations show this inadequacy: general revelation brands men sinners, but it does not save them; general revelation is available to all men, but not all receive it; those who do receive it are enabled to do so because another revelation has been given. Unless he is guided by the wisdom of a special revelation, man is likely to exalt nature above the God of nature. Only in the light of divine wisdom is nature illuminated and rightly interpreted.¹⁹

At times the general and special revelations become closely related. The experience of John in exile on Patmos, where he learned to observe closely the manifestations of divine power in the book of nature, is an illustration. He delighted to meditate on the great work of creation and the power of the Divine Architect. To him the desolate cliffs and the dashing of the waters against them spoke of the terrors of the awful outpouring of God's wrath. The glory of the sky, day or night, taught him the littleness of man. In the mighty rocks he saw reminders of Christ, the Rock of his strength, in whose shelter he could hide without fear. As John recalled that God spoke to Moses from the rocks, that God descended upon rocky Horeb to speak his law amid thunder and lightning from a thick cloud, the Spirit of God came upon him. As he continued to meditate on the majesty and greatness of the Creator, John was overwhelmed. He recalled incidents related to his association with Jesus years before.

Suddenly his meditation is broken in upon; he is addressed in tones distinct and clear. He turns to see from whence the voice proceeds, and lo! he beholds his Lord, whom he had loved, with whom he had walked and talked, and whose sufferings on the cross he had witnessed. But how changed is the Saviour's appearance! . . . His eyes are like a flame of fire; His feet like fine brass, as it glows in the furnace. The tones of His voice are like the musical sound of many waters. His countenance shines like the sun in its meridian glory.²⁰

Unable to endure the enveloping glory, John fell to the earth. By the hand and voice of the One who thus confronted him he was strengthened, "and then were presented before him in holy vision the purposes of God for future ages."²¹ In this instance, general revelation appears to lead into special revelation without the individual's awareness of the transition at the time.

"God has communicated with man by His Spirit, and divine light has been imparted to the world by revelations to His chosen servants."²² Before the invention of writing, those who had communicated with God passed their knowledge orally from one generation to the next. Beginning

with events related to the Exodus and continuing to the close of the apostolic age, inspired revelations were committed to writing and "embodied in an inspired book."²³ Through the truths recorded in the Old and New Testaments God speaks to each man individually, and as directly as if his voice could actually be heard.^{24,25}

Although the Word of God is correctly called revelation, the Bible reveals truth only to those who search for it. Reading the Bible is not sufficient; one must study it diligently to the accompaniment of much prayer. One must receive it as it is perceived. One must believe it as it is revealed. One must act upon it as it is learned. Its truth must become an integral part of the life, exemplified in the character.²⁶

He who would be an effective exemplar must himself have direct enlightenment; he cannot depend on the reflections of others. He must plead with God in prayer for enlightenment of the mind.²⁷ He must be able to witness to what he has seen, what he personally knows of God. He dare not parrot that which he has learned from others; he must be able to speak from his own experiential knowledge.²⁸

"By the secret influences of His holy spirit, again and again the Lord comes to us and presents to us the things which pertain to our eternal welfare." This communication is termed "the dictates of the heavenly voice."²⁹ Out of a communion with the Spirit grows a close cooperation between man and God, and the Spirit's educating power will constantly be unfolding truth that elevates and refines.³⁰ At no point in this growth should one be satisfied. There must be a continual reaching out after God in the realization that "there is an eternity before us in which there will be revealings of His glory and we shall become better and better acquainted with our divine Lord and have a more comprehensive knowledge of Him."³¹

Moved under the Spirit's inspiration, a speaker says the words of God in warning, reproof, and appeal. By God's power, not his own, revelation is transmitted; it is God working through a faithful servant.³²

Two experiences illustrate how Ellen White thought this should work in practice. The first concerns a minister who was confronted by one of his parishioners with a question that made him realize his "business as usual" preaching was inadequate. He left his pulpit for three weeks to study and plead with God for a greater revelation. "When this minister returned to his charge he had an unction from the Holy One. . . . He presented the Saviour and His matchless love. There was a revelation of the Son of God, and a revival began that spread through the church and to the surrounding regions."³³

The second experience is from Ellen White's own life. At a camp meeting in Ottawa, Kansas, for several days it seemed that her preaching was not accomplishing what it should. She became particularly impressed that the people needed to realize the necessity of exercising living faith. Then while she was speaking on righteousness through Christ alone, the Holy Spirit became evident: "Truths were presented that were new to the majority of the congregation. Things new and old were brought forth from the treasure house of God's word. Truths were revealed which the people were scarcely able to comprehend and appropriate. Light flashed from the oracles of God in relation to the law and the gospel, in relation to the fact that Christ is our righteousness, which seemed to souls which were hungry for truth, as light too precious to be received."³⁴

That Ellen White believed in a continuing revelation to individuals, even special revelation to particular individuals, is clear. That she firmly believed she had a place in this special revelation is also apparent from even a superficial acquaintance with her writings. Early in 1856 she wrote: "God has seen fit to use me, a feeble instrument; . . . messages have been given me, and it has been enjoined upon me to be faithful in declaring them."³⁵ From the beginning she felt "bidden by the Lord, 'Write, write the things that are revealed to you.'"³⁶ She obeyed, certain that she was strengthened to do so by none other than the Lord himself and certain that her writings contained the word of God. The writing she did for journals and books she believed expressed not only her ideas, but ideas that God had opened for her.³⁷

In the introduction to *The Great Controversy* she wrote:

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ . . . and Satan. . . .

As the spirit of God has opened to my mind great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed, — to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.³⁸

She was not writing history; she was interpreting it. The Spirit's illumination revealed God as active in history, and she was the agent through which the illumination came. In her exposition of history under the influence of this illumination, she became an instrument of revelation. Of this she had no question.

Anyone who is convinced that he has received divine revelation will inevitably be asked some form of the ancient question, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Ellen White's answer: "I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title."³⁹ This sentence is part of a larger statement that indicated the reasons why she consistently refused to assume the title of prophet. First, some who boldly claimed to be prophets discredited the cause of Christ, and she did not wish to be classed with them. Second, her activities were so diverse that she did not feel the term prophet was descriptive of her work. "I cannot call myself other than a messenger, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out."⁴⁰ When one person wrote to her that he believed every word she ever spoke in public or private and everything she ever wrote was "as inspired as the Ten Commandments," she publicly and vehemently denounced this viewpoint and denied that she or any of those who had been associated with her from the beginning ever made any such claims.⁴¹

REVELATION BY INTERNAL SUGGESTION

Both Old and New Testaments abound in illustrations of revelation by internal suggestion, as in visions and dreams. "If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream."⁴² Paul regarded "visions and revelations of the Lord" as cause for an apostle's "boasting;"⁴³ and his own life was radically altered by a "heavenly vision."⁴⁴

Belief in the divine origin of visions and dreams was basic to the entire ministry of Ellen White. She did not attempt, however, to give a technical description of the psychological means of contact between the human faculties of cognition and the supernatural world, except to say, "The brain nerves that connect with the whole system are the medium through which heaven communicates with man."⁴⁵ She reported these processes as experiences she had had. To her, these visionary activities were as real as those in which she was consciously engaged. She could recall what she had seen, heard, said, read, thought, felt, imagined, written, acted upon, and wished for during a vision. Even though the symbolism of a dream might arise out of a recent experience of her own, and although her understanding necessarily was conditioned by her own apperceptive mass, she felt completely dependent on divine action for the reception and understanding of a dream or vision and for subsequent recollection, description, and interpretation.

She did not differentiate essentially between the vision and the divinely

inspired dream. For her, the relationship between the natural and the supernatural was so close that within a matter of one evening she could pass from her ordinary conscious experience into a natural sleep, awakened to the awareness of the divine presence physically perceptible, and then lapse into the divinely inspired dream of sleep without astonishment or feeling of mystery.⁴⁶

Although she warned against mistaking an ordinary dream for a prophetic vision, she never felt any confusion herself. She explained simply that a genuine communication from God carries its own evidence of validity. During both sleep and trance she had experiences in which she apprehended specific knowledge that she otherwise would not have gained.

REVELATION BY COLLABORATIVE ACTION
WITH THE HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

If revelation can be induced during natural sleep or during the ecstatic trance, is unconsciousness an essential condition for the reception of revelation? If divine agencies are able to present images to the human mind during its passive state, is it not possible that they also may influence mental images during periods of conscious activity? The Bible, recognized as a product of revelatory activity, must have a positive answer to this question, for by far the larger part of the materials of both Old and New Testaments came from sources other than visions and dreams.

Ellen White's belief in revelation by concursive action with the human consciousness was expressed in frequent and numerous contexts. She recognized this kind of action in the writing and understanding of Scripture, in the work of the Holy Spirit, in spiritually induced mental impressions, in the practice of prayer, and in the exercise of faith.

She cited Paul as a specific example. Although Paul was an inspired apostle, the Lord did not keep him constantly informed of the spiritual condition of his churches. This information the apostle received frequently from other members of the church. Neither did the Lord give a new revelation for every situation. On the basis of the information he obtained from common sources and the revelation of God's will that he had previously received, Paul "was prepared to judge the true character of these developments," and on the same grounds he knew how to deal with them. The counsel that Paul gave the churches in these various circumstances was stated "just as much under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his epistles."⁴⁷

Concursive action is necessary to achieve understanding of previous reve-

lation, for only as one experiences the deep movings of the Spirit of God during prolonged and intensive study can he apprehend Bible truth and experience its power. Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, the human mind is unable to discern truth from error and is subject to demonic deception even in the study of the inspired record.⁴⁸ But, on the other hand, the little knowledge that man boasts could be a hundredfold greater if the mind and character were enlightened by the Spirit of God.⁴⁹ The honest inquirer, sensitive to impressions of the Holy Spirit, may be assured of obtaining a clearer knowledge of truth and an unfolding of divine mysteries, assisted by angels who "pour light and knowledge into the darkened understanding."⁵⁰ Ellen White regarded truth learned through intelligent, prayerful study of the Bible by one who is in living connection with God as new light and new revelation.⁵¹

In her ministry she frequently was conscious of specific mental impressions that she attributed to the action of the Spirit of God on her already active mind. Often these came while she was speaking at religious services and were simply concerned with what she should say or do next; sometimes, in fact, they were contrary to what she had planned. But the experiences were so real, and at times affected her so completely, that they seemed to involve her entire person: "I felt the power of God thrilling me through and through."⁵²

Occasionally she relied on such impressions as confirmation for the rightness of some course of action in which she was involved. For example, when she was asked by the General Conference Committee to make an extended visit to Europe, she did not feel that the invitation was in harmony with the will of God. However, she made preparations and finally boarded the train to begin her transcontinental and transatlantic journey. Speaking of it later she said that, although she had prayed for months for guidance in this matter, her thinking was not clarified until the moment she sat down in her railway coach. "But when I had taken my seat on the cars, the assurance came that I was moving in accordance with the will of God."⁵³

When asked how she could be sure that she had divine authority for matters on which she spoke so positively, she once replied: "I speak thus because they flash upon my mind when in perplexity like lightning out of a dark cloud in the fury of a storm. . . . At such times I cannot refrain from saying the things that flash into my mind, not because I have had a new vision, but because that which was presented to me perhaps years in the past has been recalled to my mind forcibly."⁵⁴

She frequently expressed concern that Christians should learn to think

for themselves and receive their enlightenment from God firsthand, and she held that prayer is an effective means to this end. The guidance and wisdom thus received is "not through the channel of some other man's mind, but wisdom that is unadulterated from the Source of all power."⁵⁵ She believed that God would thus reveal his will in regard to the daily concerns of life. "We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God."⁵⁶

The mind can be disciplined to make concursive action with the Divine possible. Both thoughts and imaginations are employed in the development of communion with God. One may develop the habit of a divine-human conversation. The question "What will the Lord have me to do?" should be addressed to all the purposes and pursuits of life. The constant inquiry as to how one can serve God is a prelude to a continual walk with God. The conscious development of love for that which Christ loves is to grow into oneness with him.⁵⁷ But the reception of divine revelation is impossible without earnest human effort. The usual mental processes must change from concern with the things of the world to contemplation of the divine. By deliberate mental effort, one should make real in the human imagination great scenes depicting acts of God recorded by inspired writers. Even the scenes of otherworldly glory portrayed by prophets should become a part of one's habitual mental imagery. The words and character sketches of Christ should be the frequent subject of thought and a part of one's thinking vocabulary.

Because man has the opportunity of direct communion with God, Ellen White regarded it as one of the great defects of the human race that this direct communion is experienced to so slight a degree. There was no doubt in her mind that God will enter into such communication with any man who sincerely and faithfully seeks it. "Invisible agencies will work through the visible; the supernatural will cooperate with the natural, the heavenly with the earthly; unknown things will be revealed through the known."⁵⁸ While the mind is seeking a cognitive grasp of recorded revelation, or while it is engaged in the culture of spiritual interests, consciously seeking union with the Divine, believing in its reality, and deliberately obeying to the extent of its understanding, the Holy Spirit acts on the mind by expanding its powers, enlightening its understanding, impressing it with flashes of insight and conviction, guiding it into attitudes, and impressing upon it a character. By such concursive action God reveals himself to man and man apprehends God.

REVELATION THROUGH THE CHURCH

Throughout history God's revelation has been bound up closely with a special community: prophets spoke for God in the context of the covenant with Israel, and apostles witnessed to the redemptive act as members of the body of Christ.

Probably no concern bore more heavily upon Ellen White throughout the years of her service than did her anxiety about the revelatory nature of the relationship of God and his church. She spoke of every child of God as "a letter" sent to his respective family, village, street, and acquaintances. Often those who do not read the Bible or see God through nature will learn of his character through his living representatives, who are to show forth the divine glory. Even the truths of Scripture are given a living significance through living men.⁵⁹ "Human agents are God's appointed channel to the world."⁶⁰ In acts of love and mercy the church and its members are to represent the character of God and demonstrate the principles of divine law.

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The church has been appointed the channel of light through which God communicated his will and purposes for mankind. Although God reveals himself to individuals, he does not give "to one of His servants an experience independent of, and contrary to, the experience of the church itself."⁶¹ Nor does he commit to any one man the knowledge of his will for the church as a whole while the church itself is left in darkness. All those to whom God speaks are placed in close connection with the church, that they may be interdependent as well as dependent upon God.⁶²

God's representatives today are the links that connect the church of history with the living church of the present. In every age God has revealed himself through the church. He is continuing to do so now. Past revelation is to be incorporated with that of the present so that the continuing church will possess and display an ever-increasing light of God in the earth.⁶³ As the channel of his revelation, the church is God's agency for salvation.

CHRIST IN THE PROCESS OF REVELATION

The identification of Christ as the Word who was with God in the beginning, who was God the Creator, who became the true Light that enlightens every man, who became Flesh, who came into the world to dwell among men, who as the only Son has made the Father known, indicates the uniqueness of the place Jesus holds in Christian concepts of revelation.⁶⁴

Ellen White regarded Christ as the Eternal Revelator and attributed to him all revelation in history and in nature. Inasmuch as historical and general revelations suffer from the limitations of sinful man and corrupted

creation, the character of God as communicated through these means had been completely misunderstood before the Incarnation. God could manifest himself adequately to man only by the personal appearance of Jesus the Christ.

Ellen White spoke of Christ as God's thought made audible. He lived the character of God among men who had never before seen anyone not in rebellion against God. Although this same Christ had endeavored to communicate through types, patriarchs, prophets, theophanies, and acts in history, he had been unable to break through with the complete truth. Although man had learned many things about God, man had never been confronted by God personally, and he did not know him. To make such an acquaintance possible God became flesh and lived among men.

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In nature, in the events of human life, and in the human conscience, Christ had been mediating the revelation of God. That God was recognizable in nature was demonstrated in Jesus' own learning process: he learned about God by means of the natural revelation seen in the light of the special revelation recorded in Scripture. Yet nature, being impersonal, could show only the handiwork of God. Christ, as a person, could reveal the personality and character of God with a fullness impossible by any other means. And although he is no longer visible on earth, he continues as the mediator of all divine blessings to man, and he offers to be a guide, a teacher, a counselor, a friend to humanity.

Christ remains the only source of intellectual enlightenment available to man; he is the source of all knowledge man learns by any means. In him the revelation in nature is united with the revelation in history and man is confronted personally by God. He speaks to man with the authority of God; he speaks to man as God; he does the acts of God; he is God. In Christ, the Creator gave himself in and to his creation. In Christ, fallen creatures not only can see God, but also they may find a union with him. Christ stands as a bridge between the human and the divine in all relationships. He manifests to man the truths, the attributes, the character, the very person of God.

THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

To summarize Ellen White's concepts of the kinds of knowledge that are revealed may be easy or difficult. The simplest way is to state that her concept of God as the source of all knowledge and as the sovereign of all processes excludes no knowledge from the realm of revelation. On the other hand, what knowledge *may be* revealed and what *actually is* revealed are not necessarily the same. The differentiation is determined not so much

by the content as by its purpose and by the recipient's readiness. Any knowledge that might contribute to a person's salvation and that he would not learn otherwise may properly be expected to be revealed.

The glory, the character, the will of God have been revealed. So have the degradation, the character, and the selfishness of man. The purpose of these revelations is to turn man from his evil, reconcile him to God, and unite him with God and with his fellowmen in the love relationship.

Revelations of future events which concern the destiny of man and the judgments of God, events connected with God's saving acts, or specific things that man should do are granted. These contribute to man's understanding of God's redemptive work and help him to locate himself in the progress of history preparatory to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Revelations about the mission of the church, its structure, and its modus operandi are given to contribute toward the advancement of God's redemptive work through the church. Similarly, revelations concerning the objectives and procedures of education; relationships within the family; the use of leisure time; and attitudes of individuals toward themselves, toward others, and toward the church are all relevant to the divine-human relationship.

Excluded from special revelation is such knowledge as is unnecessary to salvation and such knowledge as might detract from the importance of revealed knowledge by making man satisfied in his lost condition or by encouraging selfishness and pride.

REVEALED AND ORDINARY KNOWLEDGE

Basic to Ellen White's understanding of the workings of the human mind was the idea that man is not intellectually autonomous but is subject either to God or to Satan. He has the freedom to choose which of these masters he will serve, but he cannot escape the consequences of that choice. If man submits to the control of Satan, he is unable to receive the spirit of truth. If man allows God to control his intellect, he is open to the revelation of God, which is never opposed to knowledge and intellectual attainment in any field, and may attain true wisdom.⁶⁵

It is God's will that man should exercise his power of reason, but he must guard against deifying reason. Reason must ever acknowledge the authority of the great I AM as superior to itself.⁶⁶ The craving for broadening horizons and new knowledge, when rightly directed and properly limited, is commendable. God never hampers man's inquiry, intelligence, or acuteness. Man's danger lies in mistaking arrogance for greatness or conceit for knowl-

edge. Unduly to exalt reason is to debase it. "To place the human in rivalry with the divine, is to make it contemptible."⁶⁷

The disposition to exalt human reason above its proper sphere is one of the greatest evils attending man's investigations into science. When man attempts to judge the Creator by his own limited knowledge and to speculate in theories concerning the Omnipotent and his works, man is pursuing a course that imperils his soul.⁶⁸ Mysteries of the divine being may be penetrated only by a humble reception of the revelation that God is pleased to give and by conforming to his will thus revealed.

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Ellen White differentiated between what she termed *true experience* and experience as commonly understood. "True experience" is always in complete harmony with natural and divine law. Whenever the knowledge gained through experience contradicts the knowledge of revelation, it is also out of harmony with "true science." It must be branded false.⁶⁹

Truth is never self-contradictory, regardless of the source from which it comes or the methods by which it is apprehended. Ellen White advocated the testing of experience by the revelation of the Bible, yet she recognized the necessity of having one's faith in the validity of revelation confirmed by personal experience. A genuine experience in faith establishes the veracity of God's word, which then becomes the criterion by which other experience and ideas may be tested.⁷⁰

Inasmuch as both science and the Bible have the same author, there can be no conflict between them when they are both understood correctly. Scientific research opens vast fields of knowledge that make new perceptions of truth possible. Nature and the written word both reveal the laws and character of God. They shed light upon each other and lead man to God.⁷¹

Science and revelation witness by different methods and in different languages to the same truths. Science is continually making new discoveries, but it brings nothing from research that, correctly understood, contradicts divine revelation, for it *is* revelation. Special revelation is not at odds with general revelation. "Rightly understood, both the revelations of science and the experiences of life are in harmony with the testimony of Scripture to the constant working of God in nature."⁷²

There is no question about the priority Ellen White accorded special revelation in education. She recognized the power of science and declared it was in the purpose of God that it should be taught in Adventist schools as a preparation for carrying to the world the final message of hope. However, she repeatedly insisted that the science which reveals the character of God — the science of salvation — is without equal among the other sciences.⁷³

An illustration of the way in which ordinary and revealed knowledge were intermingled in her own writing is to be seen in an article she wrote a few weeks after the Battle of Bull Run, which was fought July 21, 1861. On August 3 she had a vision about the sin of slavery. In the vision she was shown the bondage of Israel in Egypt. She saw the effect of the plagues on the Egyptians, the release of Israel, the pursuit by the Egyptian army, and its destruction in the Red Sea — scenes presented, she said, to illustrate the selfish love of slavery and the fact that God alone could wrench the slave from the hand of his relentless oppressor. This presentation was followed by a view of the recent Battle of Bull Run, which she described as a most exciting, thrilling, and distressing scene. She saw the Southern army prepared for a dreadful battle; but as the two armies engaged in action, she saw an angel descend and wave his hand backward. Instantly, confusion broke out in the Northern ranks: to the Union soldiers it appeared that their armies were retreating when actually this was not true. An immediate rout followed. It was then explained that this nation was in the hand of God and that the progress of the war would punish both sides in proportion to their responsibility in the sin of slavery.⁷⁴

She was already well acquainted, of course, with the story of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage, and it is most likely that she had read newspaper accounts of the Battle of Bull Run. Probably the vision added nothing to her historical knowledge of these two events; what was added by revelation was the action of God. Obviously, such knowledge is not an object of human research. The history was learned by ordinary means, but the activity of God in the historical situation was seen by revelation.

Although Ellen White did not regard the Bible writers as infallible in the thought patterns and language they used, she insisted that the truths they conveyed are indeed the truths of God. In her own work she used thought patterns common to her contemporaries. Her revelatory experiences were concerned primarily with the acts of God in natural events and through natural laws. She did not always distinguish between the divine principle and the objective fact or event which disclosed it. Perhaps this was due to the fact that she did not sharply distinguish between the acts of God and natural events. For is God not the creator of all objects and the founder of all laws? And when it is remembered that she regarded all knowledge as coming ultimately from God, her hesitance or inability to draw a dividing line at any point in the learning process separating knowledge by revelation from knowledge by other means is understandable. Generally, ordinary knowledge is concerned with objective things and observ-

able processes, and revelation is concerned with explaining these things and processes in relation to the acts of God. Primarily, revelation is concerned with the personal relationship between man and God, but it is not excluded *per se* from operation in the learning of objective facts and processes.

THE VALIDATION OF REVELATION

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The question of validation arises in connection with every means to knowledge. Research is largely concerned with the testing of that which is supposed by some to be true. Can the knowledge received through revelation be validated? Are there criteria by which the genuineness of a claim to revelation may be tested? These questions have been asked both by skeptics and by those who have experienced spiritual phenomena profoundly. Indeed, the questions are imbedded in the assurance that the prophetic office should be a prominent medium for God's revelation to man. "If you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' — when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him."⁷⁵ This tests an individual message. It does not say that the Lord has never spoken by that prophet or that he will never do so again.⁷⁶

Ellen White held that God asks faith from no one without giving sufficient grounds for it. She differentiated between evidence and demonstration; faith must rest on the former, not on the latter. For those who desire to know God's truth, the evidence supporting faith is sufficient. God has not removed all possibility of doubt, however, and those who desire to doubt will find ample opportunity.⁷⁷

Doubts about revelation may be eliminated by a sympathetic comparison of one revelation with another. Investigation brings the light of understanding, and the Holy Spirit will impress the human consciousness with the clear and simple truth presented in the messages.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the very greatness and exalted nature of the themes of revelation inspire faith in its infinite origin.⁷⁹ On the other hand, one who approaches the study of revelation with a pride of opinion, a cherishing of sin, a stubbornness of will, can find ample cause for doubt. Indeed, his very condition renders him unable to discern truth from error and inclines him to accept falsehood.

Whether or not one finds adequate evidence to validate revelation is largely a matter of his decision for obedience or disobedience. He who wills to know the will of God and submits to it as he learns it, will find increasing evidence for the certainty of revealed truth; he will find reason and revela-

tion in perfect harmony. Conversely, he who refuses to surrender his carnal nature will not recognize the evidences implicit in revelation; he will not admit their validity regardless of the quality or quantity of any additional evidence that might be amassed.

The ultimate confirmation of revelation is found in the person-to-person relationship that results from a reception of the revelation of God in Christ. Such an experience surpasses mental assent and formal affiliation. It is a truly personal relationship, fervently sought by man and graciously fulfilled by God in Christ.

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The foregoing have been largely subjective criteria. According to Ellen White, primary among the objective criteria for the validation of knowledge by revelation is the Bible. She regarded the Bible as beyond the need for validation and accepted it as *the standard* of truth. No demonstrations of supernatural power can supersede the authority of Scripture as a test of any claims to revelation. Satan, the most disobedient creature in the universe, is also one of the most powerful. One who is living in disobedience and at the same time is demonstrating supernatural power thereby brands himself an agent of the adversary. He who is truly a medium of divine revelation may also manifest supernatural power. But his life of obedience to the scripturally revealed will of God, not his power, differentiates him from the agent of Satan. Any revelation which itself has passed the biblical test thereby becomes helpful in the testing of subsequent claims to revelation.

A supposed revelation may also be confirmed or invalidated by its effect on human experience when put into practice. Although Ellen White believed that Christ's claim to divinity was proved by his miracles, she regarded the fact of his revelatory life — in which the character, the work, and the words of God were made manifest — as the greatest miracle of all. Therefore, the nature of his life and its effect on other lives are the greatest proofs of his claim to be the revelation of God.

When God sends a message by a man, he gives evidence both of the genuineness of the message and of the commission to the man: the messenger will be Christlike, and the message will lead to a renewal of mind and life in those who accept it. This renewal of life is a miracle second only to the miracle of the Christ. There is no middle ground for anyone who claims revelation; either he is of God, or he is of Satan. The results in the life of one who proclaims a message and in the lives of those who accept it will demonstrate the source from which it originated. Ellen White asked that her own work be submitted to this test: "You will know them by their fruits."⁸⁰

She also recognized the church as an important element in the evaluation of claims of revelation. The Holy Spirit does not work in a manner that will be offensive to godly people. The church collectively is a channel of divine communication superior to that of any individual. Although Ellen White recognized the guidance of God manifested in individuals for the reproof and the correction of the church, she insisted that the individual should exercise his mission only in counsel with other experienced and godly churchmen. It would seem that she regarded the relation of the collective church body to the divinely led person as one of checks and balances.

This concept has been common to Christians of nearly all persuasions: Roman Catholics and Protestants, liberals and conservatives. However, it should be noted that conservative Protestants usually do not acknowledge this criterion beyond the period in which the Bible was written. In this regard the concepts of Ellen White seem closer to those of Catholics and neo-orthodox Protestants. The latter place much emphasis on the importance of the dynamic tension between the experience of an individual and that of the collective body of believers in both the reception and the validation of revelation.

In her dealings with specific claims to revelatory experiences which she regarded as spurious, Ellen White applied the above principles. Practical Christianity in the life (not emotional excitement) and conformity to scriptural principles (not miraculous performances) were the results she demanded of genuine revelation. Dreamers who belittled former revelation, visionaries who regarded impulse as superior to scriptural guidance, ecstasies who offered to exhibit their peculiar experiences, prophets who were concerned with trivia, messengers who enjoined prohibitions far beyond those of Scripture — all these Ellen White unhesitatingly branded as sheer pretenders who tended toward fanaticism. Her counsel was "Beware!" Even when everyone acts according to the best light available, she believed, some errors and misjudgments will still be made. Her position was that it is better for these errors to be made on the side of conservatism rather than on the side of fanaticism.

Claims to revelation may be validated by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, by comparison with the records of former tested revelation, by the resulting fruitage in the lives of messenger and recipients, and by judgment of the church. However, these criteria are available only to one who will test the claims sympathetically and with a willingness to obey the will of God as it is revealed. He who refuses to accept this discipline has no criteria by which to judge any claim to revelation, be it true or false.

The inclusiveness of Ellen White's concepts of the nature, processes, and content of revelation must be attributed to her belief that for the man of faith and obedience, the line between the natural and the supernatural may become almost nonexistent. God is one; his truth, all truth, forms a unity. The natural universe is an expression of the power, the nature, the character of God. To be sure, there is much ambiguity in this natural manifestation because of sin; and for the same reason, man's perception and understanding are clouded. To overcome these handicaps to the discovery of truth, the seeker has access to guidance from the word of God, which is communicated by methods less subject to the distortions of sin. However, even here, in order to arrive at understanding, one must be led and enlightened by the same Spirit which inspired the writing of that word in the first place.

ADVENTISM AND THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

There is reason to be apprehensive about the current status of the doctrine of revelation among Seventh-day Adventists. A tendency exists to place on it limitations that could cause a rejection of its relevance, as has happened within much of Protestantism. To blame Darwin and Wellhausen for the demise of this doctrine in many churches is an exercise in historical naïveté. The main cause is rather the disappearance of a living faith in and a vital experience with the supernatural; these form the strongest bulwark against crass naturalism. Unfortunately, the doctrine among nineteenth century Protestants had become so narrowly defined and so inflexible that it crumbled before emerging scientism. Yet Seventh-day Adventism not only withstood but prospered in the face of the same forces that were destroying the vitality of other communions. Unquestionably, this was due largely to the important place accorded the experience — not merely the dogma — of revelation.

Protestantism had splintered the doctrine into rather strictly defined categories such as revelation, inspiration, and influence. The process had been reduced to the transmission of propositions and dictums. Isolation of revelation (as propositionally embedded within an ancient book) from inspiration, illumination, enlightenment, and indwelling of the Spirit (as experientially available to every devout Christian) left the Bible vulnerable to charges of obsolescence and irrelevance. There was a refusal to recognize the reality of revelation outside the Bible. Relegating the prophetic vision to past ages, while regarding it as the only authoritative revelatory device, left the church without a contemporary divine Head who could speak to his followers within the context of their lives.

Is Seventh-day Adventism moving toward a similar position? Is the present course in any way different, except that the church has more books with more propositional truths from a prophet who, in the judgment of some, has been "a long time dead"? Must a recognition that degrees of directness of revelation vary (as they certainly do) necessarily crystallize into a closed, brittle doctrine such as was in vogue among Protestants a century ago? May it be that an undue emphasis on the truly important role of visions is narrowing rather than expanding the significance of the prophetic office? Can the church not retain a unique place for the Bible and a special place for the Ellen White writings (as they both surely deserve) without demeaning the continuing conversation and communion between God and living people?

Faith in a revelatory book or books is of no consequence, nor will it long endure, without living personal and communal experiences. But these experiences will not be sought or cherished if the body of believers shrugs them off as being of little importance in comparison with what was written long ago. On the other hand, nurtured spiritual communion, whether individual or group, has no defense against fanaticism or demonic possession apart from a high regard for the tested revelatory records of the past. In other words, a doctrine of divine revelation can effectively survive only in its entirety — not in fragments. It will be embalmed soon after any of its parts are downgraded, ignored, or inordinately exalted.

If Ellen White's inclusive and flexible concepts of revelation were known and practiced, the doctrine could be rescued from possible emasculation into a sterile dogma. Instead of debating ideas, church members would be comparing experiences. They would have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church; they would know the current commandments of God and be empowered to keep them. They would have the living testimony of Jesus, and the spirit of prophecy would be, in truth, an abiding gift.

In a world in which the recipients of knowledge are of limited ability and experience, no perfect communication is possible. Yet the revelation of God can change and perfect those who are obedient to his truth into the likeness of God and can unite the creature with his Creator in an eternal union. Although the consummation of this experience is still future, a progressive growth toward it may begin immediately, and it may be enjoyed in increasing measure throughout life.

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