

no overt sentimentalism. We also see these "trailblazers" (including the Whites) as human beings who lived lives apart from the pulpit. Current controversy concerning "Spirit of Prophecy" sources aside, *Miss Marian's Gold* presents the life of a woman who sought the true gold and found it to be not something obtained by effort, but a gift from God. Ms. Lantry has admirably combined the interest of early American travel and life with the age-old theme of the quest, while avoiding a didactic tone. One can only hope that the Pacific Press will hold out more often until manuscripts of this quality come their way. Or better yet, Adventist publishers should seriously solicit contracts with authors of proven worth and determine to publish only high-quality manuscripts.

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## Rewriting Ellen White?

Ellen G. White. *Steps to Jesus*. 125 pp. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981. \$5.95.

reviewed by Howard Gustrowsky

**S**teps to Jesus, first printed in 1981 and also available since 1982 under the title *Knowing Him Better*, is an adaptation of Ellen G. White's *Steps to Christ*, a book that the White Estate calls the "most popular" of her more than 70 published volumes. Translated into some 100 languages and read by "millions," *Steps to Christ* has proven its accessibility as a Christian missionary tool and devotional guide. The new version's purpose, according to its nameless authors, is to reach a "wider audience, particularly the youth," by converting "hard to understand phrases [into] every day language," simplifying the vocabulary, and abbrevia-

ting long sentences (*SJ*, p. 7). One still wonders: why tamper with a good thing? do the gains outweigh the losses—especially the potential losses to the foundation of Ellen White's prophetic role?

The White Estate's adaptation of *Steps of Christ* leads to question: what contribution does style make toward the acceptance of Ellen White's prose as religiously authoritative? No matter what the sources for her writings may have been, or how her books may have found their published form, they have inspired religious enthusiasm in many thousands of readers: before, during, and after the exposure of their ambiguous origins. As with the Bible and other inspirational and holy books, some of the most influential literature gains its popularity less because of what is said and more because of how it is said. A study of the relationship between literary style and prophetic authority would be a new approach to understanding Ellen White's writings.

Most readers will not analyze the text to discover the reasons behind the feeling they get from reading the new version, but they *will* feel a difference, and for devotional literature, what could be more important? The language of devotion, of religious inspiration, is a language of metaphor, sound, and rhythm. Devotional literature is primarily expressive in nature; it is willing to sacrifice propositional clarity to emotional appeal. If one uses this distinction as a criterion for judging the new version's accomplishments, the results are at best ambivalent, and at most, a clear corruption of the original.

Although an investigation into the new version's doctrinal purity is not the purpose of this article, I do challenge the White Estate's contention that "the author's thoughts have been retained" in the new book. The uneasiness that some readers will feel, and that students of literature will verbalize, can be charged to a change in literary style. Despite the disclaimers issued by the new authors, the total impact of a new vocabulary within the modified grammatical context is striking. One of the more

suitable examples of this change is found in the substitution of “The thought ‘God is love’ is on every opening flower and every blade of grass” (*SJ*, p. 10), for “‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass” (*SC*, p. 10). “Flower” rather than “bud?” On what basis? “Every blade of grass” for “every spire of springing grass?” Why should the changes be considered improvements or even suitable equivalents?

The substitution of “Jesus” for “Christ” in the book title, but the retention of “Christ” in chapter titles suggests that the changes made by the authors have been arbitrary or capricious. Doctrinal shifts do not seem to have dictated the use of modernized language. Uneducated as they may have been, even Ellen White and her editorial staff probably recognized the denotative distinctions between “Jesus” and “Christ” and chose their words accordingly.

Just as important, *Steps to Jesus* clearly reflects an insensitivity to the literary nature of *Steps to Christ*. Returning to my example above, the removal of “spire of springing grass” in favor of “blade of grass” illustrates the authors’ neglect of the more poetic conventions of connotation, sound, and grammatical rhythm. “Blade” cannot supply the rich association of holiness contained in “spire,” which gives a literal reference to the object we commonly refer to as blade but at the same time elevates each blade to the status of a temple. The authors of the adaptation were obviously intent on removing any obstacles that might interfere with the literal sense. The removal of “spire” and “springing” for “blade” also removes the alliteration, its echo in the word grass, and greatly diminishes the spirited rhythm that in this context has taken on the value of a grand and joyous musical accompaniment.

Changes similar to the above example can be found throughout the text. “The whispered temptations of the enemy entice them to sin” (*SC*, p. 94), is reduced to “The enemy leads them into sin” (*SJ*, p. 93).

Within the same paragraph, an entire phrase “where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence” is simply dropped, and with it the expansive spirit of meditation and devotion shared by many of the Psalms. There are many more examples of this type.

Of course, literary changes are not very important for those whose view of inspiration focuses on *ideas* as the faultless representations of divine truths. These readers see Ellen White’s ideas as objective reflections of divinely sanctioned doctrines which have autonomous existences outside of language. The best way to communicate such ideas is through referential language that most closely records their objective content. The more literary qualities of language—connotation, metaphor, and symbolism—must be viewed as troublesome inconveniences, as unfortunate ornamentation, which usually leads to dangerous misunderstandings. Those who read *Steps to Jesus* with this view of inspiration will be rewarded. However, for those readers who consider Ellen White’s words as an inspired and inspiring account of the subjective religious experience, the deletion of the expressive elements of her language is like revoking her credentials.

In expressive literature, the way one gets there is more important than the destination: the author’s psychological and emotional state is more important than any external reality. In applying this approach to Ellen White, one reads her *Steps* as an expression of a religious consciousness that is closer to music than mathematics. If her account of religious experience has been sanctioned as worthy of special regard by a group of believers, to tamper with her style—the mode of expression found in the texture of metaphor, symbol, sound, and rhythm—is to tamper with her message and authority.

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