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Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth

Mountain Cleft

-A Refuge for Biblical Research
and Spiritual Renewal-

"So it shall be,
while My glory passes by,
that I will put you
in the cleft of the rock,
and will cover you
with My hand
while I pass by."
Exodus 33:22



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All Come Short of the Glory - Part 1

Ellen G. White: Prophet or Plagiarist?

by William Fagal

White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists

About twenty years ago, many Adventists were shaken by claims from a Seventh-day Adventist pastor that Mrs. White had plagiarized her writings from others. In a book he later published, the pastor arranged passages from her writings in parallel columns with the earlier works of others, claiming that she had "copied" their writings and that therefore her claims to having received her instruction from God were a lie.

The results were devastating to the faith of some. People disposed of their Ellen White books in yard sales and trash cans. Some left the Seventh-day Adventist church, while others stayed but took pride in rejecting some of its teachings and practices which Ellen White had strongly endorsed. Even those who did not give up their faith in her writings were, in some cases, uneasy and uncertain about the charges. The effects of this controversy linger to our day.

Not First. Though such claims were new to many twenty years ago, the pastor who popularized them was not the first to have made them. Just a few years before, in the 1970s, an Adventist historian had written a book examining Mrs. White's involvement in health concerns. He concluded, among other things, that her health counsels were not new or unique. She had drawn them from others, he said, despite her claims to having received them in vision. (The Ellen G. White Estate prepared a detailed, almost point-by-point response to his book.)

Over the years various people inside and outside the church have set forth similar claims. The most influential of Ellen White's critics was probably Dudley M.

Canright, a prominent minister and evangelist in our early years. After withdrawing from the ministry four times in doubt and discouragement and coming back each time, Canright finally left the ministry and the church in 1887. In 1889 he published a book against Seventh-day Adventist teaching, and in 1919, the year of his own death and four years after hers, his book against Mrs. White was published. Prominent among his accusations was that Mrs. White had copied the works of others.

But interest in this issue even predates Canright's claims. In the *Review and Herald* of October 8, 1867, Mrs. White responded to the question, "Did you receive your views upon health reform before visiting the [non-Adventist-operated] Health Institute at Dansville, N.Y., or before you had read works on the subject?" Mrs. White replied that she had indeed received her visions first, but the question implied the other possibility—that the source of her instruction may have been human rather than divine.

How does a prophet convey God's messages? Was Mrs. White honest in describing how she conveyed them, particularly regarding her use of sources? Did she get her messages from other people and claim they were from God? These questions deserve a careful look.

HOW DOES A PROPHET CONVEY GOD'S MESSAGES?

Many people seem to believe that a prophet who receives instruction from God delivers it *exactly as God gave it*, with-

See, ELLEN G. WHITE, *Cont'd* p.6

Gleanings From the Library

Literary Borrowing -An Example

by Stephen Wallace

One of the most interesting features of the Mountain Cleft Resource Library is the reconstructed personal and office library of Ellen G. White. For nearly twenty years now, I have been diligently searching through the inventories of used bookstores across the nation and around the world to find these long since out-of-print and at times exceedingly scarce books. With perseverance, I have found about 90% of the titles in her personal library and about 75% of those in her office library*.

For several years the only way these books could be found was by my personally searching the shelves of used book store. A tedious and time-consuming task, though admittedly an enjoyable one. It has often seemed to me that I was looking for a needle in a haystack -to describe the odds, or a gem in a garbage dump -to describe the environment, but the rewards of finding these precious truth-filled books have made the effort more than worth it. For the last few years the project has gotten a good deal easier and a lot more efficient by utilizing the internet. I can now search through some forty million titles from the inventories of booksellers around the world in a matter of seconds. It's amazing to me how that's possible, but I'm so glad it is! As we move towards completing the project the titles that have managed to elude us for so many years are obviously very rare and hard to find. It is not infrequent, during an internet search, that I will find only one entry for a particular title I'm looking for. When that happens, you can be sure that it is a rare book -literally one in forty million!

That God's end time messenger carefully read and deeply appreciated, these books is clearly evidenced in that she frequently borrowed from them. In fact it was new evidence regarding the extent of her literary borrowing that initiated my interest in the library. I launched the project while I was working at the White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. At that time there was a diligent effort on the part of a sadly misguided, former SDA minister to discredit the Spirit of Prophecy by giving supposed evidence that she was only a plagiarist. For those who had a mistaken concept as to how inspiration worked - who believed that a true prophet simply takes dictation from God in writing out what is to be shared with His people -the irrefutable evidence of borrowing was devastating. Not a few renounced Ellen White as a fraud. Tragic mistake! What needed to be renounced was a mistaken concept of how inspiration works. It is to help our readers better understand how inspiration works and how literary borrowing is not only an acceptable, but an entirely rational part of the process, that we have featured in this newsletter William Fagel's excellent article.

For two reasons, the documented evidence of the extent of Ellen White's literary borrowing did nothing whatsoever to shake my confidence that her writings were divinely inspired. First of all, literary borrowing was in no way incompatible with my understanding of how inspiration worked, but secondly, and most importantly, I had long before come to a settled conclusion through my personal study and resulting experience that the Spirit of Prophecy was most certainly the testimony of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I knew with assurance then, and I know with even greater assurance now, that what flowed from the pen of Ellen White was precisely that inspired explanation and practical application of the truths of God's Word that His church so desperately needs to finish the course and make it into the Kingdom. In my personal Bible study, listening to His voice speak to my heart through those "red books" had become - and most certainly still is -the graciously provided equivalent of what the disciples had the privilege of hearing when after the Lord's public discourses they could take Him aside and ask Him what He really meant by what He had said. It was this, more than anything that kept -and will continue to keep -my confidence in the divine origin of the Spirit of Prophecy unshaken no matter how much literary borrowing might be discovered!

The fact that she found her books very helpful to her in writing out that which the Lord had revealed through visions and dreams simply brought me to the conclusion that they would be exceptionally valuable books to have in a resource library. If they were helpful to her in coming to better understand and communicate precious truth, surely they would be to others as well. This conclusion was reaffirmed and strengthened when I discovered later a most interesting fact.

When Ellen White was first instructed by the Lord to write out what she was being shown, she was very reticent to accept the responsibility, being painfully aware of her inadequacies. With very little formal education, she felt that the task was far more than she was capable of doing. It was then that she was assured by her angel that she would be guided in her reading, and led to materials that would help her fulfill her commission to write out what the Lord would show her. Discovering this, I could not but conclude that hers would be no ordinary library! It would be a collection of books that the Holy Spirit guided her in acquiring. They would be very special books. Books that the Lord wanted her to have that she might by them be aided in writing out urgently needed counsel and advice from Jesus for His remnant people in the critical, closing hours of the great controversy. They would

*This percentage does not include as part of the "Office Library", the C. C. Crissler collection -some 550 titles that were purchased only two years before Ellen White's death and were not likely to have been used by her, even though they were listed on the bibliography when her estate was settled.

be books containing precious truths and insights that had been written over the centuries by godly men and women of old, but that needed to be collected and synthesized into vital and timely counsel that would enable us to become effective witnesses for the soon-coming King and fit citizens for His kingdom. It would be a library that would embody the grand heritage of truth -that "everlasting Gospel" -that has been entrusted to us, the last generation, to take across the finish line. With these thoughts, I launched the project and the quest began. For the last twenty years, in all my extensive travels, I have always kept with me the list of all the titles she had in her personal and office libraries -a list that was made during the settlement of her estate just after her death -and one and two at a time, I have checked them off as I have retrieved them from all over the nation and around the world. In has been a challenge, it has been a joy, and it has been tremendously rewarding. The collection has proven to be the most extraordinary and valuable resource library I've ever seen.

It is typically from this collection that I have selected excerpts to include in our Mountain Cleft Journal under the heading, "Gleanings From the Library". For this issue, I have again chosen a passage from one of Ellen White's favorite authors -Octavius Winslow. It is taken from the book entitled *The Glory of the Redeemer*, published in London by John F. Shaw in 1855. This time however, I want to share the selection in a format that will allow you to see that it has quite obviously been borrowed by Ellen White as she writes on the same subject. Because I want you to be able to note not only similarities, but differences in wording, I am going to present the material in parallel columns. Of course my intention is not, as with others who have used this format, to try to discredit Ellen White as a plagiarist. God forbid! I want rather to give you opportunity to gain what I think is an exciting insight into how inspiration really works. We offer these parallels as well to illustrate the conclusion that Bill Fagel comes to in his cover article:

Octavius Winslow

The Glory of the Redeemer
Chapter V "The Glory of the Redeemer in His Humiliation" pp. 128 -134

The assumption of our nature, in its depressed and bruised condition, constituted no small feature in the abasement of the Son of God. That, in the strong language of the Holy Spirit, He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," is a truth we cannot too distinctly affirm, or too earnestly maintain.

"God was manifest in the flesh,"—"He humbled Himself." Oh, it is an amazing truth! So infinitely great was He, He could thus stoop without compromising His dignity, or lessening His glory....

But his taking into substance with His own, our nature in its fallen condition, comprehends the sinless infirmities and weaknesses with which it was identified and encompassed. "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses..." Is there any spectacle more affecting, than thus to behold the incarnate God, entering personally and sympathetically into all the humiliations of my poor, bruised, vile nature, and yet remaining untouched, untainted, by its sin?...

"We have seen that a prophet proclaims God's messages not in words given by God but in those of the prophet's own choosing, which may include drawing on the language of others. Mrs. White openly declared that she had sometimes used the writings of others to help her convey effectively the messages she had been given. Her manner of doing so accorded well with the accepted practice in her day. And she was the master of her materials, not their slave, adapting them to her purposes rather than parroting theirs."

It is fascinating to see how Ellen White takes what she is obviously reading from Winslow's book and modifies it to say exactly what she wants to say. What makes this particular selection so interesting, is that it addresses a very crucial and I must add controversial issue -the human nature of Christ and how He as a man was tempted. With the extensive study that I have done in the Spirit of Prophecy on this topic, I have been amazed at how frequently she borrows from Winslow when she makes particularly theologically significant statement regarding the human nature of Christ and His capacity to be tempted. It is quite evident that upon reading Winslow, the Holy Spirit impressed her that he had articulated very clearly and accurately precious truth on this vital issue in a balanced and Biblically sound way. She obviously concluded that it was so clearly and accurately stated that she could make excellent use of it to express the understanding that the Lord had brought her to regarding the same issues.

As you read this selection, please note that occasionally the order in which Octavius Winslow presented this material in his book has been slightly changed to better match the order in which Ellen White made use of it. Also, as you note the obvious literary borrowing, I would encourage you to notice how consistently she improves upon what she borrows. Clearly, "she was the master of her materials, not their slave."

Ellen G. White

As quoted from sources indicated.

Christ, who knew not the least taint of sin or defilement, took our nature in its deteriorated condition. This was humiliation greater than finite man can comprehend.

God was manifest in the flesh. He humbled Himself. What a subject for thought, for deep earnest contemplation! So infinitely great that He was the Majesty of heaven, and yet He stooped so low, without losing one atom of His dignity and glory! . . .

In taking upon himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He "knew no sin."

Octavius Winslow

He was the sacrificial "Lamb without spot."

As a single leak must have sunk the ark beneath the waves, so the existence of the slightest taint of sin in Jesus would have opened an inlet through which the dark billows of Divine wrath would have rolled, plunging both Himself and the church He sustained in eternal woe.

The least misgiving touching the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of our Lord, tends to weaken the confidence of faith in the atonement, and so to enshroud in darkness the hope of the soul.

But that "holy thing" that was begotten of the Holy Spirit, knew not the least moral taint. He "knew no sin,"

And because He presented to the Divine requirement a holy, unblemished, and perfect obedience and satisfaction, we who believe are "made the righteousness of God in Him." Hold fast this essential and blessed truth, and guard against its fatal opposite, as you value your own salvation, and the glory of God.

Our Lord's exposure to temptation, and his consequent capability of yielding to its solicitations, has its foundation in His perfect humanity. It surely requires not an argument to show that, *as God*, He could not be tempted, but that, *as man*, He could.

His inferior nature was finite and created; it was not *angelic* it was *human*. It was perfectly identical with our own,—its entire exemption from all taint of sin only excepted.

A human body and a human mind were His, with all their essential and peculiar properties. He was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh:"

He travelled up through the stages of infancy, boyhood, and manhood; He was encompassed with all the weaknesses, surrounded by all the circumstances, exposed to all the inconveniences that belong to our nature. He breathed our air, trod our earth, ate our food.

The higher attributes of our being were His also. Reason, conscience, memory, will affection, were essential appendages of that human soul which the Son of God took into union with His Divine.

As such, then, our Lord was tempted. As such, too, He was capable of yielding.

His finite nature, though pure and sinless, was yet necessarily limited in its resources, and weak in its own powers. Touching His inferior nature, He was *but* man.

The Godhead, as I have before remarked,

was not humanized,—nor was the humanity deified, by the blending together of the two natures. Each retained its essential character, properties, and attributes, distinct, unchanged, and unchangeable.

But let no one suppose that a liability in Jesus to yield to Satan's temptation, necessarily implies the existence of the same sinful and corrupt nature which we possess. Far from it.

Ellen White

He was the lamb "without blemish and without spot."

Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour's head. As it was, he could only touch His heel. Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.

We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ. Our faith must be an intelligent faith, looking unto Jesus in perfect confidence, in full and entire faith in the atoning Sacrifice. This is essential that the soul may not be enshrouded in darkness. (ST June 9, 1898)

The humanity of Christ is called "that holy thing." The inspired record says of Christ, "He did no sin," he "knew no sin," and "in him was no sin." He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (ST Jan. 16, 1896)

This holy substitute is able to save to the uttermost; for He presented to the wondering universe perfect and complete humility in His human character, and perfect obedience to all the requirements of God. Divine power is placed upon man, that he may become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. This is why repenting, believing man can be made the righteousness of God in Christ. (ST June 9, 1898)

As God, Christ could not be tempted any more than He was not tempted from His allegiance in heaven. But as Christ humbled Himself to the nature of man, He could be tempted.

He had not taken on Him even the nature of the angels, but humanity, perfectly identical with our own nature, except without the taint of sin.

A human body, a human mind, with all the peculiar properties, He was bone, brain, and muscle. A man of our flesh,

He was compassed with the weakness of humanity. The circumstances of His life were of that character that He was exposed to all the inconveniences that belong to men, not in wealth, not in ease, but in poverty and want and humiliation. He breathed the very air man must breathe. He trod our earth as man.

He had reason, conscience, memory, will, and affections of the human soul which was united with His divine nature.

Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yielding to temptations, as are human beings.

His finite nature was pure and spotless,

but the divine nature that led Him to say to Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" also,

was not humanized; neither was humanity deified by the blending or union of the two natures; each retained its essential character and properties.

But here we must not become in our ideas common and earthly, and in our perverted ideas we must not think that the liability of Christ to yield to Satan's temptations degraded His humanity and He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man. The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations. Here the liability to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God.

Octavius Winslow

To deny His capability of succumbing to temptation, were to neutralize the force, beauty, and instruction of this eventful part of His history altogether.

It were to reduce a splendid fact to an empty fable, a blessed reality to a vague supposition; it were to rob Jesus of the great glory which covered Him when left alone, the victor on this battle field.

And yet, that He must necessarily be sinful in order to be thus capable of yielding, does not follow; it is an error in judgement to suppose that the force of a temptation always depends upon the inherent sinfulness of the person who is tempted.

The case of the first Adam disproves this supposition, and in some of its essential features strikingly illustrates the case of the second Adam.

In what consisted the strength of the assault before whose fearful onset Adam yielded? Surely not in any indwelling sin, for he was pure and upright.

There was no appeal to the existence of any corrupt principles or propensities; no working upon any fallen desires and tendencies in his nature;

for, until the moment that the blast swept him to the earth, no angel in heaven stood before the throne purer or more faultless than he.

Ellen White

To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be perfect example for man, and the force and the power of this part of Christ's humiliation, which is the most eventful, is no instruction or help to human beings.

But the facts of this history are not fable, but a living, acting, experience. [To deny this] would rob Jesus of His greatest glory—allegiance to God—which enshrouded Him as a garment in this world on the field of battle with the relentless foe, and He is not reckoned with the transgressor. He descended in His humiliation to be tempted as man would be tempted, and His nature was that of man, capable of yielding to temptation. (Ms 57, 1890; 16MR 181-183)

Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.

He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden. (Lt. 8, 1895; 5BC 1128)

In what consisted the strength of the assault made upon Adam, which caused his fall? It was not indwelling sin; for God made Adam after His own character, pure and upright.

There were no corrupt principles in the first Adam, no corrupt propensities or tendencies to evil.

Adam was as faultless as the angels before God's throne. (Lt. 191, 1899;

ELLEN G. WHITE, *Cont'd from p.1*

out reference to other materials of any kind. Some in the evangelical world believe that God even gave the prophet the *very words* in which to speak and write the messages. They view the prophet as a passive secretary who merely transcribed the Holy Spirit's words. While Seventh-day Adventists have never adopted that view, having in fact gone on record in General Conference session against it as early as 1883,¹ some church members may hold such a view, perhaps without ever having actually thought it through.

Clearly, while the Bible writers received their messages from God, they did not typically receive the wording from Him, or one would expect them all to sound pretty much the same. We can easily tell John's letters from Paul's epistles, just by the style and vocabulary. Their own minds are at work, framing and shaping their God-inspired messages into words of their own choosing.

Furthermore, Bible writers borrowed language from one another and even from non-biblical authors to make the points they wished to put across.² And we note that the first three gospel writers have much material in common, some of it—but by no means all—using exactly the same words. These things suggest that the wording did not come from God, and that the Bible writers were free to draw on the words not only of other inspired writers, but even of common authors, to convey the messages they were inspired to tell.

Gathering and Selecting. What is more, in the introduction to his gospel, Luke tells us that he gathered his facts from those who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses" and who "delivered them to us" (1:1-4). In his case, inspiration helped him to select from others and accurately record the information about Jesus that God wanted conveyed.

In light of these examples from Scripture of how inspiration works, on what basis can we insist, as the pastor-critic of Ellen G. White seems to do, that if the material is not original to the prophet, if it shows any relationship to previous writings, the prophet's use of it is therefore not inspired? On the basis of what we find in Scripture, we must conclude that *originality is not a test of inspiration*.

Interestingly enough, this very point appears in a book which Ellen White owned and valued, one which was written during her childhood. The introduction to the book, *The Great Teacher*, by John Harris, contains this statement:

Originality Impossible. "Suppose, for example, an inspired prophet were now to appear in the church, to add a supplement to the canonical books,—what a Babel of opinions would he find existing on almost every theological subject!—and how highly probable it is that his ministry would consist, or seem to consist, in the *mere selection and ratification of such of these opinions as accorded with the mind of God. Absolute originality would seem to be almost impossible.* The inventive mind

of man has already bodied forth speculative opinions in almost every conceivable form; forestalling and robbing the future of its fair proportion of novelties; and leaving little more, even to a divine messenger, than the office of *taking some of these opinions, and impressing them with the seal of heaven.*"³

The 1883 General Conference session recorded the belief of our pioneers: "We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed."⁴ The precise words, then, were not their focus. They looked carefully for the thought being expressed. If the words aptly conveyed the thought, it did not matter under these circumstances whether the prophet had thought them up herself or adapted them from some other author who had phrased matters well.

WAS MRS. WHITE HONEST IN DESCRIBING HOW SHE CONVEYED HER MESSAGES, ESPECIALLY ABOUT HER USE OF SOURCES?

In answer to another question in the same *Review* article we referred to above, Mrs. White wrote, "Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation." The pastor who accused Mrs. White of copying turned this statement against her, claiming that the words are not "her own" but were taken from the writings of others. He questioned her honesty in reporting how she worked.

What She Claimed. But in the context, Mrs. White was not claiming originality but *responsibility*. The question she was answering had to do with supposed conflicts among her descriptions of the length of the Reform Dress she had seen in vision. In response, she observed that she had never been given the length of the dress in inches nor in any other terms she had used to describe it. She had been *shown* the dress but was left to describe its length *in words of her own choosing*. This is what she meant by "The words are my own."

So then, in fulfilling her responsibility to convey the concepts God had given her, did Mrs. White at times draw from the words and expressions of others, even without giving credit? Yes, she did. And she made no secret of it. In fact, she stated it plainly in the introduction to one of her most widely-circulated books, *The Great Controversy*, and gave her reasons for doing it:

"The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are *not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority*, but because his statement affords a *ready*

and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works" (pp. xi-xii, emphasis mine).

Wesley's Practice. John Wesley, the 18th-century founder of Methodism (in which Ellen White grew up), described his own practice regarding documenting his sources. "It was a doubt with me for some time," Wesley wrote, "whether I should not subjoin to every note I received from them the name of the author from whom it was taken; especially considering I had transcribed some, and abridged many more, almost in the words of the author. But upon further consideration, *I resolved to name none, that nothing might divert the mind of the reader from keeping close to the point of view, and receiving what was spoke[n] only according to its own intrinsic value.*"⁵

Ellen G. White's outlook seems similar to Wesley's. Her primary interest was that people understand her message. She felt no need to cite other writers "as authority." What they had written might serve simply as "a ready and forcible presentation of *the subject*." To put it in Wesley's words, she wanted nothing to "divert the mind of the reader from keeping close to the point of view."

Standards of the Day. Was such practice acceptable in Mrs. White's day? Yes. One of our Bible commentary editors found it to be common among 19th-century religious authors. "While editing the *SDA Bible Commentary*," he wrote, "I had occasion to compare thirty nineteenth-century Bible commentaries on the Book of 1 Corinthians. The first thing I noticed was the extent to which these nineteenth-century writers, many of them well known and respected, copied significant amounts of material from one another without once giving credit. I concluded that nineteenth-century literary ethics, even among the best writers, approved of, or at least did not seriously question, generous literary borrowing without giving credit. Ellen White frankly acknowledged borrowing from various historical writers in the process of writing *The Great Controversy*, sometimes with and sometimes without credit. It is not fair to a nineteenth-century writer to judge him (or her) by our standards today. We must judge them by their standards and accepted practice of their own days."⁶

Ellen White's son and principal helper in the latter part of her life, William C. White, reported that God revealed to her that in the writings of others she would find truth expressed in an acceptable manner which would help her convey the messages she had been given. "In her early experience when she was sorely distressed over the difficulty of putting into human language the revelations of truths that had been imparted to her, she was reminded of the fact that all wisdom and knowledge comes from God and she was assured that God would bestow grace and guidance. She was told that in the reading of religious books and journals, she would find precious gems of truth expressed in acceptable language, and that she would be given help from heaven to recognize these and to separate them from the rubbish of error with which she would sometimes find them associated."

This ability to distinguish truth from error brings us to our next point and the testimony of a non-Adventist scientist.

The key question comes down to this:

DID MRS. WHITE GET HER MESSAGE FROM OTHER PEOPLE AND CLAIM IT CAME FROM GOD?

Dr. Clive McCay, a noted nutrition authority half a century after Mrs. White's day, said that you could not account so easily as this for what she wrote. Dr. McCay, a Unitarian who taught the history of nutrition at Cornell University, received a copy of *Counsels on Diet and Foods* from an Adventist graduate student. He was astonished at what he read there, each statement identified by the year of its publication. For any given year, Dr. McCay knew who had been writing on nutrition and what they had written. "Who was this Ellen G. White," he asked, "and why haven't I heard of her before?"

Impressed. Dr. McCay was so impressed by Ellen White's writings on nutrition that he authored a three-part series of articles for the *Review and Herald*. Note a portion of his summation at the end:

"To sum up the discussion: Every modern specialist in nutrition whose life is dedicated to human welfare must be impressed . . . by the writings and leadership of Ellen G. White.

"In the first place, her basic concepts about the relation between diet and health have been verified to an unusual degree by scientific advances of the past decades. Someone may attempt to explain this remarkable fact by saying: 'Mrs. White simply borrowed her ideas from others.' But how would she know which ideas to borrow and which to reject out of the bewildering array of theories and health teachings current in the nineteenth century? She would have had to be a most amazing person, with knowledge beyond her times, in order to do this successfully! . . .

"In spite of the fact that the works of Mrs. White were written long before the advent of modern scientific nutrition, no better over-all guide is available today."⁸

In the years since Dr. McCay made his observations, scientific advances have confirmed his conclusions—and Ellen White's concepts about the relation of diet and health—all the more strongly.

Salt. Dr. McCay referred to the difficulty of successfully selecting the right counsel from the mass of incorrect teachings afloat in Mrs. White's day. One example is the use of salt. Apparently, some physicians were literally killing their patients with large doses of salt. Others, such as Dr. Trall, a health reformer popular with Seventh-day Adventists, recognized the cause of these deaths and reacted by forbidding any salt at all, saying that it was a poison.

What was Mrs. White's stance? "I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me" (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 344). She was not always given the reason, the "whys and wherefores," but the counsel was sound and safe to follow.

And her counsel has stood the scientific test of time. Confirmation, however, is not always immediate. It took about 120 years for science to establish the truth of her warnings about tobacco. And some things she taught have not yet been confirmed by science. But her "track record" is strong enough that we need not reject those counsels just because science hasn't proven them yet. And this track record also makes it untenable

to say that she just got her ideas from others and called them her own. As Dr. McCay observed, she could not have done this so successfully.

Not New. Some Seventh-day Adventists have believed—mistakenly—that Mrs. White's health counsels were new ideas, unheard-of prior to her receiving them. We have seen already that this was not usually the case. Our pioneers, in fact, specifically denied that in health matters Mrs. White was first to set forth the principles she taught. In 1866, Elder J. H. Waggoner wrote in the *Review and Herald*, "We do not profess to be pioneers in the general principles of the health reform. The facts on which this movement is based have been elaborated, in a great measure, by reformers, physicians, and writers on physiology and hygiene, and so may be found scattered through the land. But we do claim that by the method of God's choice [the visions given to Ellen White] it has been more clearly and powerfully unfolded, and is thereby producing an effect which we could not have looked for from any other means."

Elder Waggoner went on to make an important point about her health principles: "As mere physiological and hygienic truths, they might be studied by some at their leisure, and by others laid aside as of little consequence; but when placed on a level with the great truths of the third angel's message by the sanction and authority of God's Spirit, and so declared to be the means whereby a weak people may be made strong to overcome, and our diseased bodies cleansed and fitted for translation, then it comes to us as an essential part of *present truth*, to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril."⁹

Motivation. This connection between health and holiness provided a strong motivating factor which helped people to make the needed changes in diet and living. Other health reformers of Mrs. White's day, and since, did not offer such motivation, and their work showed far less effect. Dr. McCay commented on the difference, apparently without recognizing its origin. One of his other summary points was, "Everyone who attempts to teach nutrition can hardly conceive of a leadership such as that of Mrs. White that was able to induce a substantial number of people to improve their diets."¹⁰

As a result of the instruction she received in vision, Mrs. White had a God-given message to convey. Others might have made some of the same points before. She could even use or adapt their language for making those points. But she put the material into a structure that was her own, and thus it had new import and new power.

Lawyer's Testimony. Vincent L. Ramik, a prominent and respected copyright attorney in Washington, D.C., noticed this power. In 1981, in the midst of the newly-reborn plagiarism charges, the General Conference legal office (the Office of General Counsel) used privately-donated money to hire Ramik to research the case law and the literary evidence to see whether Mrs. White was guilty of plagiarism, literary piracy, or copyright infringement. Ramik, a Roman Catholic, spent some 300 hours reviewing cases and reading the literary evidence. In addition to examining the critics' case, he sampled what he called "a great cross section of her books," even reading *The Great Controversy* all the way through. On the legal matters, he concluded, "If I had to be involved in such a legal case [regarding charges of plagiarism, piracy, and copyright infringement against Ellen White], I would much rather appear as defense counsel [for Ellen White] than for the prosecution. There simply is no case!"

An important part of his legal opinion was his observation regarding *how* Mrs. White had used the writings of others. "Ellen White used the writings of others," he said, "but in the *way* she used them, she made them uniquely her own, ethically, as well as legally. And, interestingly, she invariably improved that which she 'selected'! . . . She stayed well within the legal boundaries of 'fair use,' and all the time created something that was substantially greater (and even more beautiful) than the mere sum of the component parts. And I think the ultimate tragedy is that the critics fail to see this. . . .

"The bottom line is: What really counts is the *message* of Mrs. White, not merely the mechanical *writings*—words, clauses, sentences—of Mrs. White. Theologians, I am told, distinguish here between verbal inspiration and plenary inspiration. Too many of the critics have missed the boat altogether. And it's too bad, too!

"I, personally, have been moved, deeply moved, by those writings. I have been changed by them. I think I am a better man today because of them. And I wish that the critics could discover *that!*"¹¹

CONCLUSION

We have seen that a prophet proclaims God's messages not in words given by God but in those of the prophet's own choosing, which may include drawing on the language of others. Mrs. White openly declared that she had sometimes used the writings of others to help her convey effectively the messages she had been given. Her manner of doing so accorded well with the accepted practice in her day. And she was the master of her materials, not their slave, adapting them to *her* purposes rather than parroting theirs.

The writings of Ellen G. White speak powerfully even today, far more powerfully than the writings from which she drew various words and expressions. As we honor the content of her writings, we also have nothing to be ashamed of in her mode of writing them.

NOTES

1. In voting to reprint the existing volumes of *Testimonies for the Church*, the 1883 session action noted that many of the *Testimonies* had originally been prepared in haste and had certain grammatical imperfections. The delegates voted, "WHEREAS, We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the *enlightenment of the mind*, thus *imparting the thoughts*, and *not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed* [emphasis mine]; therefore,

"Resolved, That in the republication of these volumes, such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought; and further,

"Resolved, That this body appoint a committee of five to take charge of the republication of these volumes according to the above preambles and resolutions" (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 27, 1883, p. 741. Reproduced in *Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy* [Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1961], p. 54).

2. The marginal references in many Bibles offer cross-references to other passages of Scripture which a writer may be quoting or alluding to. In Acts 17:28 Paul cites Epimenides the Cretan (6th century B.C.) and the poet Aratus (c. 270 B.C.), a friend of Zeno, founder of the Stoics; in Titus 1:12 he quotes Epimenides again.

3. John Harris, *The Great Teacher*, 2nd ed., 1836, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv, emphasis mine.

4. See note 1.

5. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948 reprint), Preface, p. 8, emphasis mine. Also quoted in F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, p. 406.

6. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Literary Relationship between *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White, and *The Life of Christ*, by William Hanna" (1979), p. 6. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

7. W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White," Ellen G. White Estate "Elmshaven" Office, 1933, p. 5; reprinted as a supplement to the *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1981, and available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

8. Clive M. McCay, "Adventist Health Teachings Further Confirmed," *Review and Herald*, February 26, 1959, p. 10. A reprint of all three articles is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

9. J. H. Waggoner, "Present Truth," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 7, 1866, p. 77, emphasis his. Elder Waggoner was a prominent minister and editor. His son E. J. Waggoner is better known today for his part, with A. T. Jones, in presenting fresh views of righteousness by faith at the 1888 General Conference session.

10. Clive M. McCay, "Adventist Health Teachings Further Confirmed," *Review and Herald*, February 26, 1959, p. 10. A reprint is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

11. "There Simply Is No Case," interview with Vincent L. Ramik, *Adventist Review*, Sept. 17, 1981, p. 6, emphasis his. A reprint is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

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Mission Statement

Mountain Cleft is dedicated to nurturing the spiritual life and renewal of the church

1) by providing a quiet refuge in a beautiful natural setting where those individuals who wish to "come aside . . . and rest a while," may have every possible advantage under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed in body, mind, and spirit.

2) by gathering spiritually edifying resources and making them accessible on location or through the internet, to aid all those who would take advantage of them in their quest for a more intelligent, personal, and meaningful relationship with Christ.

3) by serving as a center from which genuine and lasting revival may spread throughout the membership of the world church through the sponsorship of revival seminars and the distribution of spiritually renewing audio, video, and printed materials.