

Ellen G. White and Hermeneutics, Part 2: Wide Reading; All Available Data

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I. Introduction

A. The Five-Step Hermeneutical Outline

1. Preparation
2. Wide Reading; All Available Data
3. Contexts
 - a. Literary
 - b. Historical
 - c. Theological
4. Principles vs. particulars
5. Specialized help for exceptional cases.

B. This lecture will deal with step 2, “All Available Data.”

1. The full rule is: “Study the Scripture background and all that she wrote on a given topic before drawing conclusions.”
2. Since her writings are not to take the place of Scripture, but to call us back to Scripture, it is clear that a faithful use of her writings demands careful study of the biblical materials on a topic as the assumed theological context for interpreting her writings. See H. M. S. Richards, Sr. to C. Mervyn Maxwell (ca. 1957), in Jerry Moon, “The Role of Ellen White in the Development of SDA Doctrines,” April 19, 2000, Appendix B, p. 16.

C. Do you really know what she wrote?

Sister White Said It!

Sister White said it—
Well . . . I never really read it,
But someone said she said it,
So of course it must be so.

To prove my point, I’ll quote it,
Though I can’t show where she wrote it.
But someone said she said it.
And that’s all I need to know.

It saves a lot of time for me,
If I just listen carefully,
When others speak of Sister White,
And what they say she said—
Though I can’t repeat it word for word,

¹Parts of this lecture are adapted with permission from GSEM 534 lecture outlines by Roger W. Coon, “EGW and Hermeneutics: Jemison's First Rule,” April 5, 1995; and Denis Fortin, “Ellen G. White and Hermeneutics: Part II—Study all Applicable Information,” April 19, 2000.

I'll tell you what I think I heard,
And quote you things from Sister White
That *no one's* ever read.

—Thelma Burton in *Adventist Review*, January 8,

1998, p. 7.

II. Background

A. An Impossible Standard?

1. Biblical precedent

Jesus, after His resurrection, appeared to two disciples who did not understand why He had to die. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded [di-hermeneuo] to them in ALL the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

2. Some may technically argue that only the White Estate at present is able to study “all” the writings of Ellen G. White—because “all” of her writings, upon any subject, are not yet completely available to the public, and won’t be until the final CD-ROM version containing the unpublished writings is completed.

a. That’s true, but we can come pretty close.

(1) *Comprehensive Index*

(2) CD-ROM, *Complete Published Writings*, version 3.0

(3) Forthcoming CD-ROM of all unpublished materials

b. Danger of distortion is inversely proportional to the percentage of the total data examined. The more one examines whatever counsel is available, the less likely one is to err in understanding and interpretation.

3. Why it’s important to read “all she wrote” on a topic?

a. Methodological presupposition

“The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture” (ISM 42).

b. The principle of reading “all she wrote” on a topic before drawing final conclusions is interrelated with every other hermeneutical principle.

4. For some subjects, to study all the available counsels that directly mention the subject may not be difficult because the Bible and Ellen White are either silent or have comparatively little to say. But one should not therefore jump to the conclusion that God has no opinion on the matter. Every aspect of life has some relation to Christ and the Great Controversy and when we discover what that relation is, we will find, in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, *principles* that apply to current issues.

B. Topics upon which Ellen White never wrote directly.

1. Cinema, movies and videos. The first commercial motion picture film, “The Birth of a Nation,” was produced by D. W. Griffith in 1915, the year of Ellen White's death. However, she wrote significant counsels about theater, drama, and fictional literature. The same principles for evaluating fictional literature and theater are also applicable to movies, cinema, TV, DVD, videos, etc. That involves hermeneutical step #4, “principles and applications.”
2. Radio programs. The first commercial radio station to come on-line was Station KDKA, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and the first program broadcast was the Harding-Cox presidential election returns on Nov. 2, 1920.
3. Television programs. The first program broadcast on commercial television was a speech by President F. D. Roosevelt, which opened the 1939 World's Fair in New York City.
4. Chemical/Mechanical contraception. Although the first serious scientific study of contraception was undertaken in 1882, commercially-available products were still decades in the future. Actually, the most widely employed methods used today were not introduced on the market

- until after 1960.
 - 5. Abortion.
 - 6. Cremation.
 - 7. Organ transplants.
- C. Topics upon which Ellen White wrote very little.
1. Life insurance: Only one statement (1867), 1T 549-551.
 - a. Understanding this statement involves another hermeneutical principle, consider the context.
 - b. The insurance industry in her day was almost totally corrupt and fraud-ridden, unregulated by any government agency. (Today, by contrast, it is one of the *most* regulated.)
 - c. See the shelf document "Seventh-day Adventists and Life Insurance," available from the EGW Research Center.
 2. Wedding band: Only one statement (1892), TM 180-181.
 - a. For the context of this statement, see shelf document by Roger W. Coon, "The Wedding band, EGW, and the SDA Church," available from the EGW Research Center.
- D. Topics on which Ellen White wrote a great deal.
1. The Holy Spirit. The CD-ROM contains some 10,431 paragraphs that mention the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost (and that does not include references where "Spirit" appears without the adjective "Holy").
 2. The CD-ROM includes more than 37,000 references to Jesus and more than 69,000 references to Christ.

III. Case Study Approaches

A. Case Study: Did Ellen White teach that SDAs should not eat eggs?

1. Sermon, Battle Creek Tabernacle, March 6, 1869.

"You place upon your table butter, eggs, and meat, and your children partake of them, . . . and then you come to meeting and ask God to bless and save your children. How high do your prayers go?" (2T 362).
1. Letter to Brother and Sister E (1869)

"Eggs should not be placed on your table. They are an injury to your children" (2T 400).
2. Is that all she wrote?
3. The Story of D. H. Kress, M.D.
 - Medical missionary in Australia, 1900-1907
 - Banned eggs and dairy products
 - Became anemic and was near death
- a. Ellen White's emergency counsel, Letter 37, May 1901

"Brother and Sister Kress,

"I have all confidence in you, and I greatly desire that you may have physical health. . . . Some of our people are very careless in regard to health reform. But . . . you must not, in order to be an example to them, be an extremist. You must not deprive yourself of that class of food which makes good blood. . . . Put into your diet something you have left out. It is your duty to do this. . . . Get eggs of healthy fowls. Use these eggs cooked or raw. Drop them uncooked into the best unfermented wine you can find. This will supply that which is necessary to your system. Do not for a moment suppose that it will not be right to do this. . . . I say that milk and eggs should be included in your diet. . . . You are in danger of taking too radical a view of health reform, and of prescribing for yourself a diet that will not sustain you. . . . Eggs contain properties which are remedial agencies in counteracting poisons. And while warnings have been given against the use of these articles of diet in families where the children were addicted to, yes, steeped in, habits of self-abuse; yet we should not consider it a denial of principle to use eggs of hens which are well cared

- for and suitably fed” (CD 203-205).
- b. Dr. Kress’s reply to Ellen White, June 28, 1901

“I can see that the strong view I held with reference to the milk and egg question placed me in danger of going to extremes, and I feel very thankful that the Lord has corrected me. . . . Now with reference to myself as far as I know I am following out carefully all the instruction that God has sent me through you. I am using both the eggs and the milk, and I am able to do so without a prick of conscience now. Before this I could not do it without feeling condemned, and I really believe there is hope for me being restored to health, else the Lord would not have sent this message” (quoted in G. R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 75-76).
 - c. The rest of the story; 43 years later.
 - (1) D. H. Kress, unpublished MS, Jan. 6, 1944

“Some honest souls have taken an extreme position in regard to some of the statements made by Sister White regarding the use of animal food products, especially milk and eggs.” Speaking of his own experience, he said, “I ran down in health almost to the point of death. . . . Sister White saw me in vision and wrote me several letters, pointing out the cause of my condition, and urging me to make a change in my dietetic habits. . . . After receiving this message, I at once began making reforms by using eggs as directed, and milk, and with God’s blessing I made a good recovery. . . . This was over forty years ago. I have now about reached my eighty-second year of life, and am still able to spend three hours daily in my office at the Sanitarium. For the health so graciously granted me, I am indebted to the messages that came to me at a time when a recovery seemed hopeless from a human standpoint. I still follow out the instruction by using milk and eggs” (D. H. Kress, Jan. 6, 1944, as quoted in G. R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 76).
5. Why then the 1869 warning to Brother and Sister E?
 - a. The adolescent sons in the “E” family were addicted to sexual indulgence (2T 392; cf. CD 204).
 - b. God had shown Ellen White something that sexual hygienists and physiologists have since discovered through research—that eggs rank high among scientifically confirmed aphrodisiacs (substances that tend to stimulate sexual desire).
 - c. The letter to Brother and Sister E was really giving very sensible advice, that those whose sexual drives are already out of control should avoid substances that make the situation worse.
 6. A Statement on the benefits of eggs.

“Milk, eggs, and butter should not be classed with flesh meat. In some cases the use of eggs is beneficial” (7T 135).
 7. Who may *need* to use eggs?
 - d. “Persons whose blood-making organs are feeble,—especially if other foods to supply the needed elements cannot be obtained” (MH 320).
 - e. Persons in “[developing] countries or poverty-stricken districts, where fruit and nuts are scarce” (MH 320, 9T 163).
 - f. Persons anywhere who because of poverty cannot afford the quality or variety of food they would need to replace milk and eggs (CD 358, 9T 163).
 8. Who Should Use Few or No Eggs?
 - a. “Persons . . . in whom [sexual] passions are strong need to avoid the use of stimulating foods” (MH 320).
 - b. “Persons in full flesh” (overweight) may need to avoid eggs, apparently because of the high cholesterol in commercially-produced eggs (MH 320).
 9. A Prediction and a Promise
 - g. Around 1900, some sincere but misguided Adventists advocated health reform “in its most extreme form”—with the result that “harm” was being “done.”

- h. Attempting to bring in balance, EGW, while continuing to advocate the discontinuance of flesh-foods, tea, and coffee, nevertheless held that urging abstinence from milk, cream, butter, and eggs by all, was going too far.
 - i. She declared that “the time will come” when we will need to discard from the diet *all* animal products; but “when the time comes . . . God will reveal this. No extremes in health reform are to be advocated” (Letter 37, 1901, in CD 358, 359).
10. Has that time come?
- j. Abundant scientific evidence of rampant animal disease, particularly mad cow disease and cancers of all kinds.
 - k. In many countries, there is now available a variety of vegetable-based alternative foods available.
11. A Personal Decision
- Rom. 14:5 “Let each be fully convinced in his [or her] own mind.”
12. Factors to Consider
- l. Disease risk
 - m. Nutritional benefit
 - n. Costs (of using or of not using)
 - o. Individual differences.
13. If you decide to change, expect some struggle.
- a. Gal. 5:17 “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature” (NIV).

B. Case Study: Is it a sin to eat desserts?

- 1. Dessert problem #1: Excessive use of sugar.
 - a. “Far too much sugar is ordinarily used in food. Cakes, sweet puddings, pastries, jellies, jams, are active causes of indigestion” (CD 333).
 - b. “Sugar clogs the system. It hinders the working of the living machine. “Anything that hinders the active motion of the living machinery affects the brain very directly” (2T 369, 370).
 - c. “From the light given me, sugar, when **largely used**, is more injurious than meats” (2T 370).
- 2. Dessert problem #2: Milk, eggs, and sugar in combination.
 - a. Many people “use a **great amount** of milk and sugar. These clog the system, irritate the digestive organs, and affect the brain” (2T 370).
 - b. “Especially harmful are the custards and puddings in which **milk, eggs, and sugar** are the chief ingredients” (CD 333).
 - c. “Could we know that animals were in perfect health [which we do not know], I would recommend that people eat flesh meats sooner than **large quantities of milk and sugar**. It would not do the injury that milk and sugar do” (2T 369).
- 3. Scientific Support:

“All cholesterol is not created equal” (Neil Nedley, M.D. in *Lifestyles*, the Newsletter of the Lifestyle Center of America, Spring 1999, p. 3).

 - a. “The most harmful combination of cholesterol oxidation products was found in **custard mix** where **sugar, milk, and eggs** were combined. . . . Ice cream is the most common form of custard.”
 - b. “Pancake mixes containing eggs and dried powdered milk were equally as harmful as custard.”
 - c. The third most harmful item was Parmesan cheese; it turned out to be as atherogenic [harmful to arteries] as lard” (Neil Nedley, M.D., “All Cholesterol is Not Created Equal,” *Lifestyles*, Spring 1999, 3).
 - d. Many, reading Ellen White’s warnings, have concluded that the only safe approach is a total ban on desserts. But is that “all she wrote”?
- 4. The case of husband B (2T 378-379).

- a. He “took extreme views” of health reform.
 - b. Enforced “rigid rules” on his wife and family.
 - c. Two children died of malnutrition.
 - d. Mrs. B. was near starvation.
5. Ellen White’s counsel to save the life of Mrs. B.
- “When she needed . . . extra food, . . . it was not allowed her. Her system craved material to convert into blood, but he would not provide it. A **moderate amount of milk and sugar**, a little salt, white bread raised with yeast for a change, graham [whole wheat] flour prepared in a variety of ways by other hands than her own, **plain cake with raisins, rice pudding with raisins, prunes, and figs**, occasionally, and many other dishes I might mention, would have answered the demand of appetite” (2T 383-384).
6. A balanced view of desserts.
- a. “Sugar, when largely used” is not healthful (2T 370).
 - b. Foods “in which milk, eggs, and sugar are the chief ingredients” are not the most healthful (CD 333).
 - c. But she did not forbid the “moderate” use of sugar, even with milk (2T 384).
 - d. “Plain, simple pie may serve as a dessert, but when one eats two or three pieces merely to gratify an inordinate appetite, he unfits himself for the service of God” (CD 333).
 - e. “Lemon pie should not be forbidden,” she wrote, even though lemon pie includes some sugar and usually eggs (CD334).
 - f. Her personal practice, which she insisted (CD 491) was not a rule for others:
 - (1) “We have always used a little milk and some sugar. This we have never denounced, either in our writings or in our preaching” (CD 330 [1873]).
 - (2) “We have no sugar [bowl] on our table. Our [fruit] sauce . . . is . . . sweetened [with sugar] as is required before being put on the table” (CD 330).
 - (3) White family oral tradition: lemon pie was her favorite dessert.
 - g. “The dessert should be placed on the table and served with the rest of the food,” so people can better plan how much to eat (CD 334).

VI. Review Questions for Exam preparation

1. Give a Bible text (and be able to state its key idea) for the hermeneutical principle that heart preparation is the essential prerequisite for spiritual study. (Proverbs 9:10)
2. Be able to show how EGW’s counsels regarding (a) the use of eggs, and (b) desserts, illustrate the hermeneutical principle of Wide Reading / examining All Available Evidence before drawing final conclusions.
3. Begin memorizing the hermeneutical check list.

VII. Additional Sources

Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord* (1999), 372-443.

Jemison, T. Housel. *A Prophet Among You* (1995), 438-449.

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