

**Ellen G. White and the SDA “Health Message:”  
God’s Third Priority for the First 20 Years of Vision  
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**Introduction: God’s Apparent Priorities for Vision Content (1845-65):**

1. **Priority #1:** Formulation of Doctrinal Framework--the Decade of the 1840s:
  - a. The role of the “Sabbath Conferences” (1848-50)
  - b. Dec. 13, 1850: “We know that we have the truth.” (Letter 30, 1850)
  
2. **Priority #2:** Organization of the SDA Denomination--the decade of the 1850s:
  - a. Dec. 24, 1850: first vision on “gospel order” 11 days after EGW’s declaration on doctrine.
  - b. First three steps in organization taken in 1860:
    - (i) May 13: First “legally-organized” SDA Church, Parkville, MI
    - (ii) Oct. 1: SDA name adopted
    - (iii) Oct. 1: First institution (publishing house) organized.
  
3. **Priority #3:** Development of the “Health message”--the Decade of the 1860s:
  - a. The General Conference was organized May 21, 1863. Sixteen days later the first major health reform vision was given June 6th.
    - (i) **Autumn of 1848:** The first known vision dealing with health-related matters
    - (ii) **Feb. 12, 1854:** A second limited view given
    - (iii) **Friday night, June 6, 1863:** The first major, comprehensive health vision given at Otsego, MI, in the home of Aaron Hilliard during a family worship period.
  
  - b. **Christmas Day, 1865:** The second major health vision was given in Rochester, NY.

**I. EGW’s Health/Lifestyle Message Summarized:**

- A. There is a significant link between the physical condition and spiritual experience:
  1. God intends our bodies to be spiritual temples for the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.
    - a. God owns these “buildings” by right both of original creation and of redemption, at great personal cost to heaven.
    - b. He cares deeply how they are treated.
  
  2. As the “Owner,” God has every right to decide how His personal property is treated.
    - a. As a “tenant,” man has no right to do as he pleases with someone else’s property. EGW referred to “this wonderful house the Lord has given us.” (Letter 85, 1888; in 7MR 224)
    - b. We have a sacred obligation to maintain these dwellings in an optimum condition.
    - c. Men and women are to honor and glorify God in their bodies.
    - d. We must not, therefore, “defile” them.
    - e. God will punish severely all who thus desecrate their body

temples.

3. Man was originally created in the image of God.
  - a. Subsequently, this image was marred for the entire human race because of Adam & Eve's sin.
  - b. The goal of the Christian religion is "redemption"-- restoration to the original state.
  
- B. The body, with the mind and its central nervous system, is the only medium through which God can communicate with human beings (MH 130). This may be the most important concept of the whole health/lifestyle message.
  1. This explains Satan's concerted efforts to pollute, defile, and destroy both.
  2. That is why we humans have a sacred duty to prevent this from happening.
  
- C. In the act of obeying health principles, the Christian "earns" nothing toward his salvation and eternal life. (4SGa: 148, 149)
  1. The laws of health are not placed by God at the same level as the Ten Commandments.
  2. God gave them not as an arbitrary exercise to "show man who is boss;" rather, being able to foresee the end results of undesirable practices, He knew we could be healthier and happier if we avoided the harmful and clung to the good.

"God requires obedience, not for the purpose of showing His authority, but that we may become one with Him in character." (UL 347: 4)
  3. Christians observe true health principles, not in order to be saved, but because they have been saved, and they are motivated by love to do God's expressed will for their lives.
  4. "A clear mind enables us to understand God's will; a strong body enables us to do it." (*SDA Encyclopedia* [1976]: 574)
  5. But salvation itself is not a matter of eating and drinking. (Rom. 14:17)
  
- D. The Christian, in every act of life, seeks to be guided by two great principles:
  1. To promote and maintain life and good health:
    - a. "Preserve the best health." (CD 395)
    - b. "Eat that food which is most nourishing." (9T 163; CD 353)
  2. "Do the very best possible" under every circumstance in which we find ourselves." (IHP 60; MH 69, MR #1115 and 1409)
  
- E. The Body-Temple can be polluted, defiled, and ultimately destroyed through various bad habits:

1. Ingestion of deleterious food/drink/harmful substances
  2. Insufficient physical exercise or a lack of the right kind of exercise.
  3. Overwork--often coupled with insufficient rest/relaxation (1T 618):
    - a. "I know from the testimonies given me from time to time for brain workers, that sleep is worth far more before than after midnight. Two hours' good sleep before twelve o'clock is worth more than four hours after twelve o'clock." (Letter 85, May 10, 1888; cited in 7MR 224)
    - b. "Physical, as well as mental, workers should take a much longer time to eat than they generally allow; then one hour spent after eating, upon matters which are of little more consequence than to interest or amuse, before they subject themselves to hard labor again." (*Ibid.*; cited in 7MR 225)
  4. Feeding the mind upon impure thoughts ("Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report . . . " Phil. 4:8)
  5. Improper posture
  6. Abuse of body organs by:
    - a. Overeating or eating too rapidly
    - b. Irregularity in meal times
    - c. Snacking between regular meals
    - d. Overexertion, straining, or constriction
  7. Failure to employ natural remedies in sufficient amount
- F. Authentic Christians will strive for mastery and "true temperance":
1. "Judicious" moderation in the use of all that is good and health-producing
  2. Total abstinence from all that harms and hurts (PP 562)
- G. God's people have a twofold obligation to themselves and the world:
1. The establishment of health care centers for healing those afflicted with illness and disease
  2. Propagation of preventive methods and practices by which these may be avoided altogether (1T 489; Ms 1, 1863, p. 6)
- H. Whenever possible, in attempting to effect physical healing, natural remedies (including trust in divine power--see 5T 443; MH 127) are the preferred therapeutic agencies:
1. Poisonous drugs/substances should be avoided whenever/wherever possible.
  2. However, there is a legitimate place for some drugs like anesthetics &

immunizations and prophylaxis. (2SM 279-84)

- I. The original Edenic diet of fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables is yet today the preferred diet of those seeking to develop optimum physical health and spiritual growth and well-being:
  1. Meat, poultry, and fish, as well as certain dairy and poultry products, are increasingly undesirable and unsafe for
    - a. Physiological reasons:
      - (i) Disease in the animals/fish themselves
      - (ii) Possible chemical/radioactive contamination
    - b. Spiritual reasons: Animal products have a cause-effect relationship to one's spiritual experience.
  2. When flesh articles are removed from the diet, adequate nutritional substitutes must be found and employed. (9T 161, 162; SD 352)
  3. Meals, though simple, must be not only "palatable" (CD 471) and "appetizing" (CT 312, 313), but also "attractive" (6T 357; MR #1115), as well.
  4. On Sabbath, special efforts should be made to "provide something that will be regarded as a treat--something the family do not have every day." (6T 357)
- J. In seeking to effect reform, attitude is as important as ideas; and the greatest patience, kindness, courtesy, tact, and discretion must be exercised, if the health-reformer is to be truly effective for exercising a positive influence for good. (9T 161; 7T 113; CD 493, 495)
  1. Balance and common sense are imperatives
  2. If one must err at all, it is better to come one step short of the goal than to go one beyond; and if there is to be error, let it be "on the side of the people." (6T 120-23)

## II. Characteristics of the SDA Health/Lifestyle Message:

- A. **Origin of:** The health message was given
  1. By divine initiative
  2. By direct revelation of God.

I have had great light from the Lord upon the subject of health reform. I did not seek this light; I did not study to obtain it; it was given to me by the Lord to give to others. (CD 493, from Ms 29, 1897)

- B. **Purpose of:** This message was given for practical, pragmatic reasons.
- C. **Uniqueness of:**
  1. Philosophical/Theological:

a. EGW linked the physical condition and the spiritual experience in a cause-effect relationship; she made healthful living a religious obligation and a part of “present truth.” (J. H. Waggoner, *RH*, Aug. 7, 1866)

b. In addition to SDAs, the only other religious bodies to make health concerns a matter of religious practice are the Mormons and Moslems.

2. Historical:

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s assessment (in Preface, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, by JW and EGW, 1890, pp. iii, iv)

The reader’s attention is invited to a few facts of interest in this connection:

a. At the time the writings referred to first appeared, the subject of health was almost wholly ignored, not only by the people to whom they were addressed, but by the world at large.

b. The few advocating the necessity of a reform in physical habits, propagated in connection with the advocacy of genuine reformatory principles the most patent and in some instances disgusting errors.

c. Nowhere, and by no one, was there presented a systematic and harmonious body of hygienic truths, free from patent errors, and consistent with the Bible and the principles of the Christian religion.

d. It certainly must be regarded as a thing remarkable and evincing unmistakable evidence of divine insight and direction, that in the midst of confused and conflicting teachings, claiming the authority of science and experience, but warped by ultra notions and rendered impotent for good by the great admixture of error,—it must be admitted to be something extraordinary, that a person making no claims to scientific knowledge or erudition should have been able to organize, from the confused and error-tainted mass of ideas advanced by a few writers and thinkers on health subjects, a body of hygienic principles so harmonious, so consistent, and so genuine that the discussions, the researches, the discoveries, and the experience of a quarter of a century have not resulted in the overthrow of a single principle, but have only served to establish the doctrines taught.

**D. Practicality of:** The SDA health message:

1. Is not merely a philosophical/theoretical subject for intellectual discussion/debate.
2. It is a practical way of life, with tangible, demonstrable benefits for the faithful adherent

**E. Breadth/Scope of:**

1. It is more than merely vegetarianism or diet/nutrition. It embraces a total concept

of and program for wellness and includes (among other things) physical exercise and mental hygiene.

2. It is concerned with the prevention of disease, not merely its cure; it embraces the maintenance of good health as well as its recovery.

**F. Universality of:** Because it is based upon broad, far-reaching principles, as well as the application of those principles in specific instances, the SDA health message finds a practical, useful, and helpful application in every country and every culture.

**G. Evangelistic Utility of:**

1. Fitness, wellness, wholeness, healing by natural means, are all “in” topics of contemporary interest on the part of the majority in many parts of the world today.
2. SDAs do well to capitalize upon this interest and exploit it for soul-winning ends by means of promoting:
  - a. Interest in vegetarianism
  - b. Cooking schools
  - c. Stop-smoking programs
  - d. Exercise classes
  - e. Alcohol and substance-abuse emphases in drug-recovery and prevention seminars
  - f. Weight-loss programs
  - g. Exercise classes
  - h. Stress-management programs
  - i. Healthful-living classes
3. The health message provides an excellent opportunity to make a first introduction of EGW to nonSDAs, as a valuable “entering wedge,” by bringing into focus her amazing contribution in this area of near universal interest and showing her advance concepts from a positive perspective

**III. Reasons God Gave SDAs a Health Message:**

- A. 1. That SDAs might be able to render service to God longer and more efficiently.

The God of heaven has given us reasoning powers and intellect, and He wants us to use them. He has given us this body which He wishes us to preserve in perfect health so that we can give Him perfect service. (UL 192: 4, from Mc 6a, June 27, 1886)

2. That SDAs might be a good advertisement for the “remnant” church, thus attracting the public’s interest in a favorable manner:
  - a. “Nothing will open doors for the truth like evangelistic medical missionary work. This will find access to hearts and minds, and will be a means of converting many to the truth.” (Ms. 58, 1901, in Ev 513:1)
  - b. “Medical missionary work” is characterized as “a great entering

wedge” (CH 535, 1893) and “the right, helping hand of the gospel” (Ms. 58, 1901, in Ev 513:1; cf. 7T 59, 1902) that “will break down prejudice as nothing else can.” (9T 211, 1909)

3. That SDAs might help others not of our faith find the benefits/blessings of good health:

a. “I have been instructed by my guide that not only should those who believe the truth practice health reform but they should also teach it diligently to others; for it will be an agency through which the truth can be presented to the attention of unbelievers. They will reason that if we have such sound ideas in regard to health and temperance, there must be something in our religious belief that is worth investigation.” (Letter 1, 1875, in Ev 514)

b. “In every place the sick may be found . . . . Workers for Christ should be . . . prepared to give those who are sick the simple treatments that will relieve them, and then pray with them.” (MM 320, 1911)

c. “As the medical missionary works upon the body, God works upon the heart. The comforting words that are spoken are a soothing balm, bringing assurance and trust.” (Ms 58, 1901, in Ev 517)

d. “Many have lost the sense of eternal realities, lost the similitude of God, and they hardly know whether they have souls to be saved or not. They have neither faith in God nor confidence in men. As they see one with no inducement of earthly praise or compensation come into their wretched homes, ministering to the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and tenderly pointing all to Him of whose love and pity the human worker is but the messenger--as they see this, their hearts are touched. Gratitude springs up. Faith is kindled. They see that God cares for them, and they are prepared to listen as His Word is opened.” (RH, Aug. 3, 1905, in Ev 517)

4. That SDAs’ mental perceptions might be sharpened to better understand truth--secular truth, as well as spiritual truth:

a. “He longs to have you reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him. He loves to give you understanding in temporal, as well as spiritual matters. He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you.” (COL 146)

b. “God gave Daniel and his companions ‘knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams’ (Dan. 1:17) . . . . God cooperates with human effort . . . . God can give you skill in all your learning. He can help you to adapt yourselves to the line of study you shall take up. Place yourself in right relation to God. Make this your first interest . . . . It rests with you to say whether you will have knowledge and skill.” (UL 47)

c. “Truth constantly enriches the receiver. The minds of those who receive the truth increase in activity. As they exercise their talents, seeking to improve every capability, their mental and spiritual powers strengthen, for where there is spiritual life, there is development and growth . . . . And not only will the minds of those helped be impressed,

but the mind of him who is doing the work will be quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the co-operation of the power that comes from God alone, he will be enabled to make the truth so plain that it will vibrate in other minds.” (UL 205)

5. That SDAs might be better enabled to withstand the temptations of Satan--attaining spiritual growth and development:
  - a. “All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own Spirit, and the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind.” (DA 827)
  - b. “Do not, because you are among unbelievers, become careless in your words, for they are taking your measure. If you sit at their table, eat temperately, and only of food that will not confuse the mind. Keep yourself from all intemperance. Be yourself an object lesson, illustrating right principles. If they offer you tea to drink, tell them in simple words its injurious effect on the system. Tell them also that you do not use spirituous drinks of any kind, because you desire to keep your mind in such a condition that God can impress it with the sacred truths of His Word, and that you cannot afford to weaken any of your mental and physical powers, lest you shall be unable to discern sacred things.” (UL 342)

#### **IV. The Source and Scope of the First Four Health Reform Visions:**

##### **A. Vision of Autumn, 1848** (JW in RH, Nov. 8, 1870, p. 165; cited in Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message*, pp. 65-70)

1. Content: Injurious effects of tobacco (“a slow, insidious, and most malignant poison”), tea, and coffee.
2. Corroboration:
  - a. Tobacco: Alton Ochsner, MD, professor of thoracic surgery, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, 1954, produced cinema film “One in 20,000”; research findings 30 years later.
  - b. Coffee:
    - (i) Research at Harvard University Medical School in 1981 showed coffee to be the predisposing cause of cancer of the pancreas; they don’t know what the chemical culprit is, but it was not caffeine.
    - (ii) A scientific study was undertaken in Norway in 1984, indicting coffee as a medical hazard.
    - (iii) A study late in 1993 of 331 Canadian women showed that drinking three cups of coffee a day during pregnancy more than doubled the statistical risk of miscarriage.

**B. Vision of Feb. 12, 1854, Brookfield, NY (Ms. 1, 1854):**

1. Content:
  - a. Health-related issues:
    - (i) Adultery in the church
    - (ii) Lack of bodily cleanliness among Sabbath-keepers
    - (iii) Control of appetite needed
  - b. Other topics discussed:
    - (i) Profanity
    - (ii) Parental neglect of children
    - (iii) Unwise youthful marriages

**C. Vision of June 6, 1863 (Ms. 1, 1863):**

1. Background:
  - a. General Conference organized 16 days earlier at Battle Creek
  - b. JW/EGW visiting evangelistic campaign by R. J. Lawrence and M. E. Cornell
  - c. Stayed in the home of Aaron Hilliard; 45-minute vision during sunset worship; eyewitness, Martha Amadon
  - d. Counsel given for recovery of JW's health, also for the church at large
2. Content: emphasized earlier reforms; introduced new ones. 10 emphases.
  - a. Care of health a religious duty
    - (i) God requires us to glorify Him in our bodies.
    - (ii) We earn nothing, however, toward salvation/eternal life.
  - b. The cause of disease is a violation of health laws.
  - c. Intemperance on many fronts attacked:
    - (i) "Stimulating drinks"
    - (ii) Tobacco "in whatever form"
    - (iii) Highly spiced foods
    - (iv) Overwork: "intemperance in labor"
    - (v) "Indulgence of base passion": Manifestations not particularly otherwise identified; obviously reference to intemperate sexual relationships between husband/wife.
  - d. Vegetarianism advocated; pork totally prohibited (first time non-flesh diet revealed to EGW as ideal)

- e. Proper dietary habits to control appetite:
  - (i) Danger of eating too much.
  - (ii) Danger of eating in between meals
  
- f. Control of the mind essential; many illnesses have their origination in a diseased mind, rather than from organic/viral causes.
- g. Natural remedies in healing better than drug medication:
  - (i) Those identified in this vision:
    - (a) Pure air
    - (b) Pure water--for both  
internal/external use
    - (c) Sunshine
    - (d) Physical exercise
    - (e) Adequate rest
    - (f) Fasting for brief periods, to rest  
stomach
    - (g) Proper nutrition
  - (ii) In 1885--22 years later--she would add a final “natural remedy”: “A firm trust in God,” “trust in divine power.”
  
- h. Personal cleanliness--raised in 1854 vision--reiterated here.
  - (i) Broadened to include body, clothing, and living quarters
  - (ii) Personal cleanliness placed on level of “purity of heart” for all professing Christians.
  
- i. Environmental Concerns:
  - (i) Remove decaying vegetation from immediate proximity of home
  - (ii) Wherever possible, build houses on high ground, avoid allowing water to settle nearby.
  
- j. Health education:
  - (i) For the first time, a “duty” of Christians to educate the public.
  - (ii) This would be further re-emphasized in the 4th health-reform vision of Dec. 25, 1865, at Rochester, NY.

3. Significance of this vision:

- a. For the first time it established a definite link between one’s physical condition and one’s spiritual experience.
- b. Vegetarianism now advocated for the first time, and pork prohibited altogether

- c. The duty of the church to engage in health-education made explicit

**D. Vision of Dec. 25, 1863, Rochester, NY (1T 485-95):**

1. Background: Special service in Local SDA Church Christmas Day for healing for James White and his recovery of health.
2. Content: SDAs should now provide a health-care institution to do 2 things:
  - a. Cure those already ill
  - b. Teach preventive medicine

**V. The Case for Vegetarianism: Mounting Evidence of Pollution in Both Animal Bodies and in Processing Plants:**

**A. Meat Indicted:**

Dean Ornish, M.D., is one of the foremost advocates of vegetarianism in the United States.

Perhaps the most recent distinguished non-Adventist scientist to come forward urging vegetarianism is Dean Ornish, M. D. His professional pedigree is impressive: assistant clinical professor of medicine, University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine; attending physician, Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center, San Francisco; and present and director, Preventive Medicine Research Institute, Sausalito, California.

His recent findings were little short of startling. Writing in *Hospital Practice*, May 15, 1991 ("Can Lifestyle Change Reverse Coronary Atherosclerosis?"), Ornish reported that "by combining a strict low-fat vegetarian diet, moderate aerobic exercise, abstinence from smoking, and stress management training," his study group was able to show "measurable regression of disease in patients with severe coronary atherosclerosis."

Recently challenged on his view, Ornish ticked off the reasons for his vegetarian stance:

- ! "Even severely blocked arteries began to unclog in the majority of heart patients when they stopped eating animal products and made other simple lifestyle changes." Atherosclerosis can be reversed.
- ! A December 13, 1990, study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* provides persuasive new evidence that the more red meat and animal fat women ate, the more likely they were to get colon cancer. Harvard's Dr. Walter Willett, chief director of the study, declared, "The optimum amount of red meat you should eat should be zero."
- ! Dr. T. Colin Campbell of Cornell University directed a landmark study of 6,500 persons in mid-1990. He found that "the more meat they ate, the more likely they were to die prematurely from coronary heart disease, colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and lung cancer, among others."
- ! "Many athletes are forgoing the pregame steak for foods high in complex carbohydrates because they find that eating less meat often increases their endurance."

- ! Most beef is “still very high in fat and cholesterol. Studies also indicate that meat protein and perhaps other substances in beef raise the risk of cancer and heart disease.”
- ! Eating meat makes you fat.”

In his conclusion, Dr. Ornish played on a recent slogan of the American beef Association (“Beef. Real food for real people.”) with the words “meat. Real food for real death.”

## **B. Poultry Indicted:**

CBS News’s “60 Minutes” telecast a segment on Salmonella poisoning from eating chicken/poultry products, entitled “One Out of Three”: March 29, 1987 & September 6, 1987.

## **C. Fish Indicted:**

*Consumer Reports* cover story, February, 1992 edition: “Is Our Fish Fit to Eat?” (pp. 103-14):

Based on a six-month investigation of fresh fish and shellfish which “raises serious questions about their quality.”

- a. 29% of samples purchased in stores were already spoiled, from “total bacteria,” another 9% were “beginning to spoil,” another 4% were graded “barely acceptable,” and only 58% were labeled “acceptable.”
- b. With regard to infection from fecal coliform bacteria, 15% were “potentially hazardous,” 7% raised “cause for alarm,” another 22% were judged to be “contaminated,” and only 56% were judged “acceptable.”
- c. 43% of salmon contained PCBs, a potential carcinogen and reproductive hazard.
- d. 90% of swordfish contained heavy metal mercury contamination, which may harm nervous system; 25% contained PCBs.
- e. Catfish were found occasionally to contain residues of pesticides DDT, DDE, and DDD, which can affect reproduction in mammals.
- f. Some samples of clams were high in lead, which can impair behavioral development in young children.
- g. Of flounder and sole 55% had no detectible residues but that means 45% did, though at minimum levels.

## **Conclusion:**

1. EGW continually appealed to her followers to “Judge from the weight of evidence.” (5T 675, 676)
2. Longevity studies prove SDAs live statistically longer lives than do nonSDAs and have fewer deaths from diseases--particularly cancers:
  - a. Gary Fraser, “Epidemiological Studies of Adventists,” *Scope*, July-Sept., 1991, pp. 50-55 (*Anthology*; II:91/72-77): reports 206 published manuscripts in the scientific literature that deal with the health status of SDAs.
  - b. “At a Glance: California Adventist Health Study,” *Scope*, April-June, 1991, p. 28 (*Anthology*, II:91/47).
  - c. Jan W. Kuzma’s scientific study reports:

- (i) “Lifestyle and Life Expectancy of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Adventist Review*, June 29, 1989, pp. 15-19 (*Anthology*, II: 89/96-100).
  - (ii) “Why Adventists Live Longer,” *Ministry*, Sept., 1989, pp. 24-27 (*Anthology*, II: 89-101-104).
- d. “Health Study Finds New Dietary Key to Lower Coronary Heart Disease Risk,” (*Pacific Union Recorder*, November 1, 1993, pp. 6, 7).