

Belief in Ellen G. White as a Prophet: Should It Be Made a Test of SDA "Fellowship"?

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Introduction

1. On March 26, 1996, an E-mail message was posted on the SDA Internet web page from "Nancy:"

- a. I would really appreciate your answering this inquiry. We are going through quite a controversy in our church, and I need guidance. When I was baptized in the SDA Church 22 years ago, I was told I didn't have to believe that Ellen White was a prophet to be an SDA. Otherwise, I wouldn't be an SDA. Other folks in our church were told the same when they became SDAs. However, some people in our church said they had to say they believed in Ellen White when they joined.

You can prove all our doctrines from the Bible and I firmly believe them. Since belief in Ellen White is not necessary for salvation, I can't see why some folks want to strong-arm everyone into conforming. It's really dividing the church [here]. She herself said that nothing should be preached from the pulpit except the Bible.

My question is this: is it necessary to believe she was a prophet to be an SDA? I certainly believe that prophecy is a spiritual gift, but I believe the term "spirit of prophecy" means having the spirit of Christ, who was also a prophet (Acts 3:22-23). I do not believe the term refers to Ellen White. Thank you in advance for helping me.

2. SDA's traditionally have used the expression "test of fellowship" to refer to tests of church membership, as they relate to:
 - a. *Beliefs*: The core "Fundamental Beliefs" doctrinal framework--the "minimum" one must believe in order to be accepted as a member in the fellowship of the church, and to remain as a member "in good and regular standing."
 - b. *Behavior*: Lifestyle-conduct, in harmony with those "Fundamental Beliefs," that does not reflect a departure and apostasy from those basic beliefs.
3. Two questions, in this context, have been raised since the earliest days of the SDA church:
 - a. Is belief in Ellen White as a prophet a "test" of "fellowship" (membership)?
 - b. Should belief in EGW as a prophet be *made* a test of fellowship?

4. And perhaps four resulting categories of viewpoints, among leaders and members, have arisen over the years:
 - a. Belief in her as a prophet *is*—and *should be*—a test of fellowship.
 - b. Belief in her as a prophet *is*—but *should not be*—a test of fellowship.
 - c. Belief in her as a prophet *isn't*—but it *should be*—a test of fellowship.
 - d. Belief in her as a prophet *isn't*—and it *should not be*—a test of fellowship.
5. That there is not, today, unanimity among our believers, coalescing around one of these four viewpoints is a surprise—and equally a distress—to many within the church.
 - a. But that there are differences of opinion upon the question among *conservative* SDAs may to some be even more surprising—and distressing!
6. Historically, the evidence seems to indicate that the majority of the pioneer SDA leaders opposed making it a test of fellowship.
 - a. Many conservative leaders today still hold to such a position.
 - (1) A number of White Estate Trustees and staff, present and recently retired, continue to hold this historic position.
 - b. Others, of equal erudition and dedication, feel that the time has come to make it a test, and have increasingly voiced that opinion in public forums.
 - (1) And there is documentary evidence of a fairly recent shift of opinion, in several directions, as will be noted below.
 - c. Lastly, some, frankly, are confused.
 - (1) Perhaps some of the confusion arises because of an individual's inability to distinguish between a "teaching" of the church, on the one hand, and a "test" of the church, on the other—a point, also, to be dealt with below.

I. Those Who Approve Making It a Test of Fellowship

A. Spokespersons for the Affirmative

1. Francis D. Nichol [1897-1966]: Church leader, minister, author, editor of the *Review and Herald* for 21 years:
 - a. Nichol poses and then answers the question in his characteristically forthright manner:
 - (1) There is another question that is sometimes asked: Should a person be taken into the church who does not accept Mrs. White as God's special messenger to the remnant church? We believe that the Adventist ministry in general would quickly answer, No. . . . In view of the fact that such a belief in Mrs. White is one of our articles of faith, why would anyone wish to belong to our church if he did not accept Mrs. White?—*Why I Believe in Mrs. E. G. White* [RH: 1964], p. 106 (for a more complete text, see Appendix A).
 - b. Nichol provides no evidence whatever in his essay of any awareness on his part that his view is diametrically opposite of the position espoused by EGW and the early SDA pioneers, or of the historic position of the church.

c. More astonishing (to those of us who remember him as a most astute logician and polemicist) is the apparent failure on his part to distinguish between Ellen White as a person and as a doctrine, and to demonstrate his apparent inability to grasp Paul's doctrine of spiritual gifts, and the concomitant doctrine of a remnant church possessing the prophetic gift!

2. A growing number of SDA leaders, teachers, and pastors at all levels of the church, virtually all of whom are conservative in their theology and lifestyle, and who are seriously concerned that the growing negative attitudes eroding confidence in EGW, her role, and message, be reversed, and that she be given her rightful place within the church which she helped to co-found.

B. Reasons for Their Approval

1. "Historical Conditioning:" While recognizing that EGW truly did oppose making belief in her a test of fellowship, they allege that her opposition is historically conditioned, and must be viewed contextually, taking into account her time and place.

a. They allege that her position of opposition was, indeed, appropriate for her day, in the infancy of the denomination, when she and her ministry were still comparatively unknown, even within the church itself.

b. But, say they, times have changed; and the position appropriate to the church in that day is not at all appropriate now.

2. The 1980 Change in the "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs:"

a. They point out, correctly, that a change was made at the 1980 General Conference Session in which that "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs" dealing with the Spirit of prophecy was amended, so that EGW's name appears earlier in the statement, making mention of it more prominent and more explicit. Let us notice the exact nature of this change:

(1) The original statement of belief (which first appeared in print in the 1931 edition of the *SDA Yearbook* and the first edition of the *SDA Church Manual* in 1932, read:

19. That God has placed in His church the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. That these gifts operate in harmony with the divine principles of the Bible, and are given "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Eph. 4:12. That the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church. (1 Cor. 1:5-7; 1 Cor. 12:1-28; Rev. 12:17; Rev. 19:10; Amos 3:7; Hosea 12:10, 13.) They recognize that this gift was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.—*SDA Encyclopedia* (10BC [1976]: 396-98).

(2) The statement, as revised at the 1980 GC Session, presently reads:

17. The Gift of Prophecy

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was

manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10).—GC Bulletin #9, May 1, 1980, pp. 25, 26; see also "Doctrinal Statements," SDA Encyclopedia (10BC [1996]: 468).

(3) Some would now view (possibly incorrectly) this change as the church's authenticating belief in her as a prophet as a test of fellowship, by means of this "Good Housekeeping Seal-of-Approval."

b. And some now go so far as to argue that belief in her should be a test, "just as much as tithe-paying is a test!"

(1) In this line of argument, however, such overreach themselves; for tithe-paying is not--yet (and never has been) a test! Belief in the tithe obligation--the Biblical doctrine of tithe-paying--is a test of fellowship; but if tithe-payment were a test, only those gainfully employed could become (or remain) members of the SDA Church!

(a) And, to carry this inappropriate analogy one step further, reducing it to the absurd, who among us can determine whether an amount of money put into the tithe-envelope and marked as "tithe," is actually the donor's *honest* tithe?

3. A Pragmatic Way to Resolve an Urgent Church Problem: It is alleged by some that with the currently fairly-low level of acceptance of EGW as a prophet in some parts of the world church, that if we no longer make belief in her a test of membership, our pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers will eventually discontinue *any* reference to the prophetic gift within our midst.

a. And they argue that we need belief in her now to be taught officially as a membership-defining doctrine in order to shore-up the ever-deteriorating place of EGW within the church at large!

II. Those Who Oppose Making It a Test of Fellowship

A. Spokespersons for the Opposition

1. James S. White: co-founder (with EGW and Joseph Bates) of the SDA Church, thrice GC President an aggregate of 10 years, and founder of four periodicals: *Present Truth*, the *Review and Herald*, the *Youth's Instructor*, and the *Signs of the Times*:

a. It is well known that we have been charged with testing all men by the visions, and of making them *the* rule of our faith. This is a bold untruth, of which those who uttered it were not ignorant. This I have denied, and deny it still.—RH, Feb. 14, 1856, p. 158; for the full text, see Appendix A.

- b. Some 15 years later, he added that Adventists believed that God called her "to do a special work at this time, among this people. They do not, however, make belief in this work a test of Christian fellowship" (*ibid.*, June 13, 1871, p. 205; cited in QOD, 97).

2. Ellen G. White herself was explicit on this point:

- a. Speaking in 1862 of those who did not fully understand the gift, she wrote:

(1) Such should not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the church, if their Christian course is otherwise correct, and they have formed a good Christian character.—1T 328:0 (for a fuller statement, see especially pp. 328, 329, and—in 1863—"Wrong Use of the Visions," pp. 382-84).

3. John Nevins Andrews: scholar of Hebrew and Greek, theologian, editor of the RH, and the first ("official") missionary to Europe (1874), and Advent Movement "founding father:"

- a. We therefore do not test the world in any manner by these gifts. Nor do we in our intercourse with other religious bodies who are striving to walk in the fear of God, in any way make these a test of Christian character.—RH, Feb. 15, 1870; cited in QOD 97.

4. Uriah Smith: five times RH editor (for an aggregate of 41 yrs.), five times GC Secretary, author, poet, Battle Creek College Bible teacher:

- a. But I have not believed, as past volumes of the *Review* will testify, that these, or any other manifestation of spiritual gifts, stood on a level with the Scriptures, or that they should be made a test of fellowship. I see as yet no occasion to change my views in any of these respects.—RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883; for full text, see Appendix A.

5. George I. Butler: twice GC President (1871-74; 1880-88):

- a. Our enemies try very hard to make it appear that we make the visions a test of fellowship. . . . Our leading men have never done this, and the visions themselves teach that it should not be done. . . . No; we do not make the visions a test, and never have. But we do claim the right to believe them, to talk about them freely, and to read them in private and in public, and shall no doubt continue to exercise that right, regardless of the spite of those who hate us.—"The Visions: How Are They Held Among S.D. Adventists," RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883; for more complete text, see Appendix A.

6. George A. Irwin: GC President (1897-1901), church administrator.

- a. Irwin gives a qualified "no," in his correspondence with Emily H. Humphrey, who in 1897 inquired as to the church's position.

7. Francis M. Wilcox: author, an RH editor 35 years, appointed by EGW (in her last will and testament) as one of the first five Trustees of the White Estate:

- a. In the practice of the church it has not been customary to disfellowship one because he did not recognize the doctrine of spiritual gifts. . . . A member of the church should not be excluded from membership because of his inability to recognize clearly the doctrine of spiritual gifts and its application to the second advent movement.—*The Testimony of Jesus* [RH, 1944], pp. 141-43, taken from Chapter 17: "Relation to Church Fellowship," pp. 136-43.

8. Selected SDA Church Leaders in 1957:

- a. "A Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors" compiled *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* [RH: 1957] (QOD); Section III dealt with "Questions on the Relation of Ellen G. White's Writings to the Bible," pp. 87-98.

B. Reasons For Their Opposition

1. Church Pioneers' Historic Position: As noted above, this was the position of the early SDA pioneers, including JW and EGW.

- a. J. N. Andrews reportedly held that there should be two tests of fellowship in the context of EGW's prophetic gift:

- (1) Belief in the doctrine of spiritual gifts (as more fully explicated by Paul, chiefly in Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, and Eph. 4), which includes the gift of prophecy.
- (2) A willingness on the candidate for membership to become acquainted with EGW's life and ministry.

2. Ellen G. White, per se, is not a doctrine—she is a person!

- a. There *are*, of course, two Biblical doctrines closely associated with her gift and ministry, which, themselves, *are* today generally conceded to be tests of fellowship:

- (1) Paul's doctrine of spiritual gifts (including prophecy).
- (2) A "remnant church," appearing in the end-time, which possesses within its midst the prophetic gift.

3. The "Baptismal Vow" in the SDA Church Manual and Ministers' Manual:

- a. On Dec. 29, 1930, the GC Committee voted that a statement of SDA beliefs be prepared by a committee of four (including GC president and RH editor).

- (1) This first appeared in print in the 1931 *SDA Yearbook*, and the 1932 *SDA Church Manual*.

- (2) At the 1946 GC Session it was voted that no revisions, in either the "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," or any other portion of the *Church Manual*, could be made except at a world session of the church.

- (a) This position was reaffirmed at the 1990 GC Session on July 10 (*GC Bulletin* No. 6, July 12, 1990, p. 17).

- (3) This non-creedal statement consisted of 22 sections (of which No. 19 dealt with the Spirit of Prophecy), with minor revisions, for some five decades (see above)

(4) At the 1980 GC Session, the delegates increased the enumerated statements of belief from 22 to 27; and revised the statement on the Spirit of Prophecy, moving it from its former position as No. 19, to a new No. 17 (see above).

b. With regard to a designated "Baptismal Vow", to be taken by candidates prior to receiving baptism:

(1) A purely "Suggestive Outline for Examination" appeared in the first edition of the *Church Manual* in 1932 (pp. 75-78), suggesting 21 enumerated questions to be asked, Section 18 of which reads:

(a) "Do you believe the Bible doctrine of "spiritual gifts" in the church, and do you believe in the gift of the Spirit of prophecy which has been manifested in the remnant church through the ministry and writings of Mrs. E. G. White?" (p. 78).

(b) This recommended statement, further appeared unchanged in the second (1940) edition of the CM.

(2) The first formally-designated "Baptismal Vow" appeared initially in the CM's third edition in 1942.

(a) The earlier 21 interrogatories were now reduced to a mere 11.

(b) Interestingly, however, no reference whatever now appears anywhere concerning the doctrine of spiritual gifts or Ellen White! Just total silence!

(c) The 11th (and final) section of this new vow simply inquired: "Do you believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church constitutes the remnant church, and do you desire to be accepted into its membership?" (p. 87).

(3) A change was made in the CM's 4th edition (1951):

(a) The interrogatories were increased from 11 to 13.

(b) And a new section 8 now inquires: "Do you accept the doctrine of spiritual gifts, and do you believe that the Spirit of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church? (See pp. 34, 54)" [p. 57].

(c) This 1951 version now remained unchanged for three decades in succeeding editions of the CM until the revision of 1980.

(4) The General Conference Session of 1980 made only a cosmetic revision:

(a) "8. Do you accept the Biblical teaching of spiritual gifts, and do you believe that the gift of prophecy in the remnant church is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church?" (GC Bulletin #9, May 1, 1980, p. 28)

(5) The most recent revision of the vow (1990) was only minor:

(a) "8. "Do you accept the biblical teaching of spiritual gifts and believe that the gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of that church?" (GC Bulletin #7, July 17, 1990, p. 15).

(6) The *SDA Manual For Ministers* (which, until 1992, included the "baptismal vow") reflected the 1951 Church Manual rendering in its 1954 edition (p. 86), and in its 1977 edition (p. 97). (However, the current [1992] *SDA Minister's Manual*, fails to prescribe any baptismal vow, tending to downplay a pre-rite public examination

of the candidates in favor of "a less public appraisal" by "the church board, elders, or some other small group designated by the church," in the declared interest of "putting the candidate at ease"—p. 190.)

(7) In view of the fact that no "official" version of the "Baptismal Vow" ever required candidates for baptism to declare public belief in Ellen White, there seems to be no documentary evidence that belief in her prophetic gift was ever intended to be made a test of fellowship.

(a) And the 1995 edition of the *Church Manual* pointedly reminds its readers that no minister or church is at liberty to prescribe a test of fellowship not formally contained in this "constitution" of the SDA Church (p. 170).

III. Evidence of a Contemporary State of Flux Vis-a-Vis Belief in EGW

1. There is some documentary evidence of a fairly recent two-way movement with regard to the position of whether or not belief in Ellen White should be made a test of church fellowship.

A. The Change in the "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs"—A Step "Forward"?

1. As already noted above, in 1980 the "Statement of Fundamental Belief" concerning the Spirit of Prophecy was slightly amended to make reference to Mrs. White's name earlier in the statement, and thus more prominent and more explicit.

a. However, as also noted above, the reference to Mrs. White in the "suggestive" "Baptismal Vow" appeared only from 1932 to 1942. Since 1951, candidates for baptism have been asked only to declare publicly their belief in two doctrines: "spiritual gifts," and an end-time remnant church which possesses a gift of prophetic utterance.

B. Revision of the "Statement of Present Understanding" — A Step "Backward"?

1. A further development in mid-1982 and early 1983, which may or may not have significance, will now be noted:

a. "A Statement of Present Understanding" concerning "The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings" (as revised June 14, 1982) was published in the July 15, 1982 edition of the *Adventist Review*, and in the *Ministry* of August, 1982.

(1) It contained ten "Affirmations" and ten "Denials" concerning what the framers felt to be the church's position on the unique nature of the EGW writings.

(2) It was originally prepared by an otherwise unidentified *ad hoc* committee of church leaders appointed by GC leadership.

(3) It was then given to the Biblical Research Committee to "fine-tune."

b. The revised draft was subsequently published in the *Adventist Review* of December 23, 1982, and in the *Ministry* of February, 1983.

- (1) A comparison of the two drafts revealed that most revisions were purely cosmetic.
- (2) Indeed, the only change of some significance was in the 9th "Affirmation."
 - (a) In the first published draft the text read:

9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White, *while not a requirement of continuing church membership*, is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (emphasis supplied).
 - (b) In the revised draft, the clause italicized above (for purposes of emphasis) in the original draft, was deleted.
- c. Does this change signal a "reverse," a "drawing-back" for those who would make belief in Ellen White a test of fellowship? Some might perhaps be inclined to reason thus.

IV. The Meaning and Content of a Test of Fellowship

A. The Quintessential Essence

1. A "test of fellowship" is *not* the "maximum" requirement by means of which to gain admittance to a church; it is, rather, the "minimum" condition to be met by one desirous of church membership.
 - a. In once sense it may properly be viewed as a "license to grow within a clearly-defined religious community"—growth both in spirituality and in cognitive understanding.
2. It is a serious—though, unfortunately, common—mistake for one to equate a "test of fellowship" with a "test of eternal life"—a distinction cogently made by James White in his 1856 RH statement.
 - a. Church membership is not now—and never has been—an instant "passport" to the courts of glory above!

B. A "Teaching" of the Church vs. a "Test" of the Church

1. In the October, 1951 edition of *The Ministry* (pp. 12, 13), an extremely helpful article published by then-General Conference President William Henry Branson ("What Are Our Tests of Fellowship?"). In it he drew a most significant distinction:
 - a. There are "teachings" of the church which, nevertheless, are not "tests" of the church (for text, see Appendix B).
 - b. And Dr. Calvin B. Rock, in writing in the Nov. 28, 1991 edition of the *Adventist Review* ("Doctrines, Teachings, and Policies," p. 20) makes much the same point as does Branson (for text, see Appendix C).

2. These "teachings" are generally in the area of behavioral-oriented church "standards."
 - a. Few loyal members would seriously argue that these should not continue to be taught by the church.
 - b. But these non-test "teachings" of the church should not, however, be enforced upon the membership.

3. Examples of "teachings" that are not "tests:"

a. The Doctrine of Tithe-paying:

- (1) Belief in the Biblical doctrine that Christians should pay an honest tithe on their "increase" is a test of fellowship.
- (2) But, as noted above, the act of paying one's tithe is not, in and of itself, a test of fellowship, for two obvious reasons:
 - (a) If it were, only gainfully-employed individuals could become—and remain—members of the church.
 - (b) And only God Himself knows whether the amount paid is an honest tithe or not!

b. Membership in a Trade Union:

- (1) Ellen White repeatedly affirmed that SDAs should not join any labor union that existed in her day, or which might come into existence in the future (Lt 201, 1902; cited in 2SM 144—see entire section, pp.141-44); and this is still "present truth"—official SDA teaching (though, admittedly, it is sometimes given rather short shrift by some SDA pastors and teachers).
- (2) But we don't disfellowship SDA members who may join a union.

c. Membership in Secret Societies/Lodges:

- (1) EGW also taught that SDAs could not conscientiously belong to secret societies or lodges, such as the Masonic Order, etc. (2SM 120-40).
- (2) But we don't discipline SDA members who do join them.

d. Marriage of an SDA Member With a Non-SDA:

- (1) Both Paul (2 Cor. 6:14) and EGW have warned Christians against the practice of contracting marriage with an unbeliever in Christ.
 - (a) Indeed, the very nature of such alliance is, inherently, "unequal"!
- (2) But if a church member marries a nonSDA, his/her church membership is in no way jeopardized.
 - (a) Now the church *does* rule that a "mixed marriage" ceremony may *not* be performed in an SDA church sanctuary, and that an SDA minister may not so officiate.
 - (b) But when even these teachings are not followed, the offending minister, or member, is seldom disciplined.

e. Sending SDA Children to SDA Schools:

- (1) It is a teaching of the church that SDA children and youth belong in SDA educational centers, whenever possible; and, indeed, the entire church is called upon to make this financially possible.
 - (a) EGW clearly instructs that the provision of affordable Christian education is the responsibility of the entire church, not merely that of just the parents of school-age children at any particular point in time!

- (2) But neither parents nor children are disciplined if they still choose to ignore this counsel.

f. "Discouraging" the Wearing of a Wedding Band (in North America):

- (1) It is still official North American Division policy to "discourage" the wearing of a wedding band by SDAs within North America.
- (2) But the *Church Manual* prescribes no disciplinary penalties for the growing number of members who deliberately choose to do otherwise.
- (a) And it declares, further, that conferences or local church congregations who apply any discipline by way of discriminatory policies are totally "out of harmony" with the church as a whole!
- (b) In this, the church at large follows the example of the prophet, EGW, who left this matter solely at the door of individual personal conscience, by not making it a matter of legislation. (See Roger W. Coon's GSEM 534 Seminary lecture outline: "The Wedding Band, Ellen G. White, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church," rev. Dec. 10, 1987, 22 pp., available from the White Estate.)
- (3) Indeed, *all* questions related to *dress* are excluded from being tests of fellowship (Ev 215).

g. Vegetarianism:

- (1) Vegetarianism has long been a teaching of the church, world-wide; but those who—for whatever reason—choose a flesh diet are not disciplined.
- (2) Some are surprised to learn that the *eating of swine's flesh* is *not* a test of fellowship!
- (a) Wrote EGW in 1889: "... You must understand from Scripture that swine's flesh was prohibited by Jesus Christ [during the Exodus from Egypt]]. . . . [Yet] this is not a test question" (Ms 15, 1889; see Appendix D for the published text).
- (b) To Elder and Mrs. S.N. Haskell (who were making the eating of pork a test of fellowship in new York City in 1858), she wrote: "I saw that your views concerning swine's flesh would prove no injury to yourselves; but in your judgment and opinion you have [wrongly] made this question a test" (1T 206, 207).
- (3) Actually, the eating of *any* flesh food—whether Levitically "clean" or "unclean"—cannot be a test of fellowship, according to EGW:
- (a) "We are not to make the use of flesh food a test of fellowship" (9T 159)
- (b) "... we do not make the use of meat a test. . . ." (Lt 48, 1902; cited in CD 401, #715).

h. Animal Products and Caffeinated Beverages:

- (1) The church continues to teach and urge that certain animal products (e.g., milk, butter, cheese, eggs, etc.), and caffeinated beverages (such as tea, coffee, cola drinks, etc.) not be used by members.

(2) But it has not made such abstention a test of fellowship.

(a) The question whether we shall eat butter, meat, or cheese, is not to be presented to anyone as a test, but we are to educate and to show the evils of the things that are objectionable. Those who gather up these things and drive them upon others do not know what work they are doing."—Ms 5, 1881; cited in 3SM 287:1.

i. Farmers Raising Hops, Tobacco, or Swine:

(1) While the *use* of tobacco and alcohol *were* declared to be tests of fellowship by EGW, she nevertheless held that farmers who raise hops [an agricultural ingredient essential to the brewing of beer], or tobacco, or swine cannot be disciplined for this cause.

(2) While strongly recommending that SDAs not grow/raise these products, she held that "we should not urge this opinion upon any;" and to critics of such farmers she declared that "they have no right to make these things in any sense a test of fellowship" (2SM 338).

j. Belief in EGW as a Prophet of the Lord:

(1) And while EGW never disclaimed for herself the prophetic *role* (as distinct from the *title*), and while the church since her death has continued formally to reaffirm belief in her prophetic gift at every GC Session, yet she herself declared that such belief was not to be maintained as a test of fellowship:

(a) Those not convinced of the divine origin of her special gift "should not be deprived of the benefit and privileges of the church if their Christian course is otherwise correct, and they have formed a good Christian character" (1T 328, 329).

(b) "If persons are not settled in regard to the visions, they should not be crowded off" (1T 383, 384).

C. The Church Manual and Official Grounds for Church Discipline

1. The 1995 SDA Church Manual identifies 11 basic reasons as suitable grounds for church discipline (censure and/or removal of membership):

Reasons for Which Members Shall be Disciplined

Among the grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline are the following:

1. Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same.

2. Violation of the law of God, such as worship of idols, murder, stealing, profanity, gambling, Sabbathbreaking, and willful and habitual falsehood.

3. Violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God as it relates to the marriage institution, the Christian home, and biblical standards of moral conduct.

4. Such violations as fornication, promiscuity, incest, homosexual practice, and other gross sexual perversions, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the "innocent party" in a divorce for adultery

or for gross sexual perversions.

5. Fraud or willful misrepresentation in business.

6. Disorderly conduct which brings reproach upon the cause.

7. Adhering to or taking part in a divisive or disloyal movement or organization. (See p. 164, "Self-appointed Organizations.")

8. Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church.

9. The use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages.

10. The use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption.

11. The misuse of, or trafficking in, narcotics or other drugs.—pp. 168, 169 (see also "Church Discipline," *SDA Encyclopedia*, 10BC [1996]: 365, 366).

V. Ellen White's Counsels Concerning Tests of Fellowship

A. Approved Tests

1. In connection with the "denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church" (emphasis supplied), EGW wrote in 1881:

a. "The Word of God has given tests to His people" (Ms 5, 1891; cited in 3SM 287).

b. Let us notice some which she specifically cites:

2. Sabbath-Observance:

a. "The keeping of God's holy law, the Sabbath, is a test, a sign forever between God and His people, throughout their generations forever" (*ibid.*)

b. (It is well to note at this point that lesser drastic discipline is called for when members violate lesser, *non*-cardinal doctrines.)

3. "Open-Sin:"

a. "Christ's example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord's Supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches" (DA 656).

b. "Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive" (COL 71).

4. "Guerilla Warfare" Against the Spirit of Prophecy:

a. Concerning church members who actively oppose the prophetic gift within the church, she wrote:

(1) If they *fight against* the visions, . . . the church may know that they are not right. . . . When professed believers in the truth *oppose* these gifts, and *fight against* the visions, souls are in danger through their influence, and it is time then to labor with them, that the weak may not be led astray by their influence.—1T 328, 329; emphasis supplied.

(2) [If brethren in the church] of long experience in the truth, [who had for years] been acquainted with the influence

of the visions, [and who] have tested the truthfulness of these testimonies, [and who had] asserted their belief in them, [were] when reproved through vision [to] rise up against them, and work secretly to injure our influence, they should be faithfully dealt with, for their influence is endangering those who lack experience.—1T 382, 383.

- b. It is important to note here that if a church member should be disfellowshipped (or otherwise disciplined) by the local congregation of which he/she is a member, for such "guerilla warfare" against the life, work, or teachings of EGW, such discipline would *not* be based upon what such person might *believe*, but, rather, upon the subversive activities in which he/she were engaged—for "stirring up strife against brethren."

(1) No one has ever (legitimately, legally) been disfellowshipped for what he/she *believed*—or did not believe.

(2) The discipline comes because of what one *does* with one's belief—the consequent overt behavior!

B. Unapproved Tests

1. Minor, Trivial, Inconsequential Issues:

- a. EGW was known to speak critically of "one-idea men" of her day who "had been bringing in false tests, and had made their own ideas and notions a criterion, magnifying matters of little importance into tests of Christian fellowship, and binding heavy burdens upon others" (*Historical Sketches*, pp. 211, 212; cited in Ev 216).

b. Examples:

- (1) "Pictures" [photographs], or clocks which had "figures" [pictures] upon the face of the clock, based upon the allegation that these were included in the prohibition against the worship of graven images as found in the Second Commandment of the Decalogue!

(a) [Some, in one locality] had gone so far as to burn all of the pictures in their possession, destroying even the likenesses [photographs] of their friends. While we had no sympathy with these fanatical movements, we advised that those who had burned their pictures should not incur the expense of replacing them. If they had acted conscientiously, they should be satisfied to let the matter rest where it was. But they ought not to require others to do as they had done. They should not endeavor to be conscience for their brethren and sisters.—*ibid*.

- (2) **Avoid Killing Insects:** Another ridiculous triviality raised by some to the level of a test of fellowship was the ridiculous notion that the Sixth Commandment of God not to kill extended to any organism that possessed life—"even insects, however annoying or distressing they may be!" (RH, Aug. 13, 1901; cited in 1SM 170).

(a) Such issues were characterized by EGW as "matters of the smallest consequence," "idle tales . . . set us as tests," "trifling

details," "side issues," "cheap, unimportant theories," and as "nothingness" (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

1. It is unequivocally clear that all of the pioneers of the SDA Church—including EGW herself—held that belief in her prophetic gift should *not* be made a test of fellowship.
2. The pioneers did take the position that there *were* two Biblical doctrines, belief in which *did* constitute a test of fellowship:
 - a. The Pauline doctrine of spiritual gifts (which includes the gift of prophecy).
 - b. And a "remnant church" appearing in the end-time which itself would be identified by its possession of that particular gift.
3. The first "Statement of Fundamental [Doctrinal] Beliefs" was prepared in 1931, and published in the 1931 *SDA Yearbook*.
 - a. When the first edition of the *SDA Church Manual* was published in 1932, it was also published therein.
 - b. Action was taken by the GC in session in 1946 that any subsequent changes in either the "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs" (or any other portion of the *Church Manual*) could only be done by the world church in session.
 - (1) And this action was reaffirmed by the GC Session of July 10, 1990.
4. The doctrinal statement concerning the Spirit of Prophecy remained virtually unchanged, from 1931 (when it was first formulated) until the GC Session of 1980, when it was amended to make more prominent the reference to EGW's name, linking her to the prophetic gift within the SDA Church.
 - a. However, every "Baptismal Vow" which has made reference to the Spirit of prophecy, from the first (in 1941) to the present, calls only for the candidate for baptism to affirm belief in the biblical doctrine of spiritual gifts, and belief that the prophetic gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church in the end time.
 - b. If, as some allege, the delegates to the 1980 GC Session somehow "overlooked" changing the wording of the baptismal vow statement on the Spirit of prophecy, correspondingly, to include Ellen White by name in the pledge taken by baptismal candidates, they had the opportunity to correct that singular omission in the successive Sessions of 1985, 1990, and 1995. But this they did not do.
 - (1) And although several sections of the Baptismal Vow *were* revised in 1990, no significant change was made by the delegates in the statement dealing with the prophetic gift and the remnant church!
5. And the 1990 GC Session (on July 10) also reaffirmed that any change in the *SDA Church Manual* could only be made by the world church in session.

- a. No church member, no congregation, nor any conference has any right to establish tests of fellowship other than those adopted by the world church in session.
- b. Belief in Ellen White's gift of prophetic utterance still remains, very strongly, a "teaching" of the church; and we affirm most vigorously that it should continue to be taught within the church affirmatively, with diligence and vigor.
- c. But, though a teaching, it never has been—nor is it now—a "test" of fellowship in our church.
 - (1) Nor, in the opinion of this writer (and of many other concerned, conservative, SDA ministers), should it ever be made a test.

List of Appendixes

- Appendix A:** The Position of Pioneer SDA Leaders
- Appendix B:** A General Conference President Defines Appropriate Tests
- Appendix C:** A General Conference Vice President Differentiates Between the Doctrines, Teachings, and Policies of the Church
- Appendix D:** Ellen G. White on the Issue of Pork as a "Test Question"

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Appendix A

The Position of Pioneer SDA Leaders

1. James White: Answers a query in RH, Feb. 14, 1856:

COMMUNICATIONS.

From Bro. Bingham.

DEAR BRO. WHITE:—I am requested to write a word to you respecting the state of general feeling in our Churches as to some expressions made a different times in the *Review* from your pen respecting the Visions given for the aid of the Church. They feel that by your expressions you have placed a less estimate upon them than the Churches here have, and it has thus brought in some lack of confidence and trials in many minds. They wish you would take the subject into consideration, and if duty demands, make some apology through the *Review*; that shall be a relief to their minds. Many have been anxiously awaiting such an article from your pen for some time. By your thus doing, you will relieve many an oppressed mind who feels that God's manifestations of favor are a test for his children.

Your brother still striving for life in the coming Kingdom.
HIRAM BINGHAM.

NOTE.—I gladly embrace this opportunity to express my views of this matter, hoping it will relieve the minds of the Brethren in Vermont and elsewhere, I should have spoken out on this subject before; but I supposed the fact being known that I was in union with the "Address of the Conference" published in No. 10, and my relation to the instrument of the Lord's choice, were a sufficient excuse for my silence. My position has been one of trial. The relations I have sustained to the work in the rise and progress of the cause of present truth, have exposed me to a thousand thrusts from those who were opposed to the work.

I have ever been slow to speak of Mrs. White's visions in a public manner; but in consequence of the almost utter silence of those who should have spoken fit words in season, I have felt compelled to speak. And if I have spoken in a manner that has given the idea that I lightly esteemed them, it has not resulted from an unwillingness to bear the cross of Christ." It has been in reference to the welfare of the cause that I have spoken and acted, notwithstanding all my errors. In regard to the visions being a test, I confess that I have spoken without fully expressing myself; and if Bro. B. had pointed out the expressions he merely refers to, I should now be able to give a more definite reply.

It is well known that we have been charged with testing all men by the visions, and of making them the rule of our faith. This is a bold untruth, of which those who uttered it were not ignorant. This I have denied, and deny it still. But there need not be so much blind-fold stumbling over this matter. To say unqualifiedly that they are a test, and carry out the principle with those who know nothing of their teachings, spirit and fruit, at this time when the world is full of manifestations as near the genuine as Satan can get up, would be the wildest fanaticism. On the other hand, for those who profess to believe them to say they will in no wise be tested by them, is most irrational. I still say that the Bible is my rule of faith and practice, and in saying this, I do not reject the Holy Spirit in its diversities of operations. If any refer to an expression in a published extract of a letter written to a brother in the West, I would say that that related to those who know but little of the visions save by false reports. I believe them to be the property of the church, and a test to those who believe them from Heaven.

Let those who regard it as their duty, speak out as to their character, spirit and influence; while silence will better become me in regard to them. As to the perpetuity of the gifts I shall speak as God gives me utterance.

JAMES WHITE.

2. George I. Butler [GC President]:
"The Visions: How They Are Held
Among S. D. Adventists," RH
Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883 [this
extract is the next-to-last
paragraph of his article]

Our enemies try very hard to make it appear that we make the visions a test of fellowship. They must know themselves that this charge is false. Our leading men have never done this, and the visions themselves teach that it should not be done. It would be most absurd and impossible to do so, even if we would do it. With people in all parts of the world embracing our views who never saw Sister White or heard of her, how could we make them a test of fellowship? By their own admissions, our opponents have shown that we do not do so. They claim that there are many among us who do not believe the visions. This is true; yet these are in our churches, and are not disfellowshipped. They have claimed in this "Extra" that Eldrs. Smith, Canright, and Gage did not believe the visions; yet all of them are members of our churches, two of them hold credentials as ministers, and one of them holds very important offices. Why will men talk so foolishly and unreasonably as to even show they are not consistent in their own statements? Hatred blinds the mind, and destroys their good sense. No; we do not make the visions a test, and never have. But we do claim the right to believe them, to talk about them freely, and to read them in private and in public, and shall no doubt continue to exercise that right, regardless of the spite of those who hate us.

3. Uriah Smith [Editor of RH]:
RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883

An Explanation.

BY ELD. U. SMITH.

As my name is quite freely used in the "Extra" to which this Supplement has reference, a word may be expected from me in regard to it. I am not at all solicitous to say anything on the ground that I have given any occasion for the use which is made of my name in the above-mentioned sheet; for I feel well assured that I have not.

I have always maintained the doctrine of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, theoretically. I have believed, and do still believe, that the visions of Sister White are a practical illustration of that doctrine. But I have not believed, as past volumes of the REVIEW will testify, that these, or any other manifestation of spiritual gifts, stood on a level with the Scriptures, or that they should be made a test of fellowship. I see as yet no occasion to change my views in any of these respects. When I do, I can announce it myself; and till then our opponents need not presume to speculate upon, nor interpret, my position for me.

4. Francis D. Nichol, Why I Believe in Mrs. E.G. White (RH, 1964), p. 106:

Mrs. White and Church Membership

There is another question that is sometimes asked: Should a person be taken into the church who does not accept Mrs. White as God's special messenger to the remnant church? We believe that the Adventist ministry in general would quickly answer, No. How could we answer otherwise? In view of the fact that such a belief in Mrs. White is one of our articles of faith, why would anyone wish to belong to our church if he did not accept Mrs. White? Would it be fair to him to bring him into the church unless, first, he well understood the doctrine of spiritual gifts, and second, was ready to accept that doctrine? Would we not be doing both him and the church a distinct disservice? Would we not be running the grave risk of later tension and discord?

Now, because we should delay baptizing a person until he understands and accepts Mrs. White, does it therefore follow that we should promptly disfellowship him in the event he might later become blurred in his faith and give up belief in her? We think not. When we take someone into the church we view him from then on as a part of the fellowship of believers, and hence we have a heightened responsibility for his soul. If one of the church family wavers on some point of belief we should seek to help him to come into full faith again, and we should continue our endeavors to help him as long as there is hope. But if discord and rebellion develop, as they sometimes do, they create a new situation that may finally require disfellowshipping to protect the peace and stability of the church.

Appendix B

A General Conference President Defines Appropriate Tests

Source: *The Ministry*, October, 1951, pp. 12, 13

What Are Our Tests of Fellowship?

W. H. BRANSON

General Conference President



TESTS of fellowship for the Seventh-day Adventist Church are established by the general church body and are not left to the discretion of the individual church congregation, pastor, or elder. This plan makes for unity and strength and avoids much confusion that otherwise would be found in the church.

In the *Church Manual*, 1951 edition, pages 224, 225, the reasons for which a member may be disfellowshipped are stated as follows:

"1. Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same.

"2. Open violation of the law of God, such as worship of idols, murder, adultery, fornication, stealing, profanity, Sabbathbreaking, willful and habitual falsehood, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the innocent party in a divorce for adultery.

"3. Fraud or willful misrepresentation in business.

"4. Disorderly conduct which brings reproach upon the cause.

"5. Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church.

"6. The use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages.

"7. The use of tobacco or addiction to narcotic drugs."

"A minister, an individual church, or a conference does not have the authority to set up or establish tests of fellowship for the denomination. This authority rests with the entire church body, and is exercised through the regularly constituted organization of the church in the General Conference. Anyone seeking to apply tests other than those herein set forth does not, therefore, properly represent the church."—*Ibid.*, pp. 226, 227.

Desiring to safeguard the purity and unity of the church, the leaders have set additional standards before those requesting baptism and church membership. These apply to principles of Christian living and Bible doctrines, which the members should believe and obey, although some of them do not constitute standards for which one

found in violation would be disfellowshipped.

Many years ago the General Conference adopted a model series of questions for those seeking membership in the church, to be used as a guide to our ministers and elders who preside on such occasions. These are printed by the Review and Herald Publishing Association on the reverse side of a baptismal certificate, copy of which should be furnished to each person received into the church.

This list of questions covers all essential points of doctrine and reads as follows:

"1. Do you believe in God the Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit?

"2. Do you accept the death of Jesus Christ, on Calvary, as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of men, and believe that through faith in His shed blood men are saved from sin and its penalty?

"3. Renouncing the world and its sinful ways, have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and do you believe that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven your sins, and given you a new heart?

"4. Do you accept by faith the righteousness of Christ, recognizing Him as your Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary, and do you claim His promise to strengthen you by His indwelling Spirit, so that you may receive power to do His will?

"5. Do you believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, and that it constitutes the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian?

"6. Do you accept the Ten Commandments as still binding upon Christians, and is it your purpose, by the power of the indwelling Christ, to keep this law, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord?

"7. Knowing and understanding the fundamental Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is it your purpose, by God's grace, to order your life in harmony with these principles?

"8. Is the soon coming of Jesus 'a blessed hope' in your heart, and is it your settled determination to prepare to meet Him in peace, as well as to help others to get ready for His coming?

"9. Do you believe in church organization, and is it your purpose to support the church by your personal effort, means, and influence?

"10. Do you accept the New Testament teaching of baptism by immersion, and do you desire to be so baptized as a public expression of your faith in

the forgiveness of your sins and of acceptance with Christ?

"11. Do you believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church constitutes the remnant church, and do you desire to be accepted into its membership?"

There are of course many things taught by the church that are not covered by the above list of questions. These things are important, but are not *required* of those coming into the church. The observance of these additional points of teaching must be left to the individual conscience and not become a matter of *requirement*.

For instance, the church teaches the value of a strict vegetarian diet, the harmful effect of the use of tea, coffee, cola drinks, and so forth, but adherence to this teaching has never been made a test for admission into the church.

In order to maintain the unity of the church, each minister and leader should always carefully distinguish between the *teachings* and the *requirements* of the church. No minister or church elder has the right to set up standards of his own that have not been made standards by the general church body. To do so could only result in confusion. There would be as many sets of standards as there were leaders.

It is reported that one minister requires women seeking membership to entirely discard the use of cosmetics.

We have heard a few ministers say, "I hold the standard high." And that should be true of all of us. But in requiring these new converts to pledge themselves to uphold the standards set by the church, we should be exceedingly careful not to add a lot of standards of our own making, that we have no right, as representatives of the church, to enforce upon the people.

Some of these matters that are not tests for membership should be taught but not enforced upon the people. After proper instruction is given, then the matter of compliance must be left to the individual conscience.

Appendix C

A General Conference Vice President Differentiates Between the Doctrines, Teachings, and Policies of the Church

Source: *Adventist Review*, November 28, 1991

Doctrines, Teachings, and Policies



By Calvin B. Rock

What are the differences among doctrines, teachings, and policies? The brethren seem to use these terms interchangeably, and it is very confusing. Sometimes it seems on purpose. Can you help me understand?

Doctrines are authoritative tenets, that is, theological positions or fundamental beliefs discussed and voted by the world church in formal session and changed only by the same process. Our two best-known doctrines appear in our name—Sabbathkeeping and the second coming of Christ. The 27 fundamental beliefs present the full array of our doctrinal platform. Standards provide rules that guide us in obeying or honoring doctrines.

Teachings are positions that have not been formally voted, but that have high value because they are generally believed and shared. Our postures with respect to vegetarianism and Christian education furnish examples. So does our instruction with regard to marriage within the faith and nonmembership in secret organizations. Teachings are not tests of fellowship, as are some doctrines.

Not Theological Statements

Policies, unlike doctrines and teachings, are not theological statements. They may be scripturally inspired or modeled, but consist of rules of organization and structural operation. Our church has three major types of policies:

1. General Conference policies that have worldwide application and, like doctrines, are voted by delegates of the general church in formal session.

2. Division policies that consist of a repetition and/or modification of GC policies adjusted to meet the needs of the region involved.

3. Institutional policies that guide the operation of schools, hospitals, publishing houses, etc.

You did not mention a fourth category—guidelines. As standards tell us how to live out doctrines, guidelines tell us how to implement policies. While these recommendations have less force than policies, they are crucial to effective administration. Examples of guidelines appear in our procedures for processing interdivision workers (missionaries) and recommendations outlining methods of Ingathering. Particularly helpful guidelines often over time become elevated to the level of policy.

As standards tell us

how to live out doctrines,

guidelines tell us how

to implement policies.

The unity that our church sustains in such a highly diversified world society evidences the quality and value of these categories. We must continue to develop and guard them carefully. Please forgive us for slurring the distinctions.

Appendix D

Ellen G. White on the Issue of Pork as a "Test Question"

Source: Manuscript 15, 1889 (Manuscript Release #1029), as published in *Ministry*, February, 1987, p. 2

Letters

Pork and Ellen G. White

When we published Roger Coon's article "Ellen G. White and Vegetarianism" (April 1986), a reader asked to see the context of the statement by Ellen White that the eating of pork "is not a test question" (August 1986). The White Estate has now released the manuscript. We publish it below so you can judge the context for yourself.
—Editors

Manuscript Release No. 1209: "Counsels to Our Colporteurs Regarding Carefulness in Diet" (c. 1889).

If you are a Bible doer as well as a Bible reader, you must understand from the Scriptures that swine's flesh was prohibited by Jesus Christ enshrouded in the billowy cloud. This is not a test question. Directions have been given to families that such articles as butter and the eating largely of flesh meats is not the best for physical and mental health. Fruits and grains and vegetables would, if cooked properly and eaten in moderate quantities, be proper articles of diet.

No eating should be allowed between our meals. I have eaten two meals each day for the last 25 years. I do not use butter myself, but some of my workers who sit at my table eat butter. They cannot take care of milk (it sours on the stomach), while they can take care of a small quantity of butter. We cannot regulate the diet question by making any

rule. Some can eat beans and dried peas, but to me this diet is painful. It is like poison. Some have appetites and taste for certain things, and assimilate them well. Others have no appetite for these articles. So one rule cannot be made for everyone.

You ask in regard to canvassers who travel and have to eat bread with swine's flesh in it. I see here a serious difficulty, but there is a remedy. Learn to make good, hygienic rolls and keep them with you. You can generally obtain hot milk, or at least a cup of hot water with milk, and this, with fruit or without fruit, will nourish the system. Many plans may be devised with some little tact and labor, that many difficulties in the line of eating unwholesome food may be overcome. I advise every Sabbathkeeping canvasser to avoid meat eating, not because it is regarded as sin to eat meat, but because it is not healthful. The animal creation is groaning.—Manuscript 15, 1889. Ellen G. White Estate, Washington, D.C., Aug. 7, 1986 (entire manuscript).