

alone are able to make us 11 wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

* The Bible texts in this chapter credited to Fenton are from The Holy Bible in Modern English by Ferrar Fenton (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., Ltd., 1925). The Bible texts in this chapter credited to Moffatt are from The Bible: A New Translation by James Moffatt. Copyright 1922, 1935. By Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

11. Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy

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IN HIS RECENT and widely discussed book *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, Walter R. Martin comments on Ellen G. White, and early introduces D. M. Canright, in whose writings are found “the inspiration for 90 per cent of the destructive personal criticisms leveled against Mrs. White” (p. 97) and whose two volumes *The Life of Mrs. E. G. White and Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* “laid the foundation for all future destructive criticism of Seventh-day Adventism” (p. 98).

Then follows a reference to the “carefully documented volume of almost 700 pages,” *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* by Francis D. Nichol. This at once pits the work of Canright against that of Nichol, and produces a curious statement by Walter Martin:

Nichol has dug deep into early Adventist history—even beyond Canright’s day, but after reading both Nichol and Canright, the writer concludes that there is much to be said on both sides. But Canright, we believe, has the edge because he can say, “I was there,” or “Mrs. White said . . .” and contradictory contemporary statements are not to be found where many of Canright’s charges are concerned—Page 99.

We do not think that this statement was intended to suggest that a contemporary protagonist is necessarily a more reliable witness than the historian or the careful research student, to whom time so often gives a breadth of vision and a clear perspective denied to those who viewed things narrowly on the spot. Nevertheless, the implications of contemporary reliability are there, and should be answered.

The records of the Massachusetts Historical Society contain valuable information regarding the famous Salem witchcraft trials around 1690. In 1692 nineteen persons were executed for practicing witchcraft. Judge Samuel Sewell, who passed the terrible sentence, was wrong in his judgments in this shocking story—wrong even by the standards of his time. Sewell lived to acknowledge both his error and guilt. Others involved in the infamous affair never admitted their grave mistakes. Yet they were all able to say in the fierce debates of the ensuing years, “I was there!”

To get this grim episode in true focus we consider the facts that history presents to the careful student, and we place the hot zeal of contemporary witch-hunters on that background. Quite often we have to discount the testimony of on-the-spot zealots.

Canright and Plagiarism

Walter Martin admits that not “all of Canright’s writing is to be trusted, for many of his criticisms of Mrs. White’s activities have been neatly undercut by contemporary evidence unearthed by F. D. Nichol and others” (p. 100), and he admits that whereas Canright made much ado about alleged plagiarism by Mrs. White, he was himself flagrantly guilty of the same thing: “Canright himself plagiarized not only some of the content but even the title of a book written in 1863 by Moses Hull, also an Adventist and a predecessor of Canright in the ministry- (p. 103).

The conclusion reached by our author is that though both D. M. Canright and Mrs. White borrowed literary material, it was not for pecuniary profit, and the position of neither was affected by it. On this subject three well-reasoned chapters will be found in F. D. Nichol’s *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, beginning on page 403. We think they are an adequate answer to the plagiarism and kindred charges, and shall not attempt more here.

Early Difficulties

Years ago when we read D. M. Canright's two books we concluded that (1) he was a man of overweening ambition and was involved in personality clashes with other strong minded people; (2) he was admittedly faced with doctrinal differences among the early Adventists over the question of the nature of Christ, etcetera; (3) he finally became embittered and allotted himself to embark on a campaign of name calling and vilification of his erstwhile colleagues.

Relationships and doctrinal problems are common to all religious movements. We will take but one striking instance. It is coincidental that in the year in which Canright defected (1887) from the Adventists to the Baptists, Charles Haddon Spurgeon launched his famous "down-grade controversy." He left the Baptist Union of Great Britain, charging that the higher criticism was undermining Baptist faith in the Bible, the deity of Christ, et cetera, and he stated they were "going down-hill at breakneck speed." Now "the prince of preachers" -a Calvinistic Baptist, as also is Walter Martin-thereby created a very bitter and enduring controversy, and was called upon by the Baptist Union to name modernists among his colleagues in order to prove his charges. Spurgeon never returned to the Baptist Union. He kept up his campaign, but, being the great man that he was, he resolutely refused to call names, though he unquestionably could have done so. Canright, on the contrary, used names and recorded opinions that men used in private conversation, and that were never intended for publication or repetition. We do not know of any of his Adventist associates who escaped the bitter charges of ignorance, bigotry, stubbornness, et cetera, brought against them by D. M. Canright.

We think that in fairness Martin's "I was there!" philosophy should be applied to the personal testimonial of D. W. Reavis, an intimate friend of D. M. Canright, recorded by F. D. Nichol (op. cit., pp. 540-543, 663-665), which should be read by all our readers in evaluating Canright's character. We also think that if it is permissible for Walter Martin (pp. 175, 180, 181) to quote and claim validity for James White's earlier views to refute his later views on the investigative judgment, it must likewise be permissible for us to quote Canright's words during his Adventist days when we wish to evaluate either his views or his personality. (See Nichol, op. cit., p. 663) Such things do not establish finality of judgment, but they are balancing factors in a controversy which, we agree with Walter Martin, may never be settled.

Fortunately, the Arian views held by some of our pioneers on the nature of Christ have, with the passage of time, practically disappeared from our ranks. It is, of course, in this area that many untrue criticisms of Seventh-day Adventists have persisted, and Walter Martin on pages 86 to 89 of his book has an eminently fair statement which exonerates Adventism in his mind from teaching the sinful nature of Christ and the incomplete atonement on the cross. So much for Canright and his downgrading of early Adventist leaders.

Ellen G. White and the Tithe

On page 109 of Walter Martin's book the view is accepted that Mrs. White paid a tithe but she did not always follow her own counsel as to its proper use: "Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe to use it according to their own judgment." The charge that there was a discrepancy between Ellen G. White's teachings and her practice in tithe paying has been used by certain dissident leaders to persuade people to pay the tithe to them, as is always the case sooner or later with offshoot movements.

The Bible system of tithe paying was from the early years acknowledged by the Sabbath keeping Adventists, and for about twenty years they included it in what they called "systematic benevolence." They estimated their property gain at about 10 per cent a year, and this was counted as increase, of which one tenth was the tithe. It was of this that Mrs. White wrote: "The plan of systematic benevolence is pleasing to God." Testimonies, Volume 1, p. 190.

In 1879 it was decided that the better and more Biblical plan would be to pay one dollar out of every ten earned, as "a tithe of all our income."

There were always certain fixed principles in the Adventist conception of tithe paying: (1) The tithe was reserved for support of the ministry. "It [tithe] is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel." - Counsels on Stewardship, p. 81. (2) The tithe was to be brought to "the storehouse" for disbursement. "He [God] claims the tithe as His own, and it should ever be regarded as a sacred reserve, to be placed in His treasury for the benefit of His cause." - Ellen G. White in The Review and Herald, Dec. 8, 1896. (See also Gospel Workers, page 370) (3) The tithe payer does not, as in the case of freewill offerings, decide where and how his tithe should be disbursed. "They [members] are not to use it for themselves in an

emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work." - Testimonies, Volume 9, p. 247. (4) God's plan is the same in every age. "A tithe of all our increase is the Lord's. He has reserved it to Himself to be employed for religious purposes. It is holy. Nothing less than this has He accepted in any dispensation." - Ellen G. White in *The Review and Herald*, May 16, 1882.

Ellen G. White, not unaware of her own early years of struggle, felt commissioned of God to take special notice of the needs of neglected workers, for whom there was no sustentation fund until 1911. She was "charged not to neglect or pass by those who were being wronged." See full statement in *Selected Messages*, volume 1, pages 33, 34. There were often cases of necessitous workers, particularly in the neglected Southern States among the Negro people in the years 1900-1906. Before the Southern Union Conference was organized, several workers went at their own expense to begin work among the Negro people, their work being recognized by the later-formed Southern Missionary Society, and listed in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1904-1908. Mission schools and evangelistic work were undertaken with a small and temporary appropriation from a conference organization, but it was inadequate for so great a need.

In 1904 a Southern Missionary Society representative, while visiting Colorado, received \$400 from one church for the evangelistic work of the society among the destitute of the Southland.

Elder W. C. White, one of Mrs. E. G. White's sons, explaining the situation years later, said:

When the agent of the Southern Missionary Society asked the members of this Colorado church for a donation, they manifested a willingness to give, and some of them said that they were paying a large tithe, and some were not wholly pleased with the way in which it was used. Compared with the population of the state the conference was strong and it had a good income. Therefore, some said, "Let us send some of our tithe to be used in the good work for the neglected colored people in the Southern States."

Then the officers of the church and the agent of the Society did in an irregular way what has since become very popular as a wise and unselfish policy when done in an orderly and regular way. They transferred a portion of the tithe of a well-to-do conference to a very destitute and needy mission field.

The officers of the Southern Missionary Society did not use this money to pay their own wages. They did not use it in any way for their own personal benefit. Neither did they pay it to the support of men whom the conferences in the South thought to be unfitted or unworthy. Neither was it paid to men who were carrying on an unauthorized work of their own devising.

The money was placed in the treasury of the Southern Missionary Society and was paid out in a regular and economical way to approved laborers who were engaged in regular denominational work. - W. C. White Statement, 1934. White Publications Document File No. 384.

When this action became known to the Colorado Conference president, he and his officers took the attitude that the receiving agent and the church concerned had acted irregularly, that the money should be returned, and they evidently talked freely and in no uncertain terms.

But the money had been used to help underpaid preachers, the society could not repay it, and the matter came to the attention of Mrs. White, who wrote the following letter to the Colorado Conference president, only a portion of which is quoted on page 109 of Walter Martin's book:

Mountain View, California
January 22, 1905

Elder

My brother, I wish to say to you, Be careful how you move. You are not moving wisely. The least you have to speak about the tithe that has been appropriated to the most needy and the most discouraging field in the world, the more sensible you will be.

It has been presented to me for years that my tithe was to be appropriated by myself to aid the white and colored ministers who were neglected and did not receive sufficient, properly to support their families. When my attention was called to aged ministers, white or black, it was my special duty to investigate into their necessities and supply their needs. This was to be my special work, and I have done this in a number of cases. No man should give notoriety to the fact that in special cases the tithe is used in that way.

In regard to the colored work in the South, that field has been and is still being robbed of the means that should come to the workers in that field. If there have been cases where our sisters have appropriated their tithe to the support of the ministers working for the colored people in the South, let every man, if he is wise, hold his peace.

I have myself appropriated my tithe to the most needy cases brought to my notice. I have been instructed to do this; and as the money is not withheld from the Lord's treasury, it is not a matter that should be commented upon; for it will necessitate my making known these matters, which I do not desire to do, because it is not best.

Some cases have been kept before me for years, and I have supplied their needs from the tithe, as God has instructed me to do. And if any person shall say to me, Sister White, will you appropriate my tithe where you know it is most needed, I shall say, Yes, I will; and I have done so. I commend those sisters who have placed their tithe where it is most needed to help to do a work that is being left undone; and if this matter is given publicity, it will create a knowledge which would better be left as it is. I do not care to give publicity to this work which the Lord has appointed me to do, and others to do.

I send this matter to you so that you shall not make a mistake. Circumstances alter cases. I would not advise that anyone should make a practice of gathering up tithe money. But for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe who have placed their tithe in my hands, and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of the most needy ministers they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated.

I write this to you so that you shall keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter, lest many more shall follow their example—Ellen G. White letter 267, 1905. [1]
Some Conclusions

1. The date of this letter is given erroneously as 1906 in Martin's book, page 109.

It is evident that (1) In 1905 the workers in the South were in a deplorable situation; (2) Mrs. White never used the tithe, either her own or that handed to her, for any but duly accredited Seventh-day Adventist ministers; (3) Mrs. White had strong convictions regarding the work in the South, for she said, "That field has been and is still being robbed of the means that should come to the workers in that field"; (4) this was an extraordinary experience under circumstances that do not exist today, and therefore it does not warrant any irregular use of tithe money now; (5) Mrs. White did not make a habit of accepting for disbursement the tithe of private persons.

We should add that Mrs. White's letter to the conference president, quoted in the preceding paragraph, was marked on certain copies "not to be published," obviously because it was material subject to misuse. However, because of someone's lack of judgment (Walter Martin attributes it to "conflict behind the scenes," p. 111) this letter (or excerpts from it) was quite widely used, sometimes in recent years by dissident persons seeking support for movements of their own. Some have even used statements as to how she used her income and offerings to prove that tithe may be used in any desired manner.

Walter Martin (pp. 109, 110) contends that because Mrs. White in 1896 urged that all tithe money "be placed in His treasury," and then ten years later used some of her tithe for unprecedented needs, there is "contradiction," and he explains this in part by quoting from a letter written in 1881 by James White to D. M. Canright, in which "influence" is said to be used by two other workers on Mrs. White. There is no mention of tithe in this 1881 letter and most of Mrs. White's help to necessitous workers was given between 1900 and 1906 in behalf of work in the Southern States.

An expanded statement concerning Mrs. White and the tithe has been prepared by Arthur L. White, secretary, White Publications, at the request of our research committee, and a limited number of copies is available to our readers on request.

We can only add that Mrs. White's unique position among us, coupled with her solicitude for workers under unusually hard conditions, led her to do what she did, and time and the whole Adventist Church have found no insurmountable problem here. We now have a fiscal system that alleviates the problem of poor conferences and needy ministers faced by Mrs. White in earlier days. Today our work has regularized many details that inevitably appeared in a growing work, and without boastfulness we thank God for its wide diffusion in harmony with the wise counsels of Mrs. White. The man who turned so bitterly against her, D. M. Canright, made one small venture into prophecy: "Adventism is founded on time, and time will kill it." - Seventh-day Adventism Renounced, p. 34. The seventy-odd years since that prediction appeared have seen our work expand in every part of the world. We humbly believe that time has revealed Canright's devious error, and that the Advent Movement will lead faithful souls into the everlasting kingdom at the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom all our hopes for time and eternity are centered.