

12. Alleged Outside Influence on Ellen G. Mite

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ON PAGE 105 of his book *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* Walter Martin says: “The second and extremely serious charge against Mrs. White ... relates to her inspiration. The claim is that at times she was under influences other than the Spirit of God, which influences strongly affected some of her ‘Testimonies.’ ”

The “influences,” he said, were not demonic, but the human influence of certain strong-minded “older persons surrounding her.” He then takes the specific instance of the founding of the Battle Creek Health Reform Institute and seeks to show “her fallibility and the futility of Adventism attempting to defend everything she wrote as divinely inspired, as some have been prone to do” (page 108).

We may dismiss any implied claim of infallibility, partly because Martin himself admits that only “some” Adventists have made it, but mainly because this denomination has not claimed, and does not now claim, infallibility for Mrs. White. Walter Martin admits the falsity of the charge of infallibility (pp. 112, 113). For that matter, it would be easy to prove that the inspired prophets of the Bible were not infallible (see 2 Samuel 7:3-5; Galatians 2:11). However, supposed disproof of inspiration is now circulated, and we must examine it. Our readers would do well to read Nichol, “A Middle Position on Inspiration, Ellen G. White and Her Critics, pp. 459-467.

The events involved in this charge happened between 1865 and 1867. When we draw conclusions and make serious personal charges based on events that are almost a hundred years old we need to be sure that we understand as clearly as possible the background of events in which the persons involved lived their lives.

The Civil War Years

The tragic Civil War brought problems for the Adventists, especially in the winter of 1864-65. Numerous calls for men for the Army finally brought President Lincoln’s summons for another 300,000, with the stipulation that any deficiency in volunteers was to be made good by a draft in 1865.

Seventh-day Adventists had found Army life very difficult to harmonize with their religious convictions (see *Testimonies*, Volume 1, p. 361). And Elder James White was worn out with helping men in trouble and with raising money for compulsory bonus funds with which men were exempted from Army service, in addition to his other heavy duties. Heavy traveling under the arduous conditions of those times brought him to complete exhaustion, and on the morning of August 16, 1865, he suffered a paralytic stroke, and “attending physicians declared that unless a miracle were wrought in his behalf, he would never regain either his physical or mental vigor.”-D. E. ROBINSON, *The Story of Our Health Message*, p. 134.

Two other stalwart leaders of the small Adventist community fell ill at this time-i. N. Loughborough and Uriah Smith. All three, with Mrs. White, moved as soon as they could to a private institution, “Our Home” in Dansville, New York, and placed themselves under the skillful care of a certain Dr. Jackson. This robbed the Adventists of their financial leader in the person of James White, their editor, Uriah Smith, and a vigorous promoter in J. N. Loughborough.

The Health Institute

On December 25, 1865, Mrs. White had a vision at Rochester, from which we take this apposite quotation:

“I was shown that we should provide a home for the afflicted, and those who wish to learn how to take care of their bodies that they may prevent sickness.” - *Testimonies*, Volume 1, p. 489.

The whole vision is recorded in *Testimonies*, volume 1, pages 485-495. In general, it visualized the establishment of a health “institution of their own,” and the development of medical health work by Seventh-day Adventists as a regular part of their work. There can be no doubt that as a result of following

this and subsequent counsel on the subject, the medical and health work of this denomination has grown till today it operates 221 hospitals and clinics, employs 11,557 doctors, nurses, and other workers, not to mention scores of private institutions throughout the world.

No one could have foreseen, in that day of small things, to what large enterprises and endeavors the instruction given in the vision of December 25, 1865, would lead. *The Story of Our Health Message*, p. 142.

The Situation in 1865-66

In addition to the health breakdowns already referred to among the pitifully small ministerial working force, John Bostwick of Minnesota died, and D. T. Bourdeau, A. S. Hutchins, J. B. Frisbie, and John Byington were all incapacitated by ill health during the year ending in the spring of 1866.

The vision of 1865 was presented in substance to the third General Conference session in 1866 (four months after its reception), but it was not committed to writing till 1867. In September, 1866, five acres of land, with a good house on it, was purchased in Battle Creek, Michigan. A few weeks later two adjoining acres and another cottage were purchased, and some reconstructions completed. Great zeal was engendered and the institution was opened. Initially, everything looked prosperous, but soon it became evident to some that the financial situation of the institution was not sound.

Elder James White, indicated above as the business brain among the leaders, was sorely missed. In these circumstances the men on the spot greatly wished that Mrs. White's as-yet unpublished vision of 1865 might be used to encourage liberality toward the little institution.

Some of the leaders at Battle Creek urged Mrs. White to place in writing the revelation given to her on December 25, 1865, regarding a health reform institute. It was naturally felt that the publication of this vision without delay would greatly aid in raising money needed for the Institute. She responded by writing out part of that revelation, and this was included as a chapter for Testimony No. 11, bearing the title "The Health Reform." This was published in January, 1867 - F. D. NICHOL, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, p. 497.

It appears from subsequent events that Mrs. White issued this part of Testimony No. 11 reluctantly.

Mrs. White's testimony gave great impetus to the work, and soon E. S. Walker, the secretary, and some associates were promoting a new "large building," and the impression was created that Mrs. White endorsed ambitious enlargements. Actually in August, 1867, less than a year after the opening of the institution, funds were exhausted. James White, though out of Battle Creek during most of 1867, endorsed Mrs. White's testimony but saw no justification in it for inexperienced leadership to launch into enthusiastic but over ambitious expansion at that time when finances were inadequate.

Then Mrs. White issued Testimony No. 12 in September, 1867, in the course of which she said:

"I was shown ... that we should have such an institution, small at its commencement, and cautiously increased, as good physicians and helpers could be procured.... And as I have seen the large calculations hastily urged by those who have taken a leading part in the work, I have felt alarmed, and in many private conversations and in letters I have warned these brethren to move cautiously." - *Testimonies*, Volume 1, p. 558.

Mrs. White then spells out the reasons for caution-failure to obtain competent physicians and the lack of income and patients to fill a large institution, with resultant "general discouragement." There had been many failures of health institutions in the United States during the previous twenty five years.

In the above circumstances it is not surprising to learn that drastic action was undertaken, largely at Elder White's insistence. Building came to a halt, and certain structural work was torn down. The value of this work has been variously estimated to have been as low as \$4,000, and by certain critics as high as \$11,000. (See F. D. Nichol's *Mrs. White and Her Critics*, p. 498.)

Mrs. White's Confession

In reference to the reluctance of Mrs. White to write out part of Testimony No. 11, we here quote her own words:

This was a great trial to me, as I knew I could not write out all I had seen, for I was then speaking to the people six or eight times a week, visiting from house to house, and writing hundreds of pages of

personal testimonies and private letters. This amount of labor, with unnecessary burdens and trials thrown upon me, unfitted me for labor of any kind. My health was poor, and my mental sufferings were beyond description. Under these circumstances I yielded my judgment to that of others, and wrote what appeared in No. 11 in regard to the Health Institute, being unable then to give all I had seen. In this I did wrong-Testimonies, Volume 1, p. 563. (Italics supplied.)

In the light of later events, she admitted:

What appeared in Testimony No. 11 concerning the Health Institute, should not have been given until I was able to write out all I had seen in regard to it-Ibid.

This is a frank confession of human fallibility in actions which she did not claim were taken under direct orders from God. She candidly said that despite criticism of which she was aware on this subject-

“I have no desire to withdraw one sentence that I have written or spoken.” - Ibid., p. 559.

What Mrs. White meant when she said “all I had seen” was, as F. D. Nichol has clearly shown in *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, the whole revelation of the plan to establish the health institution. What she meant by “I did wrong” appears surely to be her human action in writing out a part only of Testimony No. 11 instead of releasing the whole. Her basic presentation was not wrong, and she nowhere repudiates her original position.

What appeared in Testimony No. 11 concerning the Health Institute, should not have been given until I was able to write out all I had seen in regard to it. (Italics supplied.)

As to whether the dominating influence in this health institute incident was the strong will of Elder James White, as Martin suggests, or the inspiration which Mrs. White claimed to have received from God, we have an Ellen G. White letter written in 1903 from which we quote these words:

“I have been thinking of how, after we began sanitarium work in Battle Creek, sanitarium buildings all ready for occupation were shown to me in vision. The Lord instructed me as to the way in which the work in these buildings should be conducted in order for it to exert a saving influence on the patients.”

“All this seemed very real to me, but when I awoke I found that the work was yet to be done, that there were no buildings erected.”

“Another time I was shown a large building going up on the site on which the Battle Creek Sanitarium was afterward erected. The brethren were in great perplexity as to who should take charge of the work. I wept sorely. One of authority stood up among us, and said, “Not yet. You are not ready to invest means in that building, or to plan for its future management.”

“At the time the foundation of the Sanitarium had been laid. But we needed to learn the lesson of waiting.” - *Messenger to the Remnant*, pp. 10, 11.

This is Mrs. White's record made years afterward as to the source of her counsels on this question. Yet our friend Martin would ask us to reject her words, written toward the close of her days, and to believe that James White and “the Battle Creek clique” made “Mrs. White contradict herself in successive Testimonies” (page 110).

Inspiration and Fallibility

When the inspired apostle Paul preached “the gospel of the non circumcision” and the inspired apostle Peter preached “the gospel of the circumcision,” one of them was right and one was wrong. Peter rightly associated with the heathen but wrongly withdrew when the Jerusalem leaders arrived (see Acts 10:28). When they eventually met in Antioch, Paul said: “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” (Galatians 2:11). The RSV says, “He stood condemned,” and Phillips, “He was then plainly in the wrong.” J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*. Copyright 1958, by The Macmillan Company. Used by permission.

If we could with reverence put words into Peter's mouth, would they not be a candid confession in these words: “I did wrong”? This is not to compare Mrs. White with an apostle, but it is a plain acknowledgment that a God-chosen instrument may be inspired in writing, teaching, preaching, exhorting, but humanly fallible in the exercise of private judgment. Prophets, apostles, saints, messengers, need redemptive grace in their daily lives in exactly the same way as does every humble servant of God.

In 2 Corinthians 12:13 Paul asks: “What is it wherein you were inferior to other churches?” The context shows that if the Corinthians were made to feel subordinate to the other churches, it was because

they had not fulfilled the duty of entertaining the apostle, as did the other churches. Then, with delicate touch he adds: "Forgive me this wrong." Surely this was a strong statement for so great a leader. This is another illustration of the fact that a man can be God's inspired messenger to the church and yet be touched with human frailty and fallibility in certain details of daily conduct.

The same truth is seen in the Old Testament. For instance, in 2 Samuel 7:2, 3, it is apparent that David expressed to the prophet Nathan his intention to build a house of worship, whereupon "Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with thee." That night, however, "the word of the Lord came unto Nathan" with a command to go to David with a message which plainly contradicted the prophet's previous word. Not David, but his son should build God's house (verses 5-13). Nathan's mistake did not invalidate his prophetic office.

The truth is seen again that God's prophets, holy men, apostles, teachers, and special messengers all through the ages have not possessed divine prescience, except in the special area of supernatural revelation. Elsewhere they were fallible human subjects of redeeming grace. We must not make inspiration what has been called an "overloaded doctrine" which requires a mechanical infallibility in both word and life, or we shall find ourselves in a worse position than when Athenagoras, the second-century apologist, claimed that the inspired writers of Holy Writ were used by the Holy Spirit "as a flute player breathes into a flute." - *A Plea for the Christians*, chap. ix.

We agree with Walter Martin that "no one can dispute the fact that her writings conform to the basic principles of the historic Gospel." (page 113), and that "Mrs. White was truly a regenerate Christian woman who loved the Lord Jesus Christ and dedicated herself unstintingly to the task of bearing witness for Him as she felt led" (page 112). Furthermore "We believe that her writings will offer their own testimony to those who are willing to read and to consider the fruitage produced by them over a hundred years of time" (Ellen G. White and Her Critics, p. 85). That she was inspired to exalt God's Word before her hearers and readers, and to guide earnest souls into the way everlasting.

13. The Hour of God's judgment Is Come

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I. Importance of the Heavenly Sanctuary

WHEN SCRIPTURE PORTRAYS either in fact or in symbol the progress of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, between the genuine and the counterfeit, the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's ministration therein occupy a central place. As the controversy draws to its climax, the sanctuary and its ministration hold the spotlight. In Satan's endeavor to overthrow God, the point of attack is upon God's sanctuary and His throne.

As one studies the controversy between good and evil forces in the eighth chapter of Daniel, two things relative to the sanctuary and its ministration are indicated.

First, up until the close of the 2300-year prophecy, 1844, men's understanding of Christ's priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary had been seriously impaired in its effectiveness on the earth at the hands of Satan's counterfeit priestly system. Describing the nefarious work of the little horn against the sanctuary of God, the Scripture declares, "by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down" (verse 11).

Second, the Scripture further declares that this will not always be so. So compelling is the work of this counterfeit system that the all-important question is asked, "How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?" (verse 13). There will come a change at the close of the 2300-year period, in 1844, declares the Scripture. "Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed- (margin, "justified"). "Then shall the sanctuary be restored to its rightful state" (RSV).

At that time, then, things will come to pass that will restore the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary to its rightful place as God brings the great controversy to a victorious climax.

Since Scripture is so specific and final in its declaration, it is important that we grasp the significance of the work of the heavenly sanctuary in the closing work of God. Daniel pictures the work of