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**ELLEN WHITE
ON THE SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION:
WHY THEY MUST GO TOGETHER**

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Ellen White on the Search for Knowledge and the Experience of Salvation: Why They Must Go Together

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Adventist educators are familiar with Ellen White's thoughts on the purpose of true education published in the first chapter of her book *Education*.

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator--individuality, power to think and to do. . . . It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation.¹

Her invitation to the youth to become deep thinkers and to develop their reasoning power is admirable. In an age when education was confined to well-defined and set curricula and the study of the classics of human thought, Ellen White invited Adventist educators to prepare young people to think for themselves and to dig deeper into God's two books: nature and Scripture.

Ellen White's thought is based on her understanding that in us is found the image of God and that this image entails "individuality, power to think and to do". While imparting knowledge is a crucial part of a good education, training young minds to think is a more crucial objective. Her wish was to see schools "send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions."² Education leads to acquiring of new knowledge but also imparts ethical and moral values.

This type of education, she continued, "provides more than mental discipline; it provides more than physical training. It strengthens the character, so that truth and uprightness are not sacrificed to selfish desire or worldly ambition. It fortifies the mind against evil. Instead of some master passion becoming a power to destroy, every motive and desire are brought into conformity to the great principles of right. As the perfection of His character is dwelt upon, the mind is renewed, and the soul is re-created in the image of God."³ True education is an important aspect of the plan of redemption. Education and redemption go hand in hand.

¹ *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*

In learning to think for themselves, guided by their study of nature and the word of God, young men and women will have the courage of their convictions and will build a godlike character. Character development and the re-creation of the image of God are foremost in her understanding of Christian education. "What education can be higher than this? What can equal it in value?" Ellen White asked. Quoting from Job 28:15-18, she answered, "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies."⁴

With that purpose in mind and in that context, throughout her ministry Ellen White invited young people to become "intelligent Christians" and to use their "reasoning powers" for service to God's glory and the good of humanity. Acquiring new knowledge was never perceived as an end in itself but always as part of a bigger purpose: to lead people to salvation, either one's own or that of others.

He whose mind is enlightened by the opening of God's word to his understanding will realize his responsibility to God and to the world, and he will feel that his talents must be developed in a way that will produce the very best results; for he is to "show forth the praises" of Him who has called him "out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9. While growing in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will realize his own imperfections, he will feel his real ignorance, and he will seek constantly to preserve and put to the stretch his powers of mind, that he may become an intelligent Christian. Students who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ will grasp knowledge with all their faculties. Without this experience, education is disrobed of its true brightness and glory.⁵

In a message of appeal to young people in 1875, she wrote

The youth have faculties that, with proper cultivation, would qualify them for almost any position of trust. If they had made it their object in obtaining an education to so exercise and develop the powers that God has given them that they might be useful and prove a blessing to others, their minds would not be dwarfed to an inferior standard. They would show depth of thought and firmness of principle, and would command influence and respect. They might have an elevating influence upon others, which would lead souls to see and acknowledge the power of an intelligent Christian life.⁶

Ellen White's invitation to exercise our own individual power to think and reason is perhaps best illustrated in her own interaction with church leaders in moments of difficulty or crisis. Her response to theological disputes in our early Adventist history is very informative to me about what she meant and did not mean when it comes to individual thinking and the search for new knowledge.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913), p. 37.

⁶ *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), vol. 3, p. 367.

Debate over the “Law in Galatians”

In the 1880s Adventists were debating quite aggressively the meaning of the law in Galatians 3:19-25.⁷ The Adventist teaching on the law in Galatians became a controversial issue when the editors of the *Signs of the Times* and *American Sentinel*, Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner, began to teach and publish that the law Paul referred to in his epistle was the Ten Commandments rather than the Old Testament ceremonial law as then currently held by the majority of Adventist leaders, pastors and evangelists.

Before 1854, many Adventists had held that the law in Galatians was the Ten Commandments. This view was advocated by Joseph H. Waggoner in his book *The Law of God: An Examination of the Testimony of Both Testaments*.⁸ Another early Adventist pioneer by the name of Stephen Pierce, however, publicly challenged Waggoner and argued that the law in Galatians was the ceremonial law. Pierce won the argument and for the next three decades Adventists taught that the law in Galatians referred only to the ceremonial law. (This approach had also the advantage of strengthening the Adventist teaching that the commandment on the Sabbath in the Decalogue was never done away with since it is not part of the ceremonial law.)

In the 1880’s, when E. J. Waggoner began to teach views similar to what his father, J. H. Waggoner, had taught 30 years earlier, George I. Butler, president of the General Conference, and Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, became worked up by this “new” interpretation. At issue were two major points. First, Butler and others felt strongly that E. J. Waggoner had not followed proper procedures in advocating a new theological view in one of the church’s papers without first getting the consent of church leaders. His approach had quickly undermined a united perspective on this matter and they feared this would lead to confusion among church members and bring them ridicule from their adversaries.

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⁷ “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. ... Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3: 19, 24, 25 KJV).

⁸ Published in Rochester, New York by the Advent Review Office in 1854. J. N. Andrews also held that view in 1851 (“Discourse with Brother Carver,” *Review and Herald*, Sept. 16, 1851, pp. 28-30).

⁹ See G. I. Butler’s introduction to his book, *The Law in Galatians: Is It the Moral Law, or Does It Refer to That System of Laws Peculiarly Jewish?* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald, 1886), pp. 3-6. Ellen White also reprimanded Waggoner for advancing views that cause “variance and strife and contention and differences”. “I have no hesitancy in saying you have made a mistake here. You have departed from the positive directions God has given upon this matter, and only harm will be the result. This is not in God’s order. You have now set the example for others to do as you have done, to feel at liberty to put in their various ideas and theories and bring them before the public, because you have done this. This will bring in a state of things that you have not dreamed of” (Letter 37, 1887, published in *1888 Materials*, p. 22).

out that Ellen White had had a vision on the subject in 1854 and had written to J. H. Waggoner that the law in Galatians was the ceremonial law rather than the moral law. Butler and Smith's line of argumentation and methodology to deal with this interpretation was simple: no one needs to challenge the current dominant view on the meaning of the law in Galatians because Ellen White settled the matter years ago. Period.

To bolster their argument, Butler and Smith asked Ellen White to produce this document she had written in 1854. But Ellen White, perhaps providentially, was unable to find it. In a letter to Jones and E. J. Waggoner in February 1887 she recalled that she had written to J. H. Waggoner "that I had been shown his position in regard to the law was incorrect," but she could not recall exactly what was incorrect about it. One thing was clear to her, however: the various positions on the law in Galatians "are not vital points" and they should not be made an issue of controversy.¹⁰ Two months later, in a letter to Butler and Smith, she again referred to the lost letter to J. H. Waggoner and pointed out that the counsel may not have been on doctrine at all. "It may be it was a caution not to make his ideas prominent at that time, for there was great danger of disunion."¹¹

Butler and Smith, however, disagreed with that recollection, holding that Ellen White had seen in vision that J. H. Waggoner had been wrong *theologically*. Hence, not only was this issue posing a threat to the traditional Adventist teaching on the perpetuity and immutability of the Ten Commandments, and the cherished doctrine of the Sabbath, but it threatened Ellen White's own prophetic ministry and reliability if she changed her mind on theological issues, however minor they might be.

The intense discussion reached its climax at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There, Ellen White held the view that minor points of doctrinal differences were not matters that she should clarify and she encouraged people to study the Bible for themselves and to come to their own conclusions. "I would have humility of mind," she stated, "and be willing to be instructed as a child. The Lord has been pleased to give me great light, yet I know that He leads other minds, and opens to them the mysteries of His Word, and I want to receive every ray of light that God shall send me, though it should come through the humblest of His servants."¹² Even though she did not agree with everything Waggoner taught on the Galatians issue, she claimed that "truth will lose nothing by investigation." In fact, she acknowledged that Waggoner's major contribution in this discussion was in building a bridge between the law and the gospel. "I see the beauty of truth in the presentation of the righteousness of Christ in relation to the law as the doctor [E. J. Waggoner] has placed it before us" she told the assembly in Minneapolis.¹³

In the months following the session, Ellen White joined Waggoner and Jones in presenting to the Adventist membership their new perspectives on the law and the gospel.

¹⁰ Letter 37, 1887, published in *1888 Materials*, pp. 21-31.

¹¹ Letter 13, 1887, published in *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 16, pp. 281-286.

¹² Manuscript 15, 1888, published in *1888 Materials*, pp. 163-175.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Although the struggle did not end quickly, Waggoner's point of view on the law in Galatians eventually prevailed in Adventism and facilitated a better understanding of righteousness by faith.

This story is a good illustration of how Ellen White viewed her role in defining Adventist teachings in contrast to how others saw her role, but that's not the purpose of this essay. In this story I find informative that Ellen White invited people to study for themselves, to use their reasoning powers to find out what the Word of God teaches on that subject. While some church leaders wanted to stifle the discussion, she encouraged it with the provision that it be done in a spirit of unity and friendship. She expressed her concerns that this debate produced disunity, rancor, and distraction from evangelism. She disclaimed having any light on the specific interpretations involved except that the issue was not of salvific importance, not a test of orthodoxy, and not worth the division it was causing. Further, she insisted that the matter should be settled by a study of Scripture, rather than by appeal to her writings. (It is interesting to note that the defenders of the established view appealed largely to a single Ellen White reference as proving their position, and that reference was no longer available.)

The discussions regarding the various doctrinal and theological issues that were presented at the 1888 General Conference continued for years later. During the aftermath of this crucial conference, Ellen White published the first edition of the book *Gospel Workers* in 1893 in which she included a few remarks on how to search the Scripture. In one of the chapters one can perceive the lingering controversy over how to approach and deal with new insights found in the Bible. She highlighted the need for investigating "God's word with a contrite heart, a teachable and prayerful spirit." But, also, she expressed her concern that some people in the church refused to allow a deeper investigation of the Bible. "We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished", she advised. "There is but One who is infallible--He who is the way, the truth, and the life." She also said that prejudice should not "bar the mind against the reception of truth" and she encouraged the search for new insights. "The Bible must not be interpreted to suit the ideas of men, however long they may have held these ideas to be true. We are not to accept the opinion of commentators as the voice of God; they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor."¹⁴

Although Ellen White advocated genuine thinking, reflection, and search for new insights, she also voiced some warnings. Searching for new knowledge for the sake of finding something new was never part of her vision of Adventist scholarship. New knowledge and new insights were to first lead to character development and there must be a salvific purpose for what is discovered because after all education is for the purpose of redemption. The conflict over the law in Galatians and Ellen White's responses to Butler and Smith contrast sharply, however, with her approach toward J. H. Kellogg's pantheism and A. F. Ballenger's sanctuary doctrine in the early 1900s. In both of these cases she unequivocally declared that the new views advocated were unbiblical and incompatible with established doctrines, and that these two church leaders had lost sight of the true purpose of inquiry for truth.

¹⁴ Published in *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1962), pp. 105-106.

Warnings in the Search for Knowledge and Truth

The first five years of the twentieth century were difficult ones for Adventists. In 1901 the church revamped its whole administrative organization, a decision that created and exacerbated some personality conflicts between church leaders. The following year fire destroyed two flagship institutions of the denomination in Battle Creek, Michigan, the Sanitarium and the Review and Herald publishing house. In 1903 the church headquarters were moved from Battle Creek to Washington, D.C., and then two prominent church leaders began to promote doctrines that challenged the Christian and Adventist core beliefs of the church. During all these turbulent years Ellen White dispatched letters to influential church leaders and counseled them on how to respond to these events and teachings.

She urged church leaders to remain true to their Christian experience; she exhorted them to remain genuinely committed to the mission of the church and asked them to stand steadfastly by the doctrines of the church. She still invited people to search the Scripture and dig for new insights, yet her counsels warned that such a search if done outside the parameters of character development, commitment to the mission of the church and the salvation of souls for the kingdom, would not be a beneficial search and it would produce ill results.

Steadfastness to Adventist teachings

Between 1903 and 1905 Ellen White confronted new teachings brought in by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and Elder A. F. Ballenger. In confronting Kellogg's pantheistic teachings on the nature of God and Ballenger's views on Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, she repeatedly exhorted church leaders to unyieldingly hold on to Adventist doctrines and to not discard long-held beliefs in favor of new "fables," "theories," or "fallacies." In many letters during that period of crisis, she was impressed to remind the church that the words of the angel to the church at Sardis sounded a message that she felt still needed to be heard. The angel's words were clear: "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent" (Rev 3:3). She understood these words as applying directly to Adventist beliefs: in the midst of these doctrinal controversies church leaders were to remember how the remnant people of God had received their distinctive beliefs and how the Holy Spirit had guided them to hear about these beliefs for the first time.¹⁵ For her, Adventist pioneers had "received" from God these distinctive beliefs; through intense Bible study, prayer and fasting, and the witness of the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy, God had "given" these doctrines to the remnant church. For Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventist message is not a human concoction or fabrication, it is a gift from heaven. Therefore church leaders were to hold fast to this message, and those who were

¹⁵ In this context, Ellen White urged publishing houses to reprint articles of earlier pioneers demonstrating the biblical foundation of Adventist beliefs. "Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise, and still another with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. A few are still alive who passed through the experience gained in the establishment of this truth. God has graciously spared their lives to repeat and repeat, till the close of their lives, the experience through which they passed, even as did John the apostle till the very close of his life. And the standard-bearers who have fallen in death are to speak through the re-printing of their writings. I am instructed that thus their voices are to be heard. They are to bear their testimony as to what constitutes the truth for this time" (Letter 329, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release* 760, p. 19).

thinking of accepting strange theories or were teaching fallacies or anything contrary to this message were called upon to repent.

Her analysis of these two men and their views is at times trenchant and blistering but always done in order to redeem and save. In her opinion, Kellogg and Ballenger began to expound their new teachings because they had neglected character development and humility. This weakness imperceptibly led them to disregard the pure principles of truth and to be open to other theological influences. Ellen White understood that as one disregards the importance of spiritual growth and character sanctification, one may be led also to disregard the truths of the Word of God. She is convinced that those who refuse or neglect to perfect their Christian characters are more apt to accept strange and false views. And this she saw to be the case for both Kellogg and Ballenger.

Conflicts with J. H. Kellogg

Her conflicts with Kellogg started years before the destruction of the Sanitarium in Battle Creek after he repeatedly refused to accept counsels and advice from church leaders regarding his administration of the church's medical missionary work and ever-expanding network of sanitariums. His desire for unchallenged authority and preeminence had therefore alienated many church leaders. Ellen White frequently warned him of his spiritual danger and urged him to "receive the messages of warning" sent to him to save him from trials.¹⁶ Following the destruction of the Battle Creek Sanitarium in February 1902, Kellogg published a small and controversial book on human physiology, *The Living Temple*, dedicating the benefits of its sale to the reconstruction of the sanitarium. In this little book Kellogg advocated some pantheistic views that undermined the personhood of God and the reality of heaven.

At first Ellen White did not wish to get involved in any discussion of Kellogg's book; she relied on the leaders of the church to answer the false doctrines. But when Kellogg argued in his defense that the book advocated views held by Ellen White, she decided to respond. In a letter to teachers at Emmanuel Missionary College in September 1903 she stated,

I have some things to say to our teachers in reference to the new book, *The Living Temple*. Be careful how you sustain the sentiments of this book regarding the personality of God. As the Lord represents matters to me, these sentiments do not bear the endorsement of God. They are a snare that the enemy has prepared for these last days. I thought that this would surely be discerned, and that it would not be necessary for me to say anything about it. But since the claim has been made that the teachings of this book can be sustained by statements from my writings, I am compelled to speak in denial of this claim.¹⁷

She went on to say that "Those who entertain these sophistries will soon find themselves in a position where the enemy can talk with them, and lead them away from God. It is represented to me that the writer of this book is on a false track. He has lost sight of the

¹⁶ *Testimonies for the Church*, vo. 8, p. 191; cf. Letter 215b, 1899.

¹⁷ Letter 211, 1903, published in *Spalding-Magan Collection*, pp. 320-323.

distinguishing truths for this time. He knows not whither his steps are tending.”¹⁸ And, in conclusion, she stated, “The sophistries regarding God and nature that are flooding the world with skepticism, are the inspiration of the fallen foe, who is himself a Bible student, who knows the truth that it is essential for the people to receive, and whose study it is to divert minds from these great truths relating to the things that are soon coming upon the world. Let our teachers beware lest they echo the soothsaying of the enemy of God and man.”¹⁹

A little later that same autumn, in a letter to Dr. David Paulson, a close associate of Kellogg, Ellen White reiterated her views of Kellogg’s teachings. She qualified these teachings as “falsehoods”, “Satan’s snare”, and “Satanic theories.” “The theories that Dr. Kellogg is now advocating are similar to the theories that Satan presented to the holy pair in Eden.”²⁰

In a letter to former General Conference president, George I. Butler, in January 1905, Ellen White urged Butler and those who would read her letter to be careful and to remember that the purpose of finding new knowledge and truths is to put them in practice, that there is a close relationship between what the mind finds and what one practices. If that relationship between mind and behavior (or character development) is broken, then anything can happen.

Do not yield one iota of your faith for spiritualistic ideas which will set you adrift in the mazes of uncertainty. Hold fast your past experience in the things that you have received and heard, and repent. This is a time when the truth that is received, unless put into practice, will be disregarded, and its place will be taken by that which is false, and which causes spiritual weakness and unbelief. Forgeries will be presented by Satan, and will be received as a great blessing, but they bring spiritual death. The call to repent and hold fast is made to those who have loosened their grasp on the truth that they have heard and received. God calls upon them to repent because of their unbelief in the truth in which they once rejoiced. They have become infatuated by Satan’s theories, which they have received.²¹

“Teach the church that the enemy will bring before them every phase of deception” she emphasized. “Those who have not held fast with the grip of faith to the experience given them by God in the past will fail to watch now. They are in danger of listening to and heeding the sophistries of Satan. Those who have admitted the enemy to their companionship need to be watchful and repent, lest in the day of God they be found with the workers of evil, who call falsehood truth.”²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Letter 220, 1903.

²¹ Letter 37, 1905.

²² Ibid.

Warnings to A. F. Ballenger

In a similar way to Kellogg's search for new truths, A. F. Ballenger began to promote an interpretation of the doctrine of the sanctuary that conflicted with the core Adventist teaching on the subject. Ballenger was a minister in Great Britain in 1905 when he began to advance the idea that Christ entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary at his ascension and that since then, not starting in 1844, Christ has been conducting his high priestly ministry of atonement and cleansing. His teaching created quite a stir in the church and Ellen White wrote a number of letters and manuscripts regarding Ballenger's views.²³

"Our message does not need that which Brother Ballenger is trying to draw into the web," she wrote plainly to church leaders assembled at the General Conference session of 1905. "Brother Ballenger does not discern what he is doing any more than Dr. Kellogg discerned that the book *Living Temple* contained some of the most dangerous errors that could be presented to the people of God. The most specious errors lie concealed in these theories and suppositions, which, if received, would leave the people of God in a labyrinth of error."²⁴

In all her remarks about Ballenger, Ellen White highlighted two major problems. In her diary entry for October 31, 1905, in which she discussed at length the impact of Ballenger's views on the doctrine of the sanctuary, she made a clear connection between the development of one's Christian character and a tendency to disregard Adventist beliefs. Lack of humility was at the root of Ballenger's problem, she believed.

There is need for Elder Ballenger to humble his soul before God and to refuse to receive new interpretations of the Scriptures. We have had to meet many men who have come with just such interpretations, seeking to establish false theories and unsettling the minds of many by their readiness to talk, and by their great array of texts which they have misapplied to suit their own ideas. . . .

There are many who have not perfected a Christian character: their lives have not been made pure and undefiled through the sanctification of the truth, and they will bring their imperfections into the church and deny their faith, picking up strange theories which they will advance as truth.²⁵

A second problem Ellen White saw in Ballenger's life and character is one that touches the core of any intellectual person's life, including church leaders and theologians. This problem is the intellectual temptation to strive for originality and to seek something new and fascinating to impress one's listeners, a temptation from the enemy of our souls to "[lead] minds

²³ See also, Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: volume 5, The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905* (Hagerstown, Md: Review and Herald, 1981), pp. 404-412.

²⁴ Manuscript 62, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*. A few months later, to Elder J. A. Burden in southern California she stated, "Elder Ballenger's proofs are not reliable. If received, they would destroy the faith of God's people in the truth that has made us what we are. We must be decided on this subject, for the points that he is trying to prove by Scripture are not sound" (Letter 329, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, p. 19). And to Elder C. B. Hughes she wrote, "The theories that Elder Ballenger advocated, which remove the sanctuary truth, are just such as the enemy would bring in as matters of the utmost importance, to shake us from our foundation of faith" (Letter 40, 1906, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, p. 26).

²⁵ Manuscript 145, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, pp. 15-17.

off on sidetracks.”²⁶

To church leaders assembled to discuss Ballenger’s views at the General Conference session in May 1905, she wrote, “In clear, plain language I am to say to those in attendance at this conference that Brother Ballenger has been allowing his mind to receive and believe specious error. He has been misinterpreting and misapplying the Scriptures upon which he has fastened his mind. He is building up theories that are not founded in truth. A warning is now to come to him and to the people, for God has not indited the message that he is bearing. This message, if accepted, would undermine the pillars of our faith.” In her estimation of what had happened to Ballenger, Ellen White intimated that he had let his mind “receive and believe specious error.” Although Christians are readily conscious of the dangers of spiritual and emotional temptations, rarely do we speak of intellectual temptations, that believing or accepting deception and error is often the results of consciously rejecting or disbelieving truth to replace it with error. Yielding to an intellectual temptation to accept something new and erroneous is a sin that also needs to be repented of.

He who claims that his teachings are sound, [continued Ellen White,] while at the same time he is working away from the Lord’s truth, has come to the place where he needs to be converted.

A rich and inexhaustible storehouse of truth is open to all who walk humbly with God. The ideas of those whose hearts are fully in the work of God are clearly and plainly expressed, and they have no lack of variety, for there is ever before them a rich cabinet of jewels. Those who are striving for originality will overlook the precious jewels in God’s cabinet in an effort to get something new.

Let not any man enter upon the work of tearing down the foundations of the truth that have made us what we are. God has led His people forward step by step though there were pitfalls of error on every side. Under the wonderful guidance of a plain, ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ a truth has been established that has stood the test of trial. When men arise and attempt to draw away disciples after them, meet them with the truths that have been tried as by fire.²⁷

And then Mrs. White concluded,

Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor. . . . Those who receive your interpretation of Scripture regarding the sanctuary service are receiving error and following in false paths. The enemy will work the minds of those who are eager for something new, preparing them to receive false theories and false expositions of the Scripture.²⁸

²⁶ Letter 50, 1906 to W. W. Simpson, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, p. 23.

²⁷ Manuscript 62, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ Manuscript 62, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, pp. 9-10.

And in her diary in October 1905, she focused on Ballenger's real problem, "The warning comes down along the line [given to the church at Sardis], 'Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent' (Revelation 3:3). Repent of the inclination to distinguish yourself as a man who has great light. Your supposed light is shown to me to be darkness which will lead into strange paths."²⁹

Conclusion

Shortly after I became dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 2006, I received a book as a gift from our accrediting organization, the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. This *Handbook for Seminary Presidents* offers a lot of practical counsels on many aspects of the work of a Seminary leader and in it I found some insights on the theological role played by a Seminary president. And to a large extent these insights reflect Ellen White's thought.

The authors of a chapter on the president's role as an academic leader remarked that Seminary administrators are often in the paradoxical position of having to represent and preserve the church's tradition and at the same time promote dialogue and academic inquiry. This is a situation in which many of us in Adventist education also find ourselves. "We want to promote inquiry and to pursue a fuller understanding of God's truth," but at the same time we believe "there are clear boundaries of where God's truth is *not*."³⁰

Even though few of us would dispute the importance of serious, sustained scholarship, educational administrators are also charged with the responsibility of preparing men and women who can preach, teach or live the gospel, making a difference in real lives. Scholarship and teaching must always be directed toward salvation. In this sense, we must encourage scholarship *that matters* for the church and for the world.³¹

I think this is what Ellen White tried to say to church leaders and pastors a century ago. The inquiry and search for knowledge and truth and for new insights are important endeavors of what education is about. There is so much to be found in God's two books of revelation: nature and Scripture. And the discovery of new knowledge is not limited only to biblical or theological studies, it also includes many other areas such as health, science, business, and social studies. As she expressed to those assembled at the General Conference in 1905, "The ideas of those whose hearts are fully in the work of God are clearly and plainly expressed, and they have no lack of variety, for there is ever before them a rich cabinet of jewels."³² But "those who are striving for originality will overlook the precious jewels in God's cabinet in an effort to get something new."³³ And that's when trouble begins. Ellen White did not set an external authoritative rule to

²⁹ Manuscript 145, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, p. 16.

³⁰ Charles Bouchard, Susan Thistlethwaite, and Timothy Weber, "The President's Role as Academic Leader," in G. Douglass Lewis, ed., *A Handbook for Seminary Presidents* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³² Manuscript 62, 1905, published in *Manuscript Release 760*, pp. 8-9.

³³ *Ibid.*

judge the personal motives and commitment regarding how one is striving for originality. Her warning is at the personal level as she invites scholars to reflect on their motives and commitments.

Nonetheless, she did not leave this matter only at the personal level. She believed there is a balance to be kept between inquiry and openness to new ideas, and faithfulness to the heritage that has been transmitted. She invited Jones and Waggoner, Butler and Smith to submit their ideas to the review of their peers in the church and to embrace the wisdom of the community. Of course, the debate over the law in Galatians was so polarized in the late 1880s that consensus over this issue did not emerge for many years. Yet, there is certainly wisdom in following the same approach today. Submitting ourselves to peer review and accountability within the Adventist scholarly community is probably one of the surest ways to insure that one's striving for originality is not leading others in strange and erroneous paths.

Another important lesson that needs to be kept in mind is that for Ellen White the true purpose of finding new insights and knowledge must be to enhance people's lives and to facilitate character development. Our own salvation and that of others is the purpose for which God invites us to use our minds and become intelligent Christians.

Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard. We are not what we might be, or what it is God's will that we should be. God has given us reasoning powers, not to remain inactive, or to be perverted to earthly and sordid pursuits, but that they may be developed to the utmost, refined, sanctified, ennobled, and used in advancing the interests of His kingdom.³⁴

³⁴ *Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.