

Modern-Day Mental Health Concepts In the Writings of Ellen G. White

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A comparison of the many mental health related statements of Mrs. Ellen G. White with similar concepts of modern writers in the field of psychiatry and neurology leads one to feel that while the scientific world of psychiatry has been groping in the dark forest of uncertainty, Seventh-day Adventists have been blessed with instruction fresh from the intelligence of heaven.

Traits in Children

First, let us look at a facet of child psychiatry. This term was not used in her day, and it is just now coming into its own as a specialty. On this particular subject, however, Mrs. White has made some remarkable statements pinpointing the sources of emotional and mental traits in children. This one was written in 1865:

"In the past generations, if mothers had informed themselves in regard to the laws of their being, they would have

understood that their constitutional strength, as well as the tone of their morals, and their mental faculties, would in a great measure be represented in their offspring." Selected Messages, Vol. 2, page 431.

In 1905 she wrote:

"What the parents are, that to a great extent the children will be. The physical condition of the parents, their dispositions, and appetites, their mental and moral tendencies, are, to a greater or less degree, reproduced in their children." Ministry of Healing, page 371.

A publication quoting Ashley Montagu, MD, in 1954, said:

"For years scientists have believed that your unborn baby lives an insulated existence, protected from all external influence, but this is not true. It is exciting news that you can control the development of your unborn child . . . The Fels Institute workers at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, under the direction of Dr. L. W. Sontag, have found that mothers undergoing periods of severe emotional distress during pregnancy frequently have infants which exhibit evidence of irritable and hyperactive nervous systems."

Drugs and Imbecility

In 1865 Mrs. White added, regarding the deleterious effects of certain drugs on the unborn:

"Physicians, by administering their drug-poisons, have done very much to increase the depreciation of the race, physically, mentally, and morally . . .

Everywhere you go you will see deformity, disease and imbecility, which in very many cases can be traced directly back to the drug-poisons, administered by the hand of a doctor, as remedy for some of life's ills." Selected Messages, Vol. 2, page 442.

Listen to the following paragraphs describing the present-day understanding, rather lately come by, of the dangers inherent in the administration of drugs such as Thalidomide during pregnancy:

"Scientists have actually produced cleft-palates, blindness, harelip and other defects in mice by giving the mothers large doses of various drugs in early pregnancy . . . Dr. Josef Wankany of the University of Cincinnati reports more than 50 drugs, chemicals and medications, that, taken in large doses during early pregnancy, can produce defective mammals." Bernard Seeman in Coronet, August, 1961.

Lesson of Thalidomide

"Summing up the feeling of the majority of pediatricians at the meeting, Dr. James M. Sutherland of the University of Cincinnati said, "The real lesson of Thalidomide is that we do not know and we may never learn how many drugs currently in use may affect embryonic development in a small percentage of cases . . . For this reason, Dr. Page suggested, it should be common medical practice that all drugs—except those essential to preserving the mother's life—should be avoided during the first three months of pregnancy." Medical World News, December 7, 1962.

In the general area of adolescent psychiatry, Mrs. White said:

"If youth could be persuaded to associate with the pure, the thoughtful, and the amiable, the effect would be most salutary. If choice is made of companions who fear the Lord, the influence will lead to truth, to duty, and to holiness. A truly Christian life is a power for good . . . Those who associate with men and women of questionable morals, and bad principles and practices, will soon be walking in the same path." Counsels on Health, page 414.

From the book "Child Psychiatry" by Kanner, a clear comparison can be seen. He points out the poor association habits of many modern adolescents:

"Shaw and Gluecks and others calculated that 95 per cent of the children and adolescents who were brought to court for stealing and other offenses had committed their acts in association with one or more companions and those sent to reformatory had close contact with those criminals, loafers, barroom habitues, professional gamblers or habitual drunkards."

Doubtless the problem of juvenile delinquency could be decreased if we followed such suggestions as found in Counsels on Health, page 430: "Allow your children to form only such associations as will have a right influence on their characters. Do not allow them to be out

in the evening unless you know where they are and what they are doing."

I believe that today we are seeing an upsurge in immorality due to the lack of application of principles such as these, expressed by Mrs. White so long ago.