

Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.
Proprietor of Ellen G. White Publications

"Keeping the Vision Alive"

**A LETTER OF RESPONSE TO SOMEONE WHO FELT CONCERNED OVER THE
USE OF GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN ELLEN WHITE'S WRITINGS**

Dear _____:

It was a pleasure to receive your recent letter, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to your concern that the White Estate is "tampering with Inspiration" by using gender inclusive language in the devotional book, *Christ Triumphant*.

Let me assure you that the trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate would not, and do not, "tamper with" Mrs. White's writings. My Webster's New World Dictionary defines "tamper with" as "1. To make secret, illegal arrangements with, as by bribing, 2. To interfere with or meddle with, especially so as to damage, corrupt, etc." The trustees do nothing secretly or illegally, nor do they in any way "damage" or "corrupt" Mrs. White's writings. Before they make any decision, they engage in much prayer and exhaustive discussion, and no effort is ever made to conceal decisions or their results. The clear, frank statement in the Foreword of the devotional book *Christ Triumphant*, explaining that inclusive language has been used, is an example of the Board's openness, as is the title page, which says, "Inclusive Language Edition (See Foreword)." Without this information at the very beginning of the book, it is likely that neither you nor anyone else would have noticed that inclusive language had been used.

I am enclosing several documents with this letter. Please read them thoughtfully and objectively. As you read the editorial from the *Review*, keep in mind that this was written and published 25 years ago, long before societal pressures were strong enough to require some changes in language. I wrote it primarily because of the general Golden Rule principles set forth in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8; namely, that Christians are to be sensitive to the feelings of others, and will avoid doing things that unnecessarily offend them. At least half of the *Review* readers were women and felt uncomfortable with the generic terms "man" and "mankind." I felt that by using inclusive language the *Review* could contribute to unity in the church and enable women readers to focus more sharply on the messages in articles without being distracted by unnecessary male-oriented language.

Also, I felt that it would make the language of the *Review* more accurate. Today, 25 years later, only people who are completely out of step with contemporary trends employ terms such as firemen, newsmen, garbage men, policemen, etc. Instead, they speak of firefighters, newscasters, garbage collectors, police officers, law enforcement agents, etc. These new terminologies have not in any way changed meanings or thoughts. That is a very important point. Thus, it seems to

me that only people who believe in an extreme form of verbal inspiration will feel that the use of inclusive language in Ellen White's writings means that they have been "tampered with."

In 1883 our church turned away from the principle of verbal inspiration in favor of thought-inspiration. (See Section 3 of the enclosed document, "Ellen G. White's Books in Contemporary Language.") As a result, Ellen White made some changes in words, sentences, and chapters in her books. Grammar was improved. Ideas were sharpened. Later, in 1896, her son Edson adapted materials prepared for *The Desire of Ages*, and, using a vocabulary suitable for children, published *Christ Our Saviour*. In 1981 *Steps to Jesus*, using a simplified vocabulary, was published for people whose second language is English, thus enabling them to understand better and enjoy the inspired truths set forth in *Steps to Christ*. In 1988 a special edition of *Prophets and Kings*, entitled *Israel, Its Captivity and Restoration*, was published, using language acceptable to Jewish readers who would have been "turned off" by standard Christian terminology. In 1991 *The Story of Redemption* was published for the hearing impaired, using a vocabulary that enables them to capture thoughts that otherwise would be misunderstood or lost entirely.

In view of all this precedent, it seems surprising that anyone would consider that the White Estate was breaking new ground by using gender inclusive language in *Christ Triumphant*.

Two important points should always be kept in mind: (1) The White Estate will never make changes in the "originals." The original handwritten or typewritten copies of Mrs. White's writings will be preserved and be available to researchers to compare with whatever is published. That is a great deal better than the situation we have with the Bible. We have no "originals" of Bible writings. The best we have is copies—in some cases, copies of copies of copies. If I remember correctly, several years ago when I examined and studied some of the uncials I was told that there are about 3,000 copies of New Testament writings, hardly any two of which are alike. This seems to tell us that the Lord was less concerned about verbal inspiration than He was with getting His message to the people. This emphasis on thought inspiration is apparent also in the way New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament. They convey the idea and message but not necessarily the exact wording. Ellen White often does the same.

(2) The White Estate will not use inclusive language in passages where the intent is to emphasize the different and distinctive roles of men and women. For example, some passages in Mrs. White's writings, as in the Bible, are designed to sound male-authoritative. These will remain. But in most cases Mrs. White meant the generic term "man" to include both men and women. For example, in the May 14 reading in *Christ Triumphant*, the first sentence in paragraph 2 begins, "God has given minds and talents to mortals only in trust, on trial, . . ." The original uses "men" instead of "mortals." Clearly, God has given minds and talents to women as well as to men. Thus, the change of wording does not change the writer's thought; it merely expresses it more accurately and acceptably for the modern mind.

A few Sabbaths ago in church I participated in a responsive reading selected from the *Adventist*

Hymnal. The passage was from 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter. As we joined in reading verse 11, it occurred to me that much of the congregation must have felt slightly ridiculous saying, "When I became a man, I put away childish things." Immediately I turned to the verse in the NRSV, which reads, "When I became an adult." Clearly, this is what the apostle Paul meant. Nothing would have been lost, and much would have been gained, if the passage had been quoted from this version instead of from the NKJV.

Again, thank you for letting me know of your concern. I hope that something in my response will reassure you that we are handling sacred writings with great care and are seeking God's guidance constantly in our efforts to reach the largest number of readers possible with the inspired messages God has sent through Ellen White.

Yours in the Master's service,

Kenneth H. Wood, Chair
Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees