

EGW AND C. C. CRISLER LETTERS

Ellen White did not concern herself with women's rights movements. When she was urged to join others in the crusade for women's suffrage, she declined the invitation. She wrote to her husband:

"I called upon Mrs. Graves. She had a burden upon her mind and ever since she knew I was at home she desired to see me. She said she felt that she must talk out her feelings to me. She is desirous that women's suffrage should be looked into by me. She says women ought to vote, and she related many things of a startling character which were legalized in France and St. Louis, and an effort was made to carry them out in Chicago this year, but [the effort] failed. Houses of ill fame are legalized. Women who travel alone through those cities, if they are the least suspicious of them, are taken up by the authorities and their cases are investigated. If they are diseased they are placed in the care of the doctors and cured. Then they are fit for the visits of men and are placed in the legalized home for men to satisfy their lusts upon. No examination is made of the men, and where this law is carried into effect the crime and immorality resemble the condition of the world which existed previous to the flood.

"Mrs. Graves viewed the matter as I do in regard to the increase of crime and demoralization of society. She says women must vote if this law is [to be] withstood. We had a long talk in regard to temperance. I told her that my mind was unprepared for any such matter as women voting. She had been thinking and dwelling upon these things and her mind was ripe upon them, while my work was of another character. We were doing upon the point of temperance what no other class of people in the world were. We were as much in favor of a pledge against tobacco as liquor."--Letter 40a, 1874; Ms Re #794.

It is likely that Ellen White did not suggest at any time that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should commence the practice of ordaining women to the gospel ministry. Her secretary, C. C. Crisler, says that she was very cautious on this point. Here is the correspondence relating to this question:

"March 12, 1916

"Mr. Clarence Crisler, Sanitarium [Calif.]

"Dear Brother: Will you please inform me in regard to the setting apart of women who can give some time to missionary work, by laying on hands in prayer, found in Review and Herald, back in the early part of the 90's, probably back in about 1892 or 1893, from the pen of Sister White.

"The reason I ask for this, I was in a recent meeting where Elder Adross set aside women by the laying on of hands, and when I asked him for the authority for so doing, he referred me to you, and as I have been a Bible

worker for a number of years and have recently been granted a ministerial license, I want this information.

"Please answer at once, as I want to hear from you before I go to the Southwestern Union Conference, which convenes April 7th. Please send me two or three copies of her statement as the president of our conference wants one." Mrs. L. E. Cox, 134 Agarita Ave, San Antonio, Texas.

"March 22, 1916

"Mrs. L. E. Cox, San Antonio, Texas

"Dear Sister: I have your letter of the 12th inst., making inquiry regarding the ordination of women who give some time to missionary work-- particularly to some statement which you believe to be found in a Review early in the 90's, from the pen of Mrs. Ellen G. White.

"As this query will require some study on my part, and searching, and as I must go to Mountain View in the morning for a few days, I am under the necessity of asking that you excuse me from answering for a few days. Upon my return, early next week, I will endeavor to send you a reply, accompanying same, if possible, with the extracts called for. However, I might say that I have not understood these extracts as teaching positively the ordination of women as ministers of the gospel. I have supposed, rather, that they refer primarily to the ordination of God-fearing women as deaconesses in local churches. But of this I will speak more fully when I write again.

"I hope to write you about the 28th inst., and will address you as above. If you are leaving San Antonio for other parts, it would be well for you to leave a forwarding order, so mail addressed as above will reach you in due time at the Union Conference."--Clarence Crisler.

"June 16, 1916

"Mrs. L. E. Cox

"Dear Sister: In my answer under date of March 22, I was unable to forward you copy of the Review article called for, but ventured to say, 'I have not understood these extracts as teaching positively the ordination of women as ministers of the gospel. I have supposed, rather, that they refer primarily to the ordination of God-fearing women as deaconesses in local churches.'

"Since writing the above, I have found the article in question and have had same copied. Enclosed find a copy of this article. I am also forwarding copy to your local Conference president, Elder E. L. Neff; and to the president of your Union, Elder J. W. Christian, that they may know what I am sending to you.

"While I do not make it a part of my work to presume to interpret that which has been written, yet I may be pardoned for expressing as my conviction the thought that this article published in the Review does not refer to the ordination of women as ministers of the gospel, but rather touches upon the question of setting apart, for special duties in local churches, God-fearing women in such churches where circumstances call for such action.

"And may I add that Sister White, personally, was very careful about expressing herself in any wise as to the advisability of ordaining women as gospel ministers. She has often spoken of the perils that such general practice would expose the church to by a gainsaying world; but as yet I have never seen from her pen any statement that would seem to encourage the formal and official ordination of women to the gospel ministry, to public labor such as is ordinarily expected of an ordained minister.

"This is not suggesting, much less saying, that no women are fitted for such public labor, and that none should ever be ordained; it is simply saying that so far as my knowledge extends, Sister White never encouraged church officials to depart from the general customs of the church in those matters."--C. C. Crisler

Ellen G. White Estate  
Washington, D. C.  
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