

## GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNMENT (with examples)

### **For Seventh-day Adventists :: Wishing to Read Books Written By Seventh-day Adventists :: For Seventh-day Adventists**

BEWARE ALL-ENCOMPASSING, UNQUALIFIED STATEMENTS. What is the scope of a statement? Example: "Will Jesus be everything to Adventism? Or will He be a sideshow or merely some part of a supposedly larger whole?" When I read this I ask, What does the author actually mean? In this case, his urgent call to make Jesus "all" becomes substance only when points of repeated negation are considered in the same book. The author chafes against church structure, authority, unique Adventist teachings and mission. Making Jesus "all" is a subtle means of negating Adventist distinctives. If Jesus is all so that nothing else is anything, then no teaching about Him, no thought about Him, can compete, in its less-than-allness, with the allness of the idea of Jesus. Whatever that is.

BEWARE OF ELLEN G. WHITE QUOTES. They are often misused by persons striving to communicate ideas to you which are *not* compatible with hers. For example, She never identifies herself as a "mystic" or as having a "mystical experience." We understand her from 1844 onward as bearing a prophetic, not a mystical, mantle. You can take or leave a mystic; a prophet who speaks for God must be obeyed.

BEWARE ENDORSEMENTS ON THE COVER. Often a book is recommended which was read only in part, if at all, by the person recommending it.

BENEFIT FROM ENDORSEMENTS ON THE COVER. By noting the likely theological perspectives of the endorsers. If they come from persons in Adventist "ghetto" locations, it is more likely that the theological perspective of author and endorsers is Liberal Adventist, as is the case with this volume.

CONSIDER HOW A TEACHING IS REFERRED TO. Determine whether the author personally agrees with beliefs or facts reported, or, like a news reporter, states what others have believed without joining in. For example, "Adventists have considered Babylon to be. . ." "Adventists have identified the second beast . . ." "Adventists have maintained that. . ." The author is not owning these views.

WATCH OUT FOR THE TWO-DITCHES. Pay special attention to the solution offered in the middle, *supposedly* between the two-ditches. Example. "Some Adventists deify Ellen White. Others demonize her. . . I have grown to appreciate this woman as neither god nor goddess, but good." Have you ever met someone who truly deified or demonized her? Probably not. What does her being "good" mean? Does she or does she not carry a prophetic authority in the sense that her writings are inspired as the Scriptures are inspired, as having an authority above all other writings except the Bible? A two-ditches-and-middle model is almost never found in the Bible; usually you find binaries: evil or just, right hand or left, etc.

BEWARE THE ELLEN G. WHITE "AURA." That is, do not assume that the book would be loved or approved or endorsed by Ellen White just because it seems to be about her. The example volume has almost nothing to do with White's dream; it instead has to do with ditching Adventist distinctives and identity and replacing these with emerging church sensibilities.

BEWARE OF ACCEPTING UNSUBSTANTIATED CHARGES (legalism, being unloving, self-righteous, etc). Example: "How silly we look when we tout our church, our religion, our denomination—when we pose with our holiness and flex our spiritual muscles to show just how righteous we are!" Something has gotten under this author's skin. we're not quite sure what it is, but it is a complaint of some kind about the church.

BEWARE OF ELLIPSES IN QUOTES LEAVING OUT CONTRADICTORY IDEAS. (The book I am using as an example contains no noteworthy examples of this practice.)

BE CAREFUL OF PILED ADJECTIVES ADDING NO MEANING. When you see many of these in a book, recognize that they are filler, padding. Example: "All religious movements have a beginning. They have a foundational, formational, inaugural, initial reason for existence." Seeing this, the next step is to try to understand what is filler and what is core content---the reason for which the book has been written, the master idea(s) it is intended to impart. These are not always as advertised.

BEWARE SHOCKING STATEMENTS. Some are shocking because they are wrong. Example: "Adventism was born because of a wrong calculation about the Second Coming." This statement is false. There was no error in the calculation in 1844. The event anticipated was different than then expected.

BEWARE OF "TRUTH BY ILLUSTRATION." Truth and error can be illustrated, but illustrations are never proof, nor even evidence. Too many cases of this in the example book to pick out just one!

QUOTING ELLEN WHITE OR ADVENTIST PIONEERS IS NO GUARANTEE. The author may not agree with what he quotes. When such quotes are offered we cannot know one way or the other what the author truly believes. The ideas presented must be weighed on their own merits apart from the charming qualities or alleged "conservative" credentials of any author.

DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN ASSERTION AND EVIDENCE PROVIDED. Example: "Adventism's uniqueness is found at its historical root: Jesus." (This statement is followed by no substantiating evidence on following pages). Little is truly unique about Adventism's picture of Jesus.

READ MORE CLOSELY WHEN THE WRITING IS ESPECIALLY FEELY AND FUZZY. You will often find empty metaphors and filler. Example: "If Adventism is going to get a life and have a life . . . it must—we must—have the Son." What does this mean? No explanation given.

BEWARE "THE AUTHOR GIVETH AND THE AUTHOR TAKETH AWAY." Example: [the author taketh away:] "Adventism was born because of a wrong calculation about the Second Coming" [but then the author giveth:] "fueled by an intense, emotional, highly personal, fervent, and ultimately right, desire to be with Jesus." This is a case of presto, change-o. The author trades "up" from what, in his view, are stale prophetic time periods, to personal, experiential, emotional desire to be with Jesus.