

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

COMMON OR  
UNINSPIRED  
WRITINGS

ARTHUR L. WHITE



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# **Common or Uninspired Writings**

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**Ellen G. White**

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### **Overview**

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### **About the Author**

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

### **Further Links**

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by Arthur L. White

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## Introduction

Ellen White as an individual—a wife, mother, neighbor, and friend—was not deprived of thinking ordinary thoughts or speaking ordinary words with no connotation of inspiration. There was clearly in her life and ministry the common and the sacred.

To her son Edson and his wife Emma, Ellen White, on September 10, 1903, wrote:

“I think that I shall write you a family letter, telling you about my household and place.”—[Letter 201, 1903](#).

In her letter to the same people, written the next day, she stated:

“This morning I found your letter under my door. I was glad to hear from you. Yesterday I wrote you a letter on common, everyday topics. This letter will be sent to you today. I have written a long letter on the subject spoken of in your letter and have given it out to be copied. This will be sent to you soon.”—[Letter 202, 1903](#).

Then she presents counsel on a point of concern to workers in the South which opens:

“It is Satan’s plan to call minds to the study of the color line”—words found near the opening of the chapter in *Testimonies*, volume 9, titled “The Color Line” (pp. 213-222). On the opening pages, pages 213-215, 24 lines of counsel sent in the letter to Edson were used in building the chapter. Other communications in which Ellen White dealt with the same sensitive matter were drawn upon for the chapter.

The tone of the letter and the subject matter presented make it clear that this was counsel based on the light God had given her. Elsewhere in the letter she introduces a paragraph with the words, “From the instruction that the Lord has given me from time to time, I know,” et cetera.—[Letter 202, 1903](#).

[2]

## Chapter 1—“The Long Letter Given Out to Be Copied”

The “long letter” referred to on September 11 is a 14-page testimony bearing the date of September 14, 1903 ([Letter 203, 1903](#)), and opens:

“To Those in Positions of Responsibility in the Nashville Publishing House.”

“Dear Brethren: I am charged with a message to you from the Lord. Seek Him earnestly while He may be found. He is acquainted with the spirit that you reveal in your purposes and plans, et cetera....

“Harmony and unity are to prevail amongst those in charge of the publishing work in Nashville. These men are to conduct themselves in all humility....

“Some who have been handling sacred things have lost a sense of their sacredness, and treat them as common matters. Unless they change, the Lord will remove them from His work....

“No harsh words are to be spoken by a Christian to anyone, old or young. Such words are prompted by the enemy. My brethren, do not be so coldly proper toward those with whom you meet in service and worship that you freeze the souls that are in need of the warmth of the love of Christ....

“May the Lord give you all a determination to do His will, and may He greatly bless and strengthen you is my prayer.”—[Letter 203, 1903](#).

This testimony was sent to Elder G. I. Butler, chairman of the board and president of the Southern Union. Copy was sent to J. E. White, who had pioneered the publishing work in the Southern states. This communication is quite different from the “family letter,” telling

“about my household and place,” a “letter on common, everyday topics.” Copies of this family letter were sent to friends and relatives: [3]

J. E. White and wife, Mrs. E. W. Farnsworth, Mrs. Nellie Druillard, S. T. Belden, Mrs. Lucinda Hall, Mrs. Mary Foss, Mrs. G. A. Irwin, J. A. Burden and wife.

This letter on “common and everyday topics” discusses:

Willie’s absence and travels.

Writing letters in regard to young people going to Battle Creek to take the nurse’s course.

The hot weather and what the paper said was its cause. Her health and ability to go up and down stairs easily. Illness of her farmer, Iram James, and the successful treatment with the electric battery.

Food from the orchard and garden.

Canning applesauce and drying corn.

The grapes ripening and the sale of them.

The prune crop—gathering and drying the prunes.

“A word or two more”—the scarcity of money.

The meals in her home—happy for the abundant harvest.

Practicing economy to advance the cause of truth.

The need of the power of the spirit.

Canaan is in sight. We must have a place there.

Come and see us—join our forces.

## Chapter 2—Ellen White Specifies the “Common and the Sacred”

It is clear that in Ellen White’s writing and conversation there was the common as well as the sacred. She wrote specifically of this in 1909 as Elder E. S. Ballenger, former manager of the Paradise Valley Sanitarium, in an endeavor to find justification for turning from the E. G. White teachings and counsels, declared that he could not have confidence in her, for “in a letter written to one of the brethren in Southern California, the statement was made by me that the sanitarium contained 40 rooms, where there were really only 38” ([Selected Messages 1:38](#)). She explained:

[4]

“The information given concerning the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium was given, not as a revelation from the Lord, but simply as a human opinion. There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know.

“In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord and am stating it as such....

“When the Holy Spirit reveals anything regarding the institutions connected with the Lord’s work, or concerning the work of God upon human hearts and minds, as He has revealed these things through me in the past, the message given is to be regarded as light given of God for those who need it. But for one to mix the sacred with the common is a great mistake. In a tendency to do this, we may see the working of the enemy to destroy souls....

“There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written, and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these questions must be answered. We converse about houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages.”—Ms 107, 1909 ([Selected Messages 1:38, 39](#)).

## **Chapter 3—How Can We Judge?**

Perhaps it is less difficult to distinguish the sacred from the common in actual practice than in theory. Sound principles are enunciated in the paragraphs just quoted. The illustrations presented at the opening of this discussion give clear indications as to a basis for judgment. And it must be remembered that Ellen White endeavored to carefully avoid setting forth her opinions as light that God had given to her. This led her at times to remain silent while visiting with others where the conversation was on certain topics and what she might say as the expression of an opinion could be taken for divine guidance.

## Chapter 4—An Instance of Ellen White’s Speaking [5] “Not by Commandment”

An illustration of her care in matters of this kind is found in a letter written in 1897 when she judged it would be well if John Wessels of South Africa would join them in Australia in the interests of the sanitarium work. She had been shown things in regard to the family, but there were things she had not been shown. As she wrote, she made this clear:

“I have not been given the message ‘Send for Brother John Wessels to come to Australia.’ No. Therefore, I do not say, ‘I know this is the place for you.’ But it is my privilege to express my wishes, even though I say, ‘I speak not by commandment.’ But I do not want you to come because of any persuasion of mine. I want you to seek the Lord most earnestly, and then follow where He shall lead you. I want you to come when God says ‘Come,’ not one moment before.

“Nevertheless, it is my privilege to present the wants of the cause of God in Australia. Australia is not my country, only as it is the Lord’s providence. The country is God’s. The people are His. A work is to be done here, and if you are not the one to do it, I shall feel perfectly resigned to hear that you have gone to some other locality.

“I have been shown that it were better for you and the other members of your mother’s family to be in some other locality, because where they are, the companionship and associations are not the most favorable to their spiritual healthfulness.”—[Letter 129, 1897](#).

It will be observed that in the phraseology of her letter she alluded to what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth ([1 Corinthians 7:6, 12](#)),

making clear what were his own opinions, which he thought were good and right, but in honesty also making it clear that he was not presenting instruction which God has given him.

[6] Ellen White was in the world, participating in many matters in the home, the community, and the church. She was not denied the privilege of thinking her own thoughts and speaking or writing her own words, but to those eager to know and follow God's will, there is no occasion for confusion in the matter. The honest-hearted believer has little difficulty in knowing when Ellen White is speaking for the Lord and when she is speaking for herself.

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