

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

THE TRUTH
ABOUT THE
WHITE LIE



The Truth About The White Lie

Ellen G. White

1982

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Information about this Book

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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.

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Introduction

Late in 1980, a professional survey was conducted which enabled researchers to discover, among other things, the differences between the Christian attitudes and behaviors of Seventh-day Adventists who regularly read Ellen G. White's books and those who do not.¹ The results were very revealing. Eighty-five percent of those who read Mrs. White's books indicated that they had an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, while only 59 percent of the non-readers did. Eighty-two percent of the readers had the assurance that they were "right with God," while only 59 percent of the nonreaders did. Daily personal Bible study was a habit with 82 percent of those who read Ellen White's writings regularly, while only 47 percent of those who did not read Ellen White studied their Bible regularly.

And so it went, in category after category. Those who regularly spent time reading from Mrs. White's writings felt better prepared for Christian witnessing, engaged in witnessing more often, felt more at home with their fellow church members, prayed more, gave more to support local soul winning, were more willing to help their neighbors with personal problems, and had family worship more regularly. In short, their religious experience was stronger, more active, and more positive.

These actual survey results present a far different picture from that set forth by Walter Rea in his recent book, *The White Lie*.² *On the dust jacket of the hard-back edition, the author likens the Seventh-day Adventist regard for Ellen White's prophetic gift to the tragic fascination of Jonestown's inhabitants for their demonic leader, Jim Jones. The book sets out to describe what it calls "the depths of that cult's [Adventism's] far reaching ramifications over*

¹Endnotes Des Cummings, Jr. and Roger L. Dudley, "A Comparison of the Christian Attitudes and Behaviors Between Those Adventist Church Members Who Regularly Read Ellen White Books and Those Who Do Not," April, 1982. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

²Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, Calif.: M & R Publications, 1982), 409 pp.

the past 140 years and the millions of souls it has affected.” Indeed, the book claims to be “every whit as shocking in its expose as the horrendous Jonestown tragedy wherein only a few hundred were involved and died.” Like this one, many of the author’s claims are either so lacking in substance or so harsh and sarcastic that they fall of their own weight.

Ellen White is not the only object of attack in *The White Lie*. Ministers of all faiths are repeatedly characterized as “supersalesmen” or “salesmen of the psychic.” The theme pervades the book:

All supersalesmen sell the advantages of their particular name brands. In the cults and sects, it’s the brand of their saint and what is required by that saint to be saved. In the larger and longer established forms of religion, it’s the Clan Plan, mother’s religion, the faith of the fathers, the true light. ^{3 4}

Christian beliefs are ridiculed:

Who tagged all of us with sin? Was it God, or that snake in the grass that came in when Adam was down on the south forty? Or do we get it from our ancestors of past eons? Or is the Devil, like Santa Claus, our dad? ⁵

Heaven is scoffed at:

Not very often, if ever, is one dealing with pure truth, either small or large, in religion. One is dealing with truth as filtered, expanded, diminished, bounded, or defined by the I-saws of all the Ellens of Christendom with a lot of help from the divines. What does emerge from all the froth is that the map for this life and the one to come, if indeed it does come, is drawn by the clan—and thus becomes the Clan Plan. Heaven becomes the

³Ibid., p. 191.

⁴Formal quotations are set in italics throughout this document.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

main gate to isolation, where all the bad as we conceive of it (which in humanity's case means other people) is snuffed out, and only us good guys go marching through. Thus we make our own ghetto. ⁶

Religion is deemed little more than a word game:

In most libraries, the religion department is under the subject heading of philosophy—and that is what it is, the defining and redefining of terms and ideas that have defied defining for centuries. ⁷

The ways God has dealt with His people are scorned:

[2]

Freethinkers have always gotten into trouble. In the time of Moses, if anyone started a fire on his own to enjoy a cup of hot herb tea on Sabbath, he was stoned, and not in the modern sense of the word either. If he wandered around in the local swapmeet on Sabbath in the days of Nehemiah he might run the risk of having his beard pulled or his toupee disrupted. Even in the New Testament times, if Ananias kept out a few shekels from the tithe to pay the rent, he was told by the local divine to drop dead—which he did. ⁸

Nevertheless, in spite of the book's emotion-laden attacks on Ellen White, on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and on Christian beliefs in general, it does provide an opportunity to illuminate some interesting corners of Seventh-day Adventist history. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing so rapidly, there are always many new members who may not be well acquainted with Ellen White's life. They will appreciate having positive answers to some of the questions raised by the book. Then too, since the volume has received attention in the popular press in the United States, our fellow Christians in other denominations deserve a calm and candid evaluation of the book.

⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁷Ibid., p. 38.

⁸Ibid., p. 45.

Those who know Ellen White from wide reading in her works will generally not need more than a taste of the bitterness of *The White Lie* to realize how foreign it is to the spirit of Christ which so permeates Mrs. White's writings. And yet they too may profit from further background information concerning her life and work.

It is not our purpose here to defend present-day church leaders, even though many have been maligned in the book. As for defending Ellen White, we suggest that her own writings offer the best defense. But we take this occasion to discuss the more important issues raised by *The White Lie*, and report the fruits of research in many fields which bear on those issues.

Chapter 1—The Use Of Literary Sources

A glance at *The White Lie* reveals many pages of similarities between Mrs. White’s writings and the writings of others. How much did Ellen White borrow from other sources?

In 1982 when *The White Lie* was published, there were more than 70 Ellen G. White books in print, an aggregate of more than 35,000 pages.¹ Although there is some repetition in the books, there are also some 50,000 typewritten pages of letters, sermons, diaries, and manuscripts on file in the White Estate and at eight research centers around the world. Thus, when compared to the total volume of Ellen White’s writings, the amount she borrowed still appears to be quite small.

On the other hand, representatives of the church have stated that the amount of borrowing was greater than they had previously known.² In the Ellen G. White Estate, systematic research is going forward on this topic, and from time to time, further parallels are discovered. The Seventh-day Adventist journal for ministers, *Ministry*, recently devoted a special issue to a broad and candid summary of the subject of Ellen White’s use of sources.³

The amount of borrowing is not the most important question however. An instructive parallel is found in the relationship of the Gospels. More than 90 percent of the Gospel of Mark is paralleled by passages in Matthew and Luke. Even so, contemporary critical Biblical scholars are coming more and more to the conclusion that although Matthew, Mark, and Luke used common materials, each was a distinct author in his own right.⁴ Thus even “higher critics”

¹See “Ellen G. White Book and Pamphlet Titles,” April, 1982. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

²See Neal C. Wilson, “This I Believe About Ellen G. White,” *Adventist Review*, March 20, 1980, pp. 8-10.

³*Ministry*, June, 1982, pp. 4-19.

⁴See Robert M. Fowler, “Using Literary Criticism on the Gospels,” *The Christian Century*, May 26, 1982, pp. 626-629.

have a more analytical approach to the study of literary sources than does *The White Lie*.

At one time in the infancy of “source criticism” the Gospel writers were thought by higher critics to be little more than “scissors and paste” plagiarizers. Now critical scholars realize that literary studies are not complete until they move beyond cataloging parallel passages to the more significant question of how the borrowed material was used by each author to make his own unique statement.

It is our hope that the study of Ellen White’s literary borrowing will move beyond the mere noting of literary parallels and discussing how much literary borrowing was acceptable, to the more interesting question of the unique uses to which Mrs. White, under the Spirit’s guidance, put the materials she adapted.

Would people in the nineteenth century have agreed with The White Lie’s judgment that Mrs. White’s literary borrowing constituted “wholesale” stealing? ⁵

Some would have, especially critics. For instance, in 1889, the Protestant pastors of Healdsburg, California, invited D. M. Canright, a recently apostatized Adventist minister, to come from Michigan and lecture against the Adventists and Ellen White. In those lectures, Canright raised the charge of plagiarism against Ellen White, and Adventist pastors William Healey and J. N. Loughborough responded, showing where Canright had overstated his case. When the debate was over, the opposing pastors published their parting shot in the local newspaper, accusing Ellen White of plagiarism. ⁶ But these pastors were hardly unbiased judges. For centuries, the charge of plagiarism has been a favorite weapon used against religious leaders—John Bunyan and John Wesley were both vigorously accused. ⁷

⁵The White Lie, p. 136.

⁶The White Lie, p. 203, mentions the charge, but not the historical background. See Ron Graybill, “D. M. Canright in Healdsburg: The Genesis of the Plagiarism Charge,” *Insight*, Oct. 21, 1980, pp. 7-10.

⁷Regarding Bunyan, see William York Tindall, *John Bunyan: Mechanick Preacher* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), pp. 194ff. Regarding Wesley, see Donald H. Kirkham, “John Wesley’s ‘Calm Address’: The Response of the Critics,” *Methodist History*, October, 1975, pp. 13-23.

In the nineteenth century, plagiarism was known and condemned, but uncredited paraphrasing was widely practiced. American humorist Mark Twain once wondered if there was “anything in any human utterance, oral or written, except plagiarism!”⁸ Edgar Allen Poe was not so relaxed on the subject. He caused a considerable uproar when he accused Longfellow of plagiarism. Ironically, modern scholars find that Poe himself plagiarized.⁹ Literary borrowing is much more easily defined and condemned in the abstract than it is avoided in actual practice.

Even closer to Ellen White was Uriah Smith, who condemned the plagiarizing of his sister Annie’s poem,¹⁰ while in his own writings on prophecy he made free use of the paraphrased words of George Storrs and Josiah Litch.¹¹ In this, Smith was not hypocritical. He, like other nineteenth-century writers, simply drew the line between plagiarism and legitimate borrowing at a different point than many would today.

It has been rumored that Ellen White was threatened with a lawsuit for her literary borrowing from Conybeare and Howson’s *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*. What are the facts?¹²

[3] In spite of A. G. Daniells’ faulty memory in this regard, Mrs. White was never accused of plagiarism by the British authors Conybeare and Howson, nor was she threatened with a lawsuit, nor was her book withdrawn because of criticisms of its use of sources. In the 1890’s there was a letter of inquiry about *Sketches From the Life of Paul* addressed to the Review and Herald Publishing Association by one of the several American publishers of Conybeare and Howson, the T. Y. Crowell Co. of New York. Large quantities of Conybeare

⁸Quoted in Joseph P. Lash, *Helen and Teacher* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1980), p. 146.

⁹See George Hatvary, “Notes and Queries,” *American Literature*, November, 1966, pp. 365-372.

¹⁰The White Lie, p. 224. See [Uriah Smith], [The Review and Herald, September 6, 1864](#), p. 120.

¹¹See Merwin R. Thurber, “Uriah Smith and the Charge of Plagiarism,” *Ministry*, June, 1945, pp. 15, 16.

¹²The White Lie, pp. 110, 112.

and Howson's book had earlier been purchased from the Crowell Co. to give away as prizes to those who would secure subscriptions to the *Signs of the Times*. W. C. White, the only source of information about this letter, indicates that it was written in a "kindly spirit" and contained "no threats of prosecution, nor any complaints as to plagiarism."¹³

When the Crowell company was quizzed about the matter some thirty years later, they replied:

We publish Conybeare's *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, but this is not a copyrighted book and we would have no legal grounds for action against your book and we do not think that we have ever raised any objection or made any claim such as you speak of.¹⁴

Like many of Ellen White's books, *Sketches From the Life of Paul* was out of print for some time while Mrs. White worked toward enlarging it into *The Acts of the Apostles*, but aside from scurrilous speculation and faulty memories, there is no evidence that this had anything to do with any alleged criticism of Ellen White's use of Conybeare and Howson.

On the question of the legality of literary borrowing, Attorney Vincent Ramik, who is not a Seventh-day Adventist, investigated Ellen White's use of sources according to the copyright laws and cases in the nineteenth century. He concluded that her use did not constitute literary piracy *even if* all the books from which she drew had been legally copyrighted.¹⁵

¹³D. E. Robinson and W. C. White, "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White" (St. Helena, Calif., "Elmshaven" Office, August, 1933, reprinted, 1981), p. 11. Reprint available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

¹⁴Quoted in Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1951), pp. 455-457.

¹⁵See "Was Ellen G. White A Plagiarist?" a reprint of articles published in the *Adventist Review*, September 17, 1981. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate. See also note 38 below.

**What about the structure and chapter titles of Ellen White’s
Patriarchs and Prophets—Are they similar to Alfred
Edersheim’s *Old Testament Bible History*? ¹⁶**

It is easy to create a false impression by looking at superficial similarities. Close examination shows that of the 73 chapter titles in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, only nine of the titles are either identical to those in Edersheim’s book, or differ only by the inclusion or deletion of the article “the.” Furthermore, these nine include such common titles as “The Creation,” “The Flood,” “Destruction of Sodom,” “The Marriage of Isaac,” and “The Death of Saul.”

The misleading nature of the comparison is even more obvious when one discovers that in Edersheim’s book there are no chapter titles as such. Rather, there are up to half a dozen or more summary phrases indicating the subject matter of each chapter. It is from these summary phrases that the allegedly parallel “titles” have been drawn. Furthermore, the order of the chapters is really established by the order in which the stories appear in the Old Testament.

**What about the illustrations from Wylie’s *History of
Protestantism* which the Pacific Press published without credit
to the Cassell Company? ¹⁷**

Here is a case where *The White Lie* recycles a charge made in the 1930’s by former Adventist E. S. Ballenger in his paper, *The Gathering Call*. ¹⁸ *At that time the charge was laid to rest by pointing out that W. C. White carried on extensive correspondence with the Cassell, Petter and Galpin Company of Great Britain, in order to purchase the rights to the illustrations in question.*

Typical of Elder White’s care in this matter is a letter written to Henry Scott on April 7, 1886. He advised Scott, who was publishing Adventist literature in Australia, to become acquainted with the Cassell Company agent in Melbourne, in order to purchase the rights to the cuts owned by that company. “When we will credit the work from which the cut is taken, as is now being done in *Present Truth*

¹⁶The White Lie, pp. 77-81.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 147-161.

¹⁸E. S. Ballenger, ed., *The Gathering Call*, September, 1932, p. 19, 20.

[the British Adventist paper], they make a 40 percent discount.” However, Elder White went on, “I do not like the idea of promising to credit each picture.” It is clear then, that he favored purchasing the rights to the illustrations outright.

Although any records of the Pacific Press’s negotiations with the publishers were destroyed in the 1906 fire, they certainly were within their rights if they followed W. C. White’s preferences in this matter. No conclusions can be drawn from the fact that the artists’ initials appear on some cuts used in Wylie’s book and not in *The Great Controversy* because we do not know in what form the Pacific Press received the engravings from the Cassell Company. It is perfectly possible that the initials were removed by the Cassell Company because of some arrangement with the artist prior to their sending the materials to the Pacific Press. ¹⁹

What about the use James and Ellen White made of the writings of J. N. Andrews and Uriah Smith? ²⁰

W. C. White has aptly summarized the pioneers’ view on this subject:

All felt that the truths to be presented were common property and wherever one could help another or get help from another in the expression of Biblical truths, it was considered right to do so. Consequently there were many excellent statements of present truth copied by one writer from another. And no man said that aught which he wrote was exclusively his own. ²¹

Ellen White explained her own use of other Adventist writers in the introduction to *The Great Controversy* where she says that “in narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time” she had made use of their writings in a way similar to the use she made of the language of historians.

¹⁹See Ron Graybill, “Did The Great Controversy Contain Stolen Illustrations?” Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

²⁰The White Lie, pp. 136, 137, 200, 222-224, 363-365, 371-373.

²¹“Brief Statements,” p. 7.

²² Thus James White used Uriah Smith just as Ellen White used James White. Outside Adventist circles, the popular historical writer Charles Adams used historian Merle D'Aubigne just as Ellen White used Charles Adams. ²³

Did Mrs. White make any attempt to conceal from Adventists her literary borrowing? ²⁴

No, she even urged that they read some of the very books from which she borrowed most freely:

The Life of St. Paul by Conybeare and Howson, I regard as a book of great merit, and one of rare usefulness to the earnest student of the New Testament History. ²⁵

On another occasion, she wrote:

Provide something to be read during these long winter evenings. For those who can procure it, D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation* will be both interesting and profitable. ²⁶

[4] Clearly, Mrs. White was not trying to hide anything or she would not have recommended the very books from which she was at the time choosing material.

On the other hand, she did not generally draw particular attention to her use of other authors, except in the *Health Reformer* in the 1870's, where, as she wrote her monthly column and selected material for republication for the non-Adventist public, she regularly quoted from other writers, gave credit to them, and even recommended that her readers secure their books. ²⁷

²²Ellen G. White, [The Great Controversy](#), xii.

²³Ron Graybill, "Analysis of E. G. White's Luther Manuscript," p. 1. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

²⁴The White Lie, pp. 112, 120, 127, 167, 200.

²⁵Ellen G. White, "Testimonials," [The Signs of the Times](#), February 22, 1883, p. 96.

²⁶Ellen G. White, "Holiday Gifts," [The Review and Herald](#), December 26, 1882, p. 789.

²⁷See for example, Ellen G. White, "Proper Education," [The Health Reformer](#), July 1873, p. 221, where she says: I am delighted to find the following in that invaluable work

Did Mrs. White feel that it was permissible for her to paraphrase the language of others?

Yes, in fact, in a letter to her secretary, Fannie Bolton, she once gave an enlightening illustration of her concept of the ownership of truth. Fannie, from time to time, felt that Mrs. White had not given her proper credit for the work she had done in editing Mrs. White's material in the process of preparing it for publication.

In vision, Ellen White "was shown Fannie gathering the fruit, some ripe, the best, some unripe. She put it in her apron and said, 'This is mine. It is mine.' I said, 'Fannie, you are certainly claiming that which is not yours. That fruit belongs to that tree. Anyone may pluck and enjoy it, but it belongs to that tree.'" ²⁸ This concept of the tree of truth suggests that God is the author and owner of all truth, just as the tree is the author and owner of its fruit. God provides truth unstintingly to all who will receive it and use it.

Mrs. White explained Christ's use of familiar concepts in much the same way:

He was the originator of all the ancient gems of truth. Through the work of the enemy, these truths had been displaced.... Christ rescued them from the rubbish of error, gave them a new, vital force, and commanded them to shine as jewels, and stand fast forever.

Christ Himself could use any of these old truths without borrowing the smallest particle, for He had originated them all. ²⁹

In the later years of her life, when she became aware that questions were being raised about whether her copying from other writers was an infringement on their rights, she asked "Who has been injured?" ³⁰ Significantly, this question was the very one asked by the courts of her day to determine whether borrowing was proper.

entitled *The Young Lady's Counselor*, by Rev. Daniel Wise, A.M.; it can be obtained at any Methodist book rooms [sic].

²⁸Letter 7, 1894.

²⁹Manuscript 25, 1890.

³⁰"Brief Statements," p. 8.

³¹ If she were writing today, her approach might be different, but she must be judged by the concepts of literary property and legality current in her own day.

What about the statements where Mrs. White appears to claim an exclusive divine source for what she wrote? ³²

The question is a pertinent and important one. In 1867 Mrs. White wrote: “My views were written independent of books or of the opinions of others.” ³³ But when the statement is put in proper context, as it can be found in the [The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#), one discovers she was speaking of her earliest health writings. After her initial writing on health, she tells us in this very same article that she read the books of various reformers and then proceeded to publish excerpts from them in *Health: or, How to Live*. Why? She says it was to show how the things shown her in vision had also been brought out by other able writers on the subject.

It was also in the context of those early health writings that she said:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own.... ³⁴

Here she is clearly drawing a distinction between words she has to provide and divinely dictated words. Since she described her vision of the proper length for women’s dresses in different language on different occasions, some women questioned her vision. She had

³¹See Vincent L. Ramik, “Memorandum of Law: Literary Property Rights, 1790-1915,” pp. 5-7. In *Greene v. Bishop* (1858) the decision of the court stated that all the authorities ... affirm the doctrine, that if so much is taken that the value of the original is sensibly and materially diminished, or the labors of the original author are substantially to an injurious extent appropriated by another, that such taking or appropriation is sufficient in point of law to maintain the suit. Ramik’s full report is available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

³²The White Lie, pp. 50, 70, 115.

³³[Manuscript 7, 1867](#), see also Ellen G. White, “Questions and Answers,” [The Review and Herald, 30](#) (October 8, 1867), p. 260.

³⁴*Ibid.*

to explain that except in rare instances, the visions did not provide the exact words in which to describe what she was seeing.

Elsewhere, Mrs. White wrote:

I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne. ³⁵

This statement was made in a long article responding to charges from Battle Creek that her reproofs of the church there were merely her own opinions based on gossip she had heard. This charge Mrs. White honestly and forthrightly denied. She affirmed her deep conviction that the messages she bore were messages from heaven. This would not rule out the fact that they might occasionally contain concepts or words gleaned from her reading; but even in such cases it was the Holy Spirit that convicted her of the truth and value of what she was reading.

On yet another occasion, Mrs. White wrote:

I have not been in the habit of reading any doctrinal articles in the paper, that my mind should not have any understanding of anyone's ideas and views, and that not a mold of any man's theories should have any connection with that which I write. ³⁶

Once again, the context is essential to understanding. This letter was written at a time when G. I. Butler and E. J. Waggoner were locked in heated debate over the meaning of the “law” in Galatians. At this crucial juncture, when she had to counsel both men, she avoided reading doctrinal articles in the paper [*The Signs of the Times*] in order that her counsel would not bear the mold of either Waggoner's or Butler's theories.

Mrs. White's statements about the source of her writings refer consistently to the ultimate authority by which she spoke, not to the “divers manners” in which the Lord communicated to her, nor to the

³⁵Ellen G. White, [Testimonies for the Church 5:67](#).

³⁶[Letter 37, 1887](#).

aid she received in expressing God's truth. Why did she not say more about her use of sources? Perhaps because she had seen how prone people were to see the human elements in her writings as proof that they were merely her own opinion, not divine messages. *The White Lie* is eloquent testimony to the continuing difficulty many people have in recognizing a union of both human and divine elements in inspired writings.

How could it happen that Mrs. White, in describing what she was shown in a vision, employs the words of other authors? ³⁷

Most likely there were times when Mrs. White read an impressive passage in a book and later the Lord called her attention to the same truth while in vision, applying that truth to a specific need in her own life or the life of the church. In such cases, she could easily express a part of what she was shown in language paraphrased from another author. We know of a half dozen or so cases where this appears to have happened. ³⁸

[5] A similar experience occurred in connection with the "Iceberg" vision. Mrs. White read an incident about a ship meeting an iceberg. Then, several days later, during a vision, a ship became a symbol of the church, and the iceberg became the symbol of the opposition and heresies of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and his faction. ³⁹ Just as in the cases where Mrs. White used the words of other authors to describe, in part, what she had seen in vision, here a dramatic event about which she had read offered the Lord a symbolic vehicle in which to convey truth to her.

Is the comparison between the use of literary sources in the Bible and Ellen White's literary borrowing really valid? ⁴⁰

Yes, if one recognizes what issue is involved. Borrowing by Biblical authors has no direct bearing on the ethical propriety of

³⁷The White Lie, pp. 53, 391.

³⁸Ron Graybill, "The 'I Saw' Parallels in Ellen White's Writings," *Adventist Review*, July 29, 1982, pp. 4-6.

³⁹Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), p. 301.

⁴⁰The White Lie, pp. 46, 139.

literary borrowing in the nineteenth century, for concepts of literary property were different in biblical times. However, literary borrowing in the Bible speaks to the question of *inspiration*. In other words, if the question is whether genuinely inspired writers can employ uninspired literary sources, then we can look to the Bible for an answer to that question. When we do, we discover that Biblical writers used sources while writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

The White Lie argues invalidly that if the Gospel writers had borrowed as much as Ellen White did they would have had to borrow every verse. This argument is based on the fact that the reader will find “more than four hundred references to eighty-eight authors in *The Great Controversy*.”⁴² When W. C. White gave these statistics, he was discussing the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy*. At that time, Ellen White instructed her literary assistants to go through the book and supply specific references for the quotations. In doing so, the literary assistants did not attempt to specify where Ellen White originally found the quotation, but where the modern reader could most readily find it. In fact, Mrs. White drew from far fewer authors than the number of references would seem to suggest, for, in many cases, a single author from whom she originally drew quoted from several prior sources himself.⁴³

⁴¹See [The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 7:706, 708](#); Robert W. Olson, One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White, pp. 105-107.

⁴²The White Lie, p. 139.

⁴³See W. C. White, “The Great Controversy—1911 Edition,” in Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 3:433-440](#); Ron Graybill, “How Did Mrs. White Choose and Use Her Historical Sources,” *Spectrum*, Summer, 1972, pp. 49-53.

Chapter 2—The Pioneers And The Prophet

What authority did Ellen White have for the pioneers of the Adventist Church? Did they believe in her inspiration? ¹

Truly, the pioneers should be allowed to speak for themselves. Of the 16 “witnesses” brought forward in *The White Lie* two are represented by statements made by other individuals (Andrews and Clough), one had no direct knowledge of what he was talking about (House), and several in no way express or imply disbelief in the inspiration of her writings (Starr, Lacey, and James and Ellen White). One was simply wrong (Colcord), and the Healdsburg Ministerial Association spokesmen were hostile opponents from the beginning. Fannie Bolton made numerous conflicting statements, and A. G. Daniells and Uriah Smith are misrepresented because their “witness” consists of only isolated comments. Contrary to *The White Lie’s* claim that these individuals were “in most cases” separated from the church after they made these statements, not more than three of the 16 were disfellowshipped for causes relating to their beliefs.

Neither the pioneers nor anyone else has ever claimed that every line Ellen White penned was inspired. She herself said that the “sacred” and the “common” must be distinguished, and that there were times when she had to write on everyday matters and business affairs. ² Consistent with Mrs. White’s statement that she was writing from memory in her autobiographical sketch, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, it has been noted that Mrs. White “did not lay claim to divine aid as she attempted to reconstruct the story of her life or in recounting the happenings at home or in her travels.” ³

¹The White Lie, pp. 200-204.

²Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 1:39](#).

³Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), pp. 46, 47; *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1962), p. 182.

Did Uriah Smith have some periods of doubt concerning Ellen White's prophetic gift?

Yes, he did. One of those is reflected in his letter to D. M. Canright.⁴ But although Smith had some struggles when he was reproved, he took the reproof to heart and soon stood firmly on the integrity and value of Mrs. White's writings. On one occasion he explained to Adventists everywhere how he almost slipped but didn't:

Considerable handle, I understand, has been made in some directions of the fact that the editor of the Review has been troubled over the question of the visions, has been unsound on that question, and at one time came very near giving them up. It strikes me that this is quite a small amount of capital to work up much of a trade on—"came very near giving them up":—but didn't! I also, at one time came very near getting run over by the cars, and rolled into jelly; but I didn't, and so continue to this day. Some have met just such a catastrophe. The difference between them and myself is that they did, and I didn't. Some have given up the visions. The difference between them and myself is the same—they did, and I didn't.⁵

Smith acknowledged that there were times when "circumstances seemed very perplexing" but the weight of evidence in his mind had never "balanced on the side of surrender," and he affirmed his position of trust and confidence.

⁴The White Lie, pp. 200-201.

⁵Uriah Smith, "Personal," [Review and Herald Extra, November 22, 1887](#), p. 15.

J. N. Andrews is said to have doubted Ellen White’s prophetic gift because he saw similarities between Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, and Ellen White’s writings. Did Mrs. White borrow from *Paradise Lost* and did J. N. Andrews question the gift? ⁶

In 1858, after hearing Ellen White give an account of her vision of the great controversy, J. N. Andrews asked her if she had read Milton’s epic. She assured him she had not, so he brought a copy to her home. This was not at all unusual. On several occasions the studious Andrews made gifts of books to the Whites. Interestingly, although *The White Lie* alleges again and again that Ellen White borrowed from Milton, the book provides no evidence to substantiate the claim. Scholarly studies have noted some similar thoughts, but no literary dependence. ⁷

As for J. N. Andrews, early in his experience he found that his parents and in-laws were critical of James and Ellen White, and in a moving confession, said:

My influence against the visions has not been from a multiplicity of words against them.... But I confess I have not stood up for them and borne testimony in their favor. ⁸

⁶The White Lie, pp. 33, 66, 133, 200.

⁷Elizabeth Burgeson, “A Comparative Study of the Fall of Man as Treated by John Milton and Ellen G. White” (Master’s Thesis, Pacific Union College, 1957). Burgeson notes the similarities between Ellen White and John Milton on extra-Biblical information, and wonders why two authors, living two hundred years apart, would be in such agreement. But unless direct literary dependence is demonstrated it cannot be said that Mrs. White actually read Milton’s poem. The ideas of Milton, the great Puritan poet, permeated New England theology for generations. The fact that Mrs. White uses a phrase from Milton in [Education](#), 150 [as noted by A. L. White, “Supplement to the Reprint Edition: Ellen G. White’s Portrayal of the Great Controversy Story,” in Ellen G. White, [The Spirit of Prophecy 4:536](#) (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1969 reprint)], does not of itself indicate literary dependence, since memorable lines of Milton were as current in her time as those of Shakespeare.

⁸J. N. and Angeline Andrews to James and Ellen White, Feb. 2, 1862, cited in Ron Graybill, “John Nevins Andrews as a Family Man,” p. 16.

Later, after he had spent time in the Whites' home and seen the anguish and tears which accompanied the writing of counsels and reproof, he wrote:

My convictions that the testimonies of Sister White are from Heaven, have been greatly strengthened by the opportunity which I have had to observe the life, and experience, and labors of these servants of Christ.⁹

Shortly afterward, he wrote of the important contribution made [6] by the testimonies:

Their work is to unite the people of God in the same mind and in the same judgment upon the meaning of the Scriptures. Mere human judgment, with no direct instruction from heaven, can never search out hidden iniquity, nor adjust dark and complicated church difficulties, nor prevent different and conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures. It would be sad indeed if God could not still converse with His people.¹⁰

Like all of us, the pioneers were people who in their human weakness sometimes struggled with pride and doubt even as we do today, but, with a very few exceptions, those who knew Ellen White best came to believe firmly in her inspiration.

Apparently A. G. Daniells was criticized in his own time for not being a sufficiently strong supporter of Ellen G. White's ministry. What was his attitude?¹¹

Elder Daniells's faith and confidence were unimpaired to the very hours of his death. At the 1922 General Conference he was indeed criticized by some who believed that Ellen White's inspiration was

⁹J. N. Andrews, "The Labors of Bro. and Sr. White," *The Review and Herald*, March 3, 1868, p. 184.

¹⁰J. N. Andrews, "Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White," *The Review and Herald*, February 15, 1870, p. 64.

¹¹The White Lie, pp. 114, 202.

both verbal and inerrant, even in the smallest detail. ¹² Daniells did not hold this rigid view. He was deeply hurt by what he considered to be false and unfounded criticisms of his position regarding Ellen G. White.

Shortly before his death in 1935, he recalled his experience of March, 1903, a day or two before the opening of the General Conference session in Oakland, California. He referred to the Battle Creek crisis and of his agony of soul as he reached out to God for evidence of His support in “the awful battle that was before us.” He told how he wrestled through the hours of the night:

Finally, there fell upon me these words, “If you will stand by My servant until her sun sets in a bright sky, I will stand by you to the last hour of the conflict...” I fell on my side, and I couldn’t talk any more with God. I was overcome. And although I have made mistakes, God has stood by me, and I have never repudiated that woman, nor questioned her loyalty, to my knowledge, from that night to this. O, that was a happy experience to me. And it bound me up with the greatest character that has lived in this dispensation. That is all I can say.

¹³

What was H. Camden Lacey’s role in the preparation of *The Desire of Ages*? ¹⁴

Lacey at one point claimed he was the first Adventist to urge the idea that the Holy Spirit was a person, and that it was because of his influence that Ellen White first referred to the Holy Spirit as “He” instead of “it.” Lacey was wrong in this, since Mrs. White used the

¹²See “Veteran Chief of Adventist Attacks Foes,” and “Acrid Debate Change [sic] Leader,” San Francisco Chronicle, c. May 23, 1922; Claude Holmes to A. G. Daniells, May 1, 1922 (an open letter); “An Interview With J. S. Washburn,” June 4, 1950, White Estate Document File #242; J. S. Washburn to A. L. White, Oct. 7, 1948; “General Conference Proceedings: Seventeenth Meeting,” [The Review and Herald, May 24, 1922](#), p. 228.

¹³“Parting Interview Between W. C. White and A. G. Daniells,” March 20, 1935, White Estate Document File #312-C.

¹⁴The White Lie, pp. 119, 203.

personal pronoun “He” to refer to the Holy Spirit in the very first edition of *Steps to Christ*, published in 1892 while Lacey was still a college student in Battle Creek, and well before Mrs. White or her literary assistants became acquainted with him. ¹⁵

At the time *The Desire of Ages* was being prepared he was 25 years old; he was at the Avondale School teaching, not Bible, but mathematics, natural science, and elocution. ¹⁶ Lacey himself, in response to an inquiry, wrote that his only contribution to the preparation of *The Desire of Ages* was to help in the arrangement of the sentences, or paragraphs, or the choice of a more suitable word in the first two or three chapters:

Never at any time, was there an alteration of the thought, or the insertion of an idea that was not already expressed in the original text. The resultant copy was always submitted to Sister White herself for final approval.

The entire *Desire of Ages* as it is now printed is, therefore, I hold, the product of Sister White’s mind and heart, guided by the good Spirit of God. And the “editing” was merely technical. ¹⁷

Elsewhere in the letter he makes clear his understanding of the book:

I gladly and with all my heart accept the **Desire of Ages** as an inspired book; indeed, I regard it as the most spiritual life of Christ, outside the Gospels, ever given to His church.... I have scores of extracts taken from this wonderful book, and from other writings of Sister White. I value them as products of the same “Spirit of Prophecy” as indicated in the Scriptures. And thousands

¹⁵The Holy Spirit exalts and glorifies the Saviour. It is His office to present Christ.... Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Chicago, Ill.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1892), p. 105, standard edition, p. 91.

¹⁶The White Lie, p. 203, identifies Lacey as a Bible teacher at five Adventist colleges. However, he was not the Bible teacher at Avondale at the time these incidents took place.

¹⁷H. C. Lacey to Samuel Kaplan, July 24, 1936.

of my hearers in church and classroom will bear witness to that. ¹⁸

Was a failure to grasp the true nature of inspiration one reason why some persons in the past questioned the propriety of Ellen White's use of literary sources and her reworking of her writings? ¹⁹

Conservative Christians have held two general views with regard to the nature of inspiration. The commonly held view—sometimes called verbal inspiration—holds to the belief that the Holy Spirit inspires the exact words of a Heaven-sent message. For many this would mean that a truly inspired writer would have no recourse to uninspired sources nor would he ever need to rephrase a message, since, in their thinking, a Spirit-indited message would be in the exact form preferred by God.

Other Christians believe the Biblical data indicates that the Holy Spirit inspires the person, and only occasionally specifies the words he is to use. The Holy Spirit imbues his mind with the thoughts or messages that He would have him convey (2 Peter 1:21). This view is sometimes described as thought inspiration. Under the continued guidance of the Spirit the prophet speaks or writes in his own words, according to his ability, what he has been instructed (cf. 1 Samuel 3:11-18) or shown (cf. Revelation 1:10, 11). Thus, he may be led to draw upon the writings of others to frame more effectively the intent of the message (cf. Titus 1:12, 13). On occasion he may rewrite or rephrase an earlier message to make it clearer and more forceful (cf. Jeremiah 36:32).

This latter view of the revelation-inspiration process was held by the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, a failure to grasp the implications of this position led some later workers to misunderstand the procedures employed by Ellen White in producing her writings. A broader view of the Biblical doctrine of inspiration would have prevented the perplexity then, even as it will now for the membership of the church. Statements by W. C. White,

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹The White Lie, p. 199.

who assisted his mother in her publishing work, set forth both Ellen White's position, and that of the church, on inspiration:

Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration, and I do not find that my father, or Elder Bates, Andrews, Smith, or Waggoner, put forth this claim. If there were verbal inspiration in writing her manuscripts, why should there be on her part the work of addition or adaptation? It is a fact that Mother often takes one of her manuscripts, and goes over it thoughtfully, making additions that develop the thought still further. ²⁰

You refer to the little statement which I sent you regarding verbal inspiration. This statement made by the General Conference of 1883 ²¹ was in perfect harmony with the beliefs and positions of the pioneers in this cause, and it was, I think, the only position taken by any of our ministers and teachers until Prof. [W. W.] Prescott, president of Battle Creek College [1885-1894], presented in a very forceful way another view—the view held and presented by Professor Gausen. [Probably Louis Gausen, a Swiss clergyman (1790-1863), who maintained that the Bible was verbally inspired.] The acceptance of that view by the students in the Battle Creek College and many others, including Elder Haskell, has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing.

[7]

Sister White never accepted the Gausen theory regarding verbal inspiration, either as applied to her own work or as applied to the Bible. ²²

²⁰A statement made by W. C. White before the General Conference Council, October 30, 1911, cited in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* 3:437.

²¹We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.... *The Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883, p. 741.

²²W. C. White to L. E. Froom, January 8, 1928, cited in *Selected Messages* 3:454, 455.

**Where can one read a good sample of the pioneers' views on
Ellen White's prophetic gift?**

Adventist Book Centers are now able to supply the book *The Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy*, a facsimile reprint of periodical and pamphlet articles written by the contemporaries of Ellen G. White.

Chapter 3—Ellen White And The Bible

Do Seventh-day Adventists make Ellen White the final, infallible standard of all Adventist faith and practice? ¹ Has the church changed its position on this topic in recent years?

The church has not changed its position, in spite of the imprecision of some individuals in attempting to explain the church's position. The church today holds the same position that the pioneers held. At the General Conference Session in Dallas in 1980, a *Statement of Fundamental Beliefs* was adopted which stated in part:

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. *They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.* (Emphasis supplied.)

The above statement clearly places the Bible as the standard and rule of Adventist faith and practice. The writings of Ellen White must be judged by that standard.

Do Adventists consider Ellen White “canonical”?

No. The “canon” is the collection of books that make up the Bible. Seventh-day Adventists believe the canon was closed with the last book of the New Testament. Ellen White expressed herself very clearly on the issue:

1. During the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, there was no written revelation.

¹The White Lie, pp. 124, 34, 59, 96.

2. The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses.
3. This work continued during the long period of sixteen hundred years....
4. This work continued ... to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel.
5. The completion of the Old and New Testaments marks the close of the canon of Scripture. ²

In connection with the above statements, Ellen White also noted how the Spirit speaks apart from the Sacred Canon:

During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God. ³

We can say unequivocally that the church has never considered Ellen White's writings canonical and does not believe so today. We do affirm, on the other hand, that she spoke by the same inspiration of the Holy Spirit as Bible writers did. The pioneers spoke to this point repeatedly:

James White: The Bible is a perfect, and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfillment of His word in these last

²Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, v, viii.

³*The Great Controversy*, viii.

days by dreams and visions, according to Peter's testimony. True visions are given to lead us to God, and His written Word. ⁴

Uriah Smith: The Protestant principle of "the Bible and the Bible alone," is of itself good and true; and we stand upon it as firmly as anyone can; but when reiterated in connection with outspoken denunciations of the visions, it has specious appearance for evil. So used, it contains a covert insinuation, most effectually calculated to warp the judgment of the unguarded, that to believe the visions is to leave the Bible, and to cling to the Bible, is to discard the visions.... When we claim to stand on the Bible and the Bible alone, we bind ourselves to receive, unequivocally and fully, all that the Bible teaches. ⁵

Is Ellen White's inspiration equal to that of the Bible?

Her inspiration is equal in *quality* to the inspiration of the Bible, but the *function* and *purpose* of Ellen White's inspiration is different from that of the Bible. A parallel is found in Scripture. The prophet Nathan was as fully inspired as King David, but Nathan's inspiration had a different function from David's. David's inspired writings became a part of the canon of Scripture. Nathan's inspiration did not result in any canonical writings. [8]

One cannot make differences in the quality of inspiration because inspiration is either present or absent, so that various manifestations of it cannot be distinguished by degrees. The Holy Spirit was just as careful in the superintendence of Nathan's inspired messages as in David's writings, although, in harmony with the divine purpose, only the latter were incorporated into the canon.

⁴James White, *A Word to the Little Flock* (1846), p. 13.

⁵Uriah Smith, "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?" *The Review and Herald*, January 13, 1863, p. 52. Smith goes on to prove that the Bible teaches the continuance of the gifts in the last days, obligating us to accept such genuine manifestations if we are truly to stand upon the Bible, and the Bible alone.

Ellen White's writings do not function as a standard or rule for doctrine. The Bible does function in this manner. In this sense Ellen White does not have equal *doctrinal* authority with the Bible.

Chapter 4—The Question Of Infallibility

Ellen White is said to have made a number of errors. Do we claim she was infallible?

No, and neither did Ellen White claim “infallibility.” For example, when she was criticized for stating the wrong number of rooms in a sanitarium—40 instead of 38—she said:

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 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. ¹

Ellen White also recognized that she was not infallible in her personal behavior. She once wrote her husband:

I wish that self should be hid in Jesus. I wish self to be crucified. I do not claim infallibility, or even perfection of Christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my life. Had I followed my Saviour more closely, I should not have to mourn so much my unlikeness to His dear image. ²

In this connection, there is a Bible experience worth noting in [Acts 21](#). The Apostle Paul was especially called to preach to the Gentiles. Because he did not include the Jewish ceremonial law in his preaching there were certain Jewish Christians that looked upon him with suspicion. Upon returning to Jerusalem from a successful missionary journey among the Gentiles, he was persuaded to lend his

¹Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 1:38](#).

²[Letter 27, 1876](#).

influence to the observance of certain ceremonial rites that were no longer required, in order to conciliate his critics. Ellen White makes the following significant comment, which she would doubtless apply to herself as well:

He was not authorized of God to concede so much as they had asked. This concession was not in harmony with his teachings, nor with the firm integrity of his character. His advisors were not infallible. Though some of these men wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, yet when not under its direct influence they sometimes erred. ³

W. C. White did not claim infallibility for his mother with regard to historical dates and details:

In some of the historical matters such as are brought out in *Patriarchs and Prophets* and in *Acts of the Apostles*, and in *Great Controversy*, the main outlines were made very clear and plain to her, and when she began to develop these topics, she was left to study the Bible and history to get dates and geographical relations and to perfect her description of details. ⁴

W. C. White also wrote:

Regarding Mother's writings and their use as authority on points of history and chronology, Mother has never wished our brethren to treat them as authority regarding the details of history or historical dates. ⁵

In summary, Ellen White did not claim to be above errors in writing on common and business matters which did not involve counsels and messages from the Lord. She recognized that she was not infallible in her personal life, and her son did not feel she should be used as an authority on incidental details in her historical writing.

³Ellen G. White, [Sketches from the Life of Paul](#), 214.

⁴W. C. White as quoted in Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 3:462](#).

⁵W. C. White, [Selected Messages 3:446](#)

It is true, of course, that she never used the term “infallible” to refer to herself or her writings in any context, but she did claim that the messages she gave were those given her by the Lord. ⁶

What about the errors she is said to have made, not only in history, but in science, health, theology, and exegesis? ⁷

We can hardly appreciate what times were like more than one hundred years ago when Ellen White wrote in the areas of health, science, and nutrition. ⁸ When she spoke of *malignancy* in connection with tobacco in 1864, a few health reformers agreed with her, but some physicians were prescribing smoking cigars for lung ailments. How did she know which position to take? When she spoke about the profound effects of prenatal influence in terms closely paralleling the pronouncements of science today, science knew little if anything about the subject. While she was emphasizing exercise and fresh air for invalids, many physicians were prescribing closed rooms and prolonged bedrest. Her counsels regarding air pollution, effect of diet on blood circulation, the use of salt, alcohol, mind-body relationship, and other topics, have been vindicated by modern research. All such statements were considered by some critics as errors when she first wrote them.

Because of difficulties and discrepancies, there are those who oppose the modern prophetic voice. And there also are those who look for “mistakes” in the Bible. Ellen White found a valuable gem of truth on this topic in a sermon by Henry Melvill. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she reset that gem and preserved it for us:

All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul,
or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture
difficulties from the plainest revealed truth. ⁹

To attempt to prove that all the alleged “errors” in Ellen White’s writings are not actually errors, is not a profitable exercise. If a

⁶Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 3:48-86](#).

⁷The White Lie, pp. 32, 34, 37, 57, 138, 141, 164, 271.

⁸See The Ellen G. White Estate, *Medical Science and the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1971), for further information on this topic.

⁹Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 1:16](#); cf. Henry Melvill, *Sermons* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1844), p. 131.

critic charges her with ten errors, and those ten are proven not to be errors, the critic will be ready with fifteen further allegations. Each individual must decide for himself whether the weight of evidence supports or discredits Ellen White's claim to the prophetic gift.

[9] In studying difficult passages either in the Bible or in other writings which the Holy Spirit inspired, it is well to ask the following questions: Do I really understand the context, meaning and importance of the inspired writer's statement? Do I understand fully the evidence that is in apparent conflict with the inspired statement? Can the two sets of data be harmonized? May I reasonably expect a better understanding to be forthcoming from further study, experiment, or divine illumination? Can the issue be left unresolved? To those who listen, the Holy Spirit speaks clearly through inspired writings, regardless of occasional difficulties that may seem to appear. ¹⁰

¹⁰Ron Graybill, "Ellen G. White's Literary Work: An Update," pp. 31, 32.

Chapter 5—The Visions

Mrs. White suffered a head injury as a child and bouts with ill-health throughout her life. Could her visions have been related to her injuries or illness? Could they have been caused by hypnosis, mesmerism, or epilepsy? ¹

The attempt to discredit the work of the Holy Spirit by attributing it to natural causes is as old as the Bible itself. After all, the miracles of Pentecost were attributed to drunkenness. Once one rejects belief in a divine source of the visions, it is to be expected that natural explanations will be sought.

Early in her experience Ellen White’s visions were thought by some to be the result of mesmerism, an early form of hypnotism. She was just beginning her work as the Lord’s messenger, and the next time she felt the power of God come upon her, she began to doubt and resist the vision. She was reproved and struck dumb for twenty-four hours. In the following vision she was shown her “sin in doubting the power of God,” and was told that this was the reason for being struck dumb. “After that,” she said, “I dared not doubt, or for a moment resist the power of God, however others might think of me.” ²

Some who questioned her visions, beginning with D. M. Canright in 1887, attributed them to epileptic seizures, noting that there were similarities between the two. As the visions began, she lost her strength; later during the vision she regained it, sometimes exhibiting superhuman strength. During the visions she did not breathe. Her eyes were open, yet she did not recognize others in the vicinity. Because these physical experiences remotely resemble seizures, it has been suggested by critics that her visions were not visions at all.

F. D. Nichol, in his book, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, asks the question: “How should a prophet act in vision?” He notes

¹The White Lie, pp. 170, 208, 211-213.

²[Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 89.](#)

that because prophets are people, they have physical and nervous systems, and as a vision is not a normal state, it should be expected that certain non-normal experiences would take place.³

Daniel experienced a loss of strength, then extra strength. He was struck dumb and there was no breath in him ([Daniel 10](#)). Balaam fell into a “trance,” “having his eyes open” ([Numbers 24](#)). The effect on John was that he “fell as dead” ([Revelation 1:17](#)). When Saul of Tarsus had his first vision “he fell to the earth,” “trembling” ([Acts 9](#)). After a vision Zecharias, father of John the Baptist, was “speechless” ([Luke 1](#)). At times critics of the Bible have tried to explain visions as being the result of mental illness, too.

One characteristic familiar to continuing seizures is what is called “diminished mental capacity.” Simply stated, the mind is weakened with repeated occurrences. It is estimated that Ellen White had about 200 open visions and some 1800 prophetic dreams. The open visions in the earlier years were accompanied by physical phenomena. If these were not visions, but epileptic seizures, we would expect mental deterioration through the years. We find no such evidence. On the contrary, there was observable development of her capabilities. She speaks of better health in later years than in her younger years. Thousands of pages of handwritten material from her pen do not contain any evidence of a progressive decline in her ability.

Furthermore, where is a single example of anyone whose frequent seizures enabled him to guide a church so wisely and counsel a people so helpfully? What is most important, after all, is the message conveyed by the visions, not the specific way in which God conveys that message.

What was the relationship of Ellen White’s earliest visions to those of William Foy and Hazen Foss?⁴

William Ellis Foy (1818-1893) and Hazen Little Foss (1819-1893) both received visions prior to the Disappointment of 1844. Both men lived to hear Ellen White relate her early visions and acknowledged that what she described, they had seen, too.

³Nichol, *op. cit.*, pp. 57, 58.

⁴The White Lie, p. 47.

Ellen White, as a young woman, had heard Foy lecture in Portland, Maine, sometime between 1842 and 1844. Not much is known concerning him, although recent research confirms that he was a black reared near Augusta, Maine. He is often confused with Foss, but unlike Foss, Foy did tell of his visions and published the first two in a pamphlet. He never felt he had grieved the Spirit of God, and he continued to work as a Free-Will Baptist minister for many years. A brief personal history was published along with the accounts of his first two visions in 1845 in a pamphlet titled *The Christian Experience of William E. Foy Together with the Two Visions He Received in the Months of Jan. and Feb. 1842*. According to J. N. Loughborough, it was a third vision, in 1844, that Foy could not understand, and which he later heard Ellen White relate. So far as is known, that third vision never was published.

Hazen Foss similarly received a vision prior to the Disappointment, but he refused to relate it. When told that the vision was taken from him, he feared the consequences and called a meeting at which he tried to recall the vision but could not. He heard Ellen White relate the same vision early in 1845, and testified to her of his experience. Although for many years Foss was thought to be a relative of Ellen White's brother-in-law,⁵ it was not until about 1960 that the exact relationship became known through genealogical records.⁶ Hazen was the younger brother of Samuel Hoyt Foss, who married Ellen White's older sister, Mary, in 1842.

Both Hazen Foss and William Foy recognized the visions given to Ellen White to be the same as those given them, and since the Lord originally intended that one of these men should be His prophetic messenger to the remnant church, there would, of course, be parallels between their visions and those of Ellen White. Although a few such similarities can be seen between Foy's published visions of heaven and those of Ellen White, there are so many marked differences that

⁵See W. C. White, "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White," *The Review and Herald*, March 14, 1935, p. 10; A. W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1961), p. 78, note 13.

⁶George Thomas Little, *The Descendants of George Little* (Auburn, Me.: The Author, 1882), pp. 290, 291.

The White Lie's allegation that her visions were “almost a carbon copy” of Foy’s is a substantial exaggeration.

Did Mrs. White promise to answer the questions of Drs. Stewart, Sadler, and others, and then, after she received the questions, “conveniently” have a vision instructing her not to do so? ⁷

[10] On March 30, 1906, Mrs. White wrote a testimony addressed “To Those Who Are Perplexed Regarding The Testimonies Relating To The Medical Missionary Work.”⁸ In it she spoke of being directed by the Lord to request those with perplexities and objections regarding the testimonies to write them out and submit them to those who desired to remove the perplexities.

On June 3, 1906, Mrs. White wrote concerning a vision she had received a few days before, in which she was speaking before a group of people answering questions about her work and writings. She stated:

I was directed by a messenger from heaven not to take up the burden of picking up and answering all the sayings and doubts that are being put into many minds.
⁹

These two statements, written about two months apart, are cited as evidence that Mrs. White’s “revelations” could often be quite conveniently arranged so as to protect her interests. An examination of the events of that period, however, sheds considerable light upon the apparent reversal of Mrs. White’s invitation for questions.

Upon receipt of Mrs. White’s testimony, several individuals acted upon her request and sent their questions to her office. A review of Ellen White’s correspondence over the next months gives evidence that she indeed took these questions seriously. Questions ranged from the ridiculous and trivial to those deserving a careful, studied response. In a letter to friends written June 15, 1906, she wrote:

⁷The White Lie, pp. 60, 170.

⁸Letter 120, 1906.

⁹Manuscript 61, 1906.

Letters, full of questions, are continually crowding in upon us.... If I can present to the people the facts in the case, as they exist, it may save some from making shipwreck of faith. I have been sent some of the most frivolous questions in regard to the Testimonies given me by the Lord. ¹⁰

The White Estate files contain more than 30 letters written by Ellen White between April and October, 1906, dealing with questions raised about various phases of her work. In addition to these, articles were published in the *Review and Herald*. ¹¹ *Some of the letters and statements made are here listed:*

- [Letter 170, 1906](#), June 13, 1906, regarding the words “I,” “we,” “us,” etc., in the testimonies;
- [Letter 206, 1906](#), June 14, 1906, re what is inspired (every word? every letter?);
- Talk (DF #247), June 26, 1906, re the relationship of W. C. White to Ellen White’s work;
- Letter of June 28, 1906, re the title “prophet”;
- [Letter 225, 1906](#), July 8, 1906, re the writing and sending of the testimonies.

It will be noticed that all of these responses, in fact, 80 percent of those on file, were written after the vision of May 25 in which she was instructed “not to answer all the sayings and doubts.” ¹² Mrs. White again reviewed the question of the Chicago buildings, ¹³ even though she had dealt with this matter back in 1903.

Not all questions were answered by Mrs. White. Some were referred to her staff whom she directed to look up past statements on the subjects to meet the criticisms. W. C. White wrote on July 13, 1906:

¹⁰[Letter 180, 1906](#).

¹¹See Ellen G. White, “A Messenger,” [The Review and Herald, July 26, 1906](#), pp. 8, 9; “Hold Fast the Beginning of Your Confidence,” [The Review and Herald, August 9, 1906](#), p. 8; “Correct Views Concerning the Testimonies,” [The Review and Herald, August 30, 1906](#), pp. 8, 9, and [The Review and Herald, September 6, 1906](#), pp. 7, 8.

¹²[Manuscript 61, 1906](#).

¹³[Manuscript 33, 1906](#).

For several days Brother Crisler has been hunting up what has been written in past years regarding contracts and agreements. I think he will be able to submit to Mother his collection of manuscripts early next week.

¹⁴

This was in full harmony with Mrs. White's original invitation where she asked that "it all be written out, and submitted to *those* who desire to remove the perplexities."¹⁵ (Emphasis supplied.)

Two who sent the greatest number of questions were Elder William S. Sadler and Dr. Charles E. Stewart. Dr. Stewart's questions eventually came into published form under the title, *A Response to An Urgent Testimony from Mrs. Ellen G. White*, later referred to as "The Blue Book." Writing to Dr. Stewart about his set of objections, W. C. White explained the reason why some questions received no personal reply from Mrs. White:

But that portion of the document addressed to her which takes the form of an attack upon her integrity and her work, she will refer to her brethren to answer, because for many years she has been instructed that it is not any part of her legitimate work to answer the numerous and violent attacks which have been made upon her by her critics and the enemies of her work.¹⁶

That had been Mrs. White's consistent attitude since the earliest days of her ministry.¹⁷ One reason that some issues were never answered by Ellen White's Office is that the General Conference Committee had only recently (May, 1906) published a refutation of charges made by A. T. Jones against the Spirit of Prophecy, detailing answers to many of the same questions.¹⁸

¹⁴W. C. White to Elders Daniells, Prescott and Irwin, July 13, 1906.

¹⁵Letter 120, 1906.

¹⁶W. C. White to C. E. Stewart, June 9, 1907.

¹⁷See Ellen G. White, "Our Present Position," *The Review and Herald*, August 28, 1883, pp. 1, 2.

¹⁸A Statement Refuting Charges Made by A. T. Jones Against the Spirit of Prophecy and the Plan of Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination (Washington, D.C.: General Conference Committee, May, 1906).

The fact that Mrs. White engaged in taking up objections *after* receiving the vision of May 25, indicates that that instruction did not cancel her earlier request. What, then, did that second vision mean? Exactly what it says:

I was directed by a messenger from heaven not to take the burden of picking up and answering **all** the sayings and doubts that are being put into many minds. (Emphasis supplied.)

Ellen White was not to feel it her duty to endeavor to answer those endless questions from doubters who would accept no answers. Referring to the same divine counsel, she wrote on July 17, 1906:

I am now instructed that I am not to be hindered in my work by those who engage in suppositions regarding its nature, whose minds are struggling with so many intricate problems connected with the supposed work of a prophet. My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend.

In response to the enemy's work on human minds, I am to sow the good seed. When questions suggested by Satan arise, I will remove them if I can. But those who are picking at straws had better be educating mind and heart to take hold of the grand and soul-saving truths that God has given through the humble messenger, in the place of becoming channels through whom Satan can communicate doubt and questioning.

To allow images of straw to be created as something to attack, is one of the most unprofitable things that one can engage in. It is possible for one to educate himself to become Satan's agent in passing along his suggestions. As fast as one is cleared away, another will be proffered.

I have been instructed to say, "The Lord would not have my mind thus employed."¹⁹

¹⁹Letter 224, 1906.

Ellen White closed her letter with a statement suggesting that the problems surrounding her work were the result of focusing on the words rather than the message of her writings—the same difficulty regarding the use of inspired writings which is seen in our own day:

More and more I shall present the message to the people in Scripture language. Then if exception be taken by anyone, his contention must be with the Bible.

²⁰

²⁰Ibid.

Chapter 6—The Shut Door

[11]

For a time the pioneers believed that the door of mercy was shut in 1844. Was Ellen White specifically shown in vision that this was the case? ¹

The shut door era in Adventist history is a fascinating but involved one. To understand it clearly requires a thorough knowledge of the events of 1844 and the years immediately following. The fact that early Adventists at first concluded that probation closed for the world on October 22, 1844, and that Ellen White's first vision seemed to support this view has for more than a hundred years been used against her by people who seek to impair confidence in her work.

Immediately after the passing of the time in 1844, those Adventists who believed prophecy had been fulfilled could only conclude that probation for the world had closed on Oct. 22. The sacrilegious scoffing and sarcasm of worldly people lent credibility to this conclusion. Although the youthful Ellen Harmon at first apparently believed that her visions confirmed the shut door position, she later realized that this was not the case. She did consistently maintain, however, that the door was shut against those individuals who had resisted their honest convictions by rejecting the message of warning. Meanwhile, references in her very first vision to the 144,000 gave a broad hint of a yet future evangelistic thrust.

In 1874, in answering charges made on this point, she declared, "I never had a vision that no more sinners would be converted."² Pioneer writers were clear on this as well. For instance, Uriah Smith wrote two years later:

¹The White Lie, pp. 37-43.

²Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 1:74](#).

The visions have never taught the end of probation in the past, or the close of the day of salvation for sinners, called by our opponents the shut-door doctrine. ³

The dawning of the light, in early 1845, on the transfer of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary which occurred in 1844 ultimately provided a solution to the problem. The pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, seeking light, saw a door that closed and another which was opened as Christ took up His ministry in the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary in heaven. This unfolding truth enabled our forefathers to maintain their confidence in God's leadings in their past experience, even as they grasped the concept of a great mission yet before them.

Ellen White, who passed through the experience, explains this transition of understanding in her 1884 book, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, in the chapter titled "An Open and a Shut Door" and in *The Great Controversy*, published a few years later, in a chapter titled "In the Holy of Holies." Reading the setting of the experience in chapter 22, "Prophecies Fulfilled," and chapter 23, "What Is the Sanctuary?" provides an illuminating background. Ellen White also gave helpful explanations in 1883 in a document reproduced in *Selected Messages*, book 1, chapter 5, "An Explanation of Early Statements."

³Uriah Smith, "'Wroth with the Woman.' [Revelation 12:17.](#)" [The Review and Herald](#), August 17, 1876, p. 60.

Chapter 7—The Literary Assistants

With more than a thousand books in her library at the time of her death, how could Mrs. White have read and borrowed from them all? Didn't her literary assistants do some of the borrowing for her? ¹

The fact is that at this point in research on this project, there are fewer than one hundred books from which there is solid evidence of literary borrowing. In many cases that evidence involves only a single brief passage. *The White Lie* provides or alleges parallels to only about 35 specific sources. Nevertheless, there is simply no reason to assume Ellen White was incapable of reading all the books from which she is alleged to have borrowed. True, she was often very busy, but she made good use of her time.

What is more to the point, there is no evidence that the literary assistants were responsible for bringing material from other authors into Ellen White's writings. "There is one thing that even the most competent editor cannot do," Marian Davis wrote, "and that is to prepare a manuscript before it is written."²

It is true that a few sentences from James Wylie appear in the Huss chapter of *The Great Controversy* which are not found in the handwritten rough draft.

Ellen White drew extensively from Wylie in that handwritten draft, but we do not know what further stages of writing she might have done on the chapter. Furthermore, the edited manuscript was sent immediately to Ellen White for her approval.

¹The White Lie, p. 281.

²Marian Davis to W. C. White, Aug. 9, 1897.

Ellen White died before *Prophets and Kings* was completed. Would not that book be an example of where literary assistants borrowed for her?

Not at all. In his article, “The Story of *Prophets and Kings*,”³ Arthur L. White quotes extensively from the correspondence of Clarence Crisler, who provided literary assistance to Ellen White for *Prophets and Kings*. These letters, written at the very time the work was going forward, indicate that on these spiritual matters, Mrs. White’s mind remained keen to the end. The last two chapters, which were not quite finished at the time of her death, were filled out, not from other authors, but from manuscripts Mrs. White herself had written earlier and left on file.

Did some of Ellen White’s literary assistants turn against her and criticize her?⁴

The one literary assistant to criticize Ellen White was Fannie Bolton. All of the known documents and letters relating to her experience with Ellen White are now published as *The Fannie Bolton Story: A Collection of Source Documents*.

Ellen White was concerned about Miss Bolton’s spiritual immaturity from the first time she employed her. In the course of her employment, her experience was very unstable. Fannie criticized Mrs. White, then, on more than a dozen occasions, wrote out “confessions” of her wrong course. Yet, through all this, Mrs. White’s patience was so great that she continued to employ Fannie through many of these cycles of criticism and confession, and on the occasions when she did dismiss her from employment, she hired her again. In the end, Fannie left Mrs. White’s employment by her own choice.

The allegation that Mrs. White was also criticized by Mary Clough, another of her literary assistants, has no foundation in contemporary documents, but is based only on a memory statement of G. B. Starr recorded many years later. Mary Clough was a niece

³ Arthur L. White, “The Story of *Prophets and Kings*,” *Adventist Review*, June 25, 1981, pp. 10-13.

⁴ *The White Lie*, pp. 116, 201, 202.

of Ellen White, but she was not a Seventh-day Adventist. She was separated from Ellen White's work not because of any criticism, but because she chose not to abide by the standards of the home in Sabbath observance. [12]

Marian Davis was one of Mrs. White's most important literary assistants. How did she view these matters?

Marian at one point heard that Fannie Bolton had said that she had been given instruction to "fill out the points" in an Ellen White testimony so that the testimony was virtually Miss Bolton's. Marian responded:

I cannot think that anyone who has been connected with Sr. White's work could make such a statement as this. I cannot think that anyone who is acquainted with Sr. White's manner of writing could possibly believe it. The burden she feels when the case of an individual is presented before her, the intense pressure under which she works, often rising at midnight to write out the warnings given her, and often for days, weeks, or even months, writing again and again concerning it, as if she could not free herself from the feeling of responsibility for that soul,—no one who has known anything of these experiences, could believe that she would entrust to another the writing of a testimony.

For more than twenty years I have been connected with Sister White's work. During this time I have never been asked either to write out a testimony from oral instruction, or to fill out the points in matter already written.⁵

⁵Marian Davis to G. A. Irwin, April 23, 1900.

What was the work of the literary assistants? Did they merely correct spelling and punctuation?

W. C. White answered the question in a letter from a woman who wondered if the thoughts and expressions she read in Ellen White's published works were really from Mrs. White:

The secretaries and copyists who prepare Mother's writings for the printer remove repetitions so that the matter may be brought into the allotted space. They correct bad grammar and they fit the matter for publication. They sometimes carry her best expressions of thought from one paragraph to another but do not introduce their own thoughts into the matter. The thoughts and expressions which you mention are Mother's own thoughts and expressions. ⁶

Mrs. White once referred to Marian Davis as "my bookmaker," and then explained:

She does her work in this way: She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it.

The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. ⁷

Contrary to *The White Lie*, Mrs. White was in control of her writings and of what was published in her name. She says:

I read over all that is copied [from her handwritten drafts], to see that everything is as it should be. I read all the book manuscript before it is sent to the printer. ⁸

⁶W. C. White to Julia Malcolm, Dec. 10, 1894.

⁷Ellen G. White, [Selected Messages 3:91](#).

⁸[Selected Messages 3:90](#).

The many personal letters exchanged between the literary assistants, W. C. White, and Ellen White leave no doubt that this was indeed the way Mrs. White's works were prepared for publication.⁹

⁹See "How The Desire of Ages was Written," for an extensive collection of such correspondence. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

Chapter 8—White Estate Research Policies

The White Lie is replete with criticism of the restrictive research policies of the Ellen White Estate. What is the White Estate doing to facilitate research, and what restrictions are imposed? ¹

In 1982, at the time *The White Lie* was published, research in Ellen White’s unpublished materials was guided by the “manuscript release” policy. This policy accomplished three purposes:

- It acquainted church leaders with materials going into general circulation.
- It made sure that the letter or portion of a letter which was requested for release was accompanied by enough context to make its meaning clear.
- It protected the privacy of pioneer workers and church members whose mistakes or sins may be revealed in the confidential messages the Lord gave to His messenger to be passed on to them.

Operating under this policy, research in Ellen White’s letters and manuscripts was pursued by hundreds of students each year. Every month the White Estate Board of Trustees approved “manuscript releases” at the request of seminary students and others from around the world. Six Ellen G. White-S.D.A. Research Centers were in operation in various parts of the world, encouraging study in Ellen White’s unpublished materials.

All through the years since the 1930s when graduate studies were first taken up by Seventh-day Adventist educators, the White Estate staff has encouraged and assisted in research by those developing their master’s theses and doctoral dissertations. Recognition of this may be found in the introductory pages of scores of such documents.

¹The White Lie, pp. 32, 59, 84, 87, 163, 197, 198, 200, 205, 218.

In the years since 1982, six more Ellen G. White-S.D.A. Research Centers have been established in various parts of the world and a third branch office has opened at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama. (The Research Center at Loma Linda University became a branch office in 1985.) To further facilitate research in the unpublished materials, the White Estate is in the process of placing all of Ellen G. White's letters and manuscripts on CD-ROM, as it has done with all of her published works.

Why hasn't Donald McAdams' study of the Huss manuscript been released? What about Ron Graybill's similar study of material Mrs. White wrote on Martin Luther? ²

Ron Graybill's *Analysis of E. G. White's Luther Manuscript* was advertised in the White Estate's catalogue of *Documents Available* and was published for general distribution well before *The White Lie* was published. Dr. McAdams's study of the Huss chapter in *The Great Controversy* is likewise available. What has not been released for publication are a number of the pages of Ellen White's handwritten draft of the Huss manuscript as transcribed by Dr. McAdams. This material was sent to all E. G. White Research Centers where it might be examined by any responsible researcher. The reason it has not been published is that it was hastily prepared by Ellen White at a time when she was not at all well. The handwritten draft is perhaps the poorest sample of her handwritten documents available. If published, it could give a distorted picture of the quality of her work. Her work on the Luther manuscript is more representative and thus has been published both in facsimile and typed transcript in the Graybill study.

[13]

It is alleged that the White Estate and the church have been trying to "cover up" Mrs. White's literary borrowing. Just what has been known in the past about this topic, and what has been shared with the church?

In 1933, W. C. White and D. E. Robinson of the White Estate prepared "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen

²The White Lie, pp. 84, 85, 164.

G. White” which spoke quite candidly about Ellen White’s use of sources insofar as those sources were known at that time. At the Advanced Bible School in 1935, W. C. White again discussed the topic, mentioning a number of sources. Interestingly, a survey was conducted among the ministers and teachers attending that 1935 session.³ They were asked which points of criticism then being leveled at Mrs. White seemed most important. Nearly all of them wanted answers to the charge that some of her early writings had been “suppressed,”⁴ and just as many were concerned about the 1856 prediction that some then living would be translated.⁵ Only half of the group thought it would be important to answer the plagiarism charge. If these attitudes were typical, they indicate that the issue of Ellen White’s literary borrowing was not as high a priority question in the church as it is now.

Hundreds of ministers attending the A. L. White classes on Prophetic Guidance in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and its extension schools between 1956 and 1971 and by Paul Gordon since that time have heard the subject discussed in the classroom.

More recently the 1933 pamphlet, “Brief Statements,” was widely distributed as a supplement to the *Adventist Review* and is currently available from the Ellen G. White Estate, as are W. C. White’s lectures at the Advanced Bible School.

Three voluminous chapters on “Literary Borrowings” were published in 1951 in the F. D. Nichol book, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*. Until recently, however, the extent of literary borrowing was not known by those in the Ellen White Estate. Although the topic was not stressed, from time to time what was known was communicated to the church, and new information will continue to be made available.

³Tim Poirier, “Results of a Survey Conducted at the 1935 Advanced Bible School.” Available from the Ellen G. White Estate.

⁴Suppression charges in the 1930s related particularly to *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, and *A Word to the Little Flock*. Both of these early publications have since been reprinted and are available in Adventist Book Centers.

⁵Ellen White provides a solution to this difficulty in [Selected Messages 1:66, 69](#).

Chapter 9—The Basic Issues

How should a person decide whether to believe The White Lie or to accept Ellen G. White as a genuine recipient of the prophetic gift?

When the Majesty of the Universe created men and women, He endowed them with the power of choice. What is at stake is, how do they make that choice? The choice should be based, not on a passing display of rhetoric, but on the weight of evidence. In the matter being considered we face, on the one hand, some facts intermingled with many unsupported assertions and accusations. On the other hand, we have the well-documented picture of the development of a church founded on the Word of God and nurtured, guided, and protected by the Holy Spirit through the gift of prophecy manifested in the work of Ellen G. White, one of its founders and pioneers.

Every Seventh-day Adventist, past and present, has at some time had to come to grips with the issue: Did Ellen White really speak for God as she and the church claim? Accepting this claim is not always easy. After all, there are precepts and counsels in the Ellen White books which call for a change in one's way of living and thinking. There are guidelines to good health. There are counsels on how to develop a character that will rightly represent the Christ who has saved us and promised us the transforming power of His Holy Spirit. Sin is pointed out and reproved. It is not easy or pleasant to change our way of life. But have not God's prophets, in communicating His messages, always reproved sin and called His people to a higher standard of living?

As with the Bible, there are things in Ellen White's writings which are "hard to be understood!" But the evidence of Ellen White's inspiration shines through everywhere.

What evidence is there of Ellen White's inspiration?

The Word of God calls for us to examine the claims of one who professes to speak for God, and it sets forth several tests. Among the foremost is, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" ([Matthew 7:16](#)). As we look at the fruitage of Ellen White's ministry, what do we see in her life and in the lives of those who have taken her claims seriously? What is the fruit?

We see a people in the early experience of the church given assurance, being stabilized and unified in their understanding of fulfilling prophecy and in doctrinal positions—positions based on the Word of God, but attested to by the Spirit. Through visions the Lord clarified what was truth and pointed out error.

We see a people led to understand the great conflict of the ages between Christ and Satan and to see their place in its closing scenes, and rewarded for their faith in and allegiance to Christ.

We see a church emerging with unified teachings and organization throughout the world, and an accelerating sense of responsibility in publishing, medical, and educational activities, climaxed with a clear-cut vision of responsibility in the outreach of the gospel and unparalleled financial commitments to carry it out.

We see a people happy in their mature knowledge of the plan of salvation, confident of their acceptance in Christ, and aware of the significance of our Lord and Saviour's ministry in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

What motivated Ellen White to serve as God's messenger? Was it wealth or fame?

No. She lived a self-sacrificing life. While she supported herself and her work on the salary of a minister and from modest royalties on her writings, she did not consider her income to be her own. Whatever was not required for necessities, she put into the cause she served. At her death, she left no great estate. She even mortgaged the potential income from her literary productions in the sum of nearly one hundred thousand dollars to have means to publish her last books and advance the cause of God. Of her experience in

finance, at one time she wrote: “The Lord saw that He could trust us with His means.... He kept pouring it in and we kept letting it out.”¹

Was it notoriety or fame she sought? No. She found public life difficult. Burdened with the responsibility of presenting personal testimonies of warning and reproof, she declared at one time: “It has been hard for me to give the messages that God has given me for those I love.”² At another point in her ministry she declared that if given the choice of another vision or the grave, she would choose the grave. She tasted the experience spoken of by the Master that “a prophet is not without honor, save in His own country” ([Matthew 13:57](#)).

What then was her motivation? It was to follow the bidding of the Lord in serving as His messenger, regardless of costs or rewards, ever eager for the saving of souls to God’s kingdom. It was to hear at last the words, “Well done.”

What of Ellen White’s literary productions, their quality and fruitage?

They stand on the highest plane. On this point Uriah Smith, an editor and fellow worker, declared:

1. They tend to the purest morality. They discountenance every vice, and exhort to the practice of every virtue.
2. They lead to Christ. Like the Bible, they set Him forth as the only hope and Saviour of mankind.
3. They lead us to the Bible. They set forth that Book as the inspired and unalterable Word of God.
4. They have brought comfort and consolation to many hearts. They have strengthened the weak, encouraged the feeble, raised up the despondent. They have brought order out of confusion, made crooked places straight, and thrown light on what was dark and obscure.³

¹Manuscript 3, 1888.

²Letter 59, 1895.

³Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objections Answered,” [The Review and Herald](#), June 12, 1866, p. 9.

How is it that thousands have been led to the Saviour through reading *The Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, and *The Great Controversy*? How is it that *The Ministry of Healing*, published in 1905, has never had to be revised while medical books survive but a decade or two?

On Ellen White's death, the staid weekly journal, *The Independent*, published in New York City, traced the high points of Ellen White's experience in an article titled "An American Prophetess." Then speaking of the fruits of her ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist church, the journal stated:

These teachings were based on the strictest doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures. Seventh-day Adventism could be got in no other way. And the gift of prophecy was to be expected as promised to the "remnant church" who had held fast to the truth. This faith gave great purity of life and incessant zeal. No body of Christians excels them in moral character and religious earnestness.

4

What of Ellen White's public ministry?

The records show she was a much-sought-after public speaker, both within and without Adventist ranks. She was often the Sabbath morning speaker at General Conference Sessions, addressing thousands as she stood before them without notes, and she was a favorite camp meeting speaker season after season.

At evangelistic meetings in America and overseas she could hold her audiences, often largely non-Adventists, spellbound for an hour or an hour and a half, almost always speaking without notes. In 1876, before the day of electronic public address systems, she addressed some twenty thousand people who gathered at a camp meeting in Groveland, Mass., and made her audience hear. At the close of the meeting, she was invited to go into a nearby city the next evening to address a large temperance gathering in a public hall.

⁴The *Independent*, Aug. 23, 1915, pp. 249, 250.

What of Ellen White as a much-sought-after counselor?

Church executives from the local conference president and institutional managers to the General Conference president, either by letter or in personal contact, came to her for counsel and guidance in meeting their responsibilities, and in making important decisions. She had no answer book to turn to. The fields of discussion ranged widely. Never were they disappointed in the results of following the counsel they received from her pen or lips.

After recounting one experience of prosperity which came to the work as the counsels of the Lord given through Ellen White were followed, A. G. Daniells, for many years president of the General Conference, exclaimed:

In all this we see the great value of the Spirit of Prophecy to the people and the cause of God. It gives light and understanding far beyond the comprehension of men. It leads us on to great undertakings from which we would shrink because we do not see the future nor the full importance of what we are called to do.⁵

Elder Daniells, near the close of his life, bore this solemn testimony:

In this present year of our Lord, 1935, Mrs. White has been at rest twenty years, while I have been toiling on. I had twenty-three years of direct observation of her life work. Since her death I have had twenty additional years for thoughtful reflection and study of that life and its fruits.

Now, at an advanced age, with the constraint of expressing only sober, honest truth, I can say that it is my deep conviction that Mrs. White's life far transcends the life of anyone I have ever known or with whom I have been associated. She was uniformly pleasant, cheerful, and courageous. She was never careless, flippant, or in

⁵A. G. Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1936), p. 321.

any way cheap in conversation or manner of life. She was the personification of serious earnestness regarding the things of the kingdom. I never once heard her boast of the gracious gift God had bestowed upon her, or of the marvelous results of her endeavors. She did rejoice in the fruitage, but gave all the glory to Him who wrought through her. ⁶

⁶Ibid., p. 368.

Chapter 10—The Choice Is Ours

And so, granted by God the power of choice, and with the evidences before us, we as Seventh-day Adventists must make our decision. The Lord gives sufficient evidence for all who desire to know the truth, but He will never compel anyone to believe. We should carefully ponder the words:

God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence. God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe; but he who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things which he cannot make plain to his finite understanding will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith. ¹

George I. Butler summed up the positive influence of Ellen White's visions on the church:

They have always been held in high esteem by the most zealous and humble among our people. They have exerted a leading influence among us from the start. They have first called attention to every important move we have made in advance. Our publishing work, the health and temperance movement, the College, and the cause of advanced education, the missionary enterprise, and many other important points, have owed their efficiency largely to this influence. We have found in a long, varied, and in some instances, sad experience the value of their counsel. When we have heeded them, we

¹Ellen G. White, [Testimonies for the Church 5:675, 676](#).

have prospered; when we have slighted them, we have suffered a great loss.²

²George I. Butler, "The Visions," *Review and Herald Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, pp. 11, 12, cited in *Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1961), p. 48.

Chapter 11—For Further Study

Note: Documents below marked with a double asterisk (**) were available at the time of this paper's publication in 1981 but are no longer in print. However, they are being prepared for on-line viewing at this site.

“Addresses to Faculty and Students at the 1935 Advanced Bible School,” by W.C. White. Currently titled, “How Ellen White’s Books Were Written.” 37 pp. \$1.50

**“Analysis of Ellen G. White’s Luther Manuscript,” by Ron Graybill. 31pp.

“A Bibliography of E. G. White’s Private and Office Libraries.” Compiled by Warren H. Johns, Tim Poirier, and Ron Graybill. This bibliography was constructed from the inventories which were made of Ellen White’s private and office libraries at the time of her death in 1915. 63 pp. \$2.00

“Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White,” by W. C. White and D. E. Robinson. 16 pp. \$.80

“Common or Uninspired Writings,” by Arthur L. White. 6 pp. \$.30

**“A Comparison of Attitudes Between Those Who Read Ellen White and Those Who Do Not,” by Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr. 45 pp.

**“Did *The Great Controversy* Contain Stolen Illustrations?” by Ron Graybill. 2 pp.

**“Ellen G. White’s Literary Work: An Update,” by Ron Graybill. An edited and annotated transcript of a tape recording of morning worship talks by Ron Graybill at the General Conference, November 15-19, 1981. (March, 1982, Aspire Tape Club Selection.) 45 pp.

“Ellen G. White and the Shut Door.”

- a. A Statement prepared by Arthur L. White. 62 pp. \$2.00

b. Ten *Review and Herald* articles by George I. Butler recounting the beginnings of the Advent Movement. 20 pp. \$1.00

**“Ellen White’s Theological and Literary Indebtedness to Calvin Stowe,” by David Neff. 22 pp.

**“Ellen G. White’s Use of Uninspired Sources,” by R. W. Olson. 19 pp.

“The Fannie Bolton Story: A Collection of Source Documents.” All of the known letters of Ellen White, Fannie Bolton, and their associates which have a bearing on Fannie Bolton’s work for Ellen White, and her attitudes toward that work, are brought together in this comprehensive collection. 128 pp. \$3.50

**“Henry Melvill and Ellen G. White: A Study in Literary and Theological Relationships.” An interim report on a cooperative study project undertaken by Ron Graybill, Warren H. Johns, and Tim Poirier, in which Ellen White’s selective use of Anglican clergyman Henry Melvill’s book of sermons is examined. 107 pp.

**“The History of the Discovery of Literary Borrowing,” by Warren H. Johns. 3 pp.

“How *The Desire of Ages* Was Written.” A collection of source documents relating to the writing of [The Desire of Ages](#), 47 pp. \$1.00

“Inspiration and the Ellen G. White Writings,” by Arthur L. White. A reprint of articles published in the *Adventist Review* on the subject of inspiration and Ellen G. White’s writing of the “Conflict of the Ages” series. 39 pp. \$1.60

**“The Literary Relationship Between *The Desire of Ages* by Ellen G. White and *The Life of Christ* by William Hanna, Parts I & II,” by Raymond F. Cottrell and Walter F. Specht. 85 pp.

**“Memorandum of Law: Literary Property Rights; 1790-1915,” by Vincent Ramik. Available from the Ellen G. White Estate. 17 pp.

“The 1907 Interview with John Harvey Kellogg,” by Tim Poirier. A review of some of the charges made by Dr. Kellogg against the testimonies, including the “Chicago buildings.” 11 pp. \$.50

**“The 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers’ Council,” by R. W. Olson. 10 pp.

“One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White,” by R. W. Olson. 112 pp. \$1.00

“The Shut Door Documents.” Statements Relating to the Shut Door, by Ellen G. White and other early Adventists. Arranged in a chronological setting from 1844 to 1851. Compiled by Robert W. Olson. 58 pp. \$2.00

“Sources or Aids—Why Did Ellen G. White Borrow?” by Paul Gordon. 14 pp. \$.50

**“To Those Who Are Perplexed....” Ellen White’s response to questions raised by her critics, including “The Blue Book.” By Tim Poirier. 4 pp.

“Was Ellen G. White a Plagiarist?” A reprint of articles published in the *Adventist Review*, Sept. 17, 1981, featuring an interview with Attorney Vincent L. Ramik. 8 pp. \$.50

Copies of this document can be obtained from the Ellen G. White Estate, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, for \$1.00.