

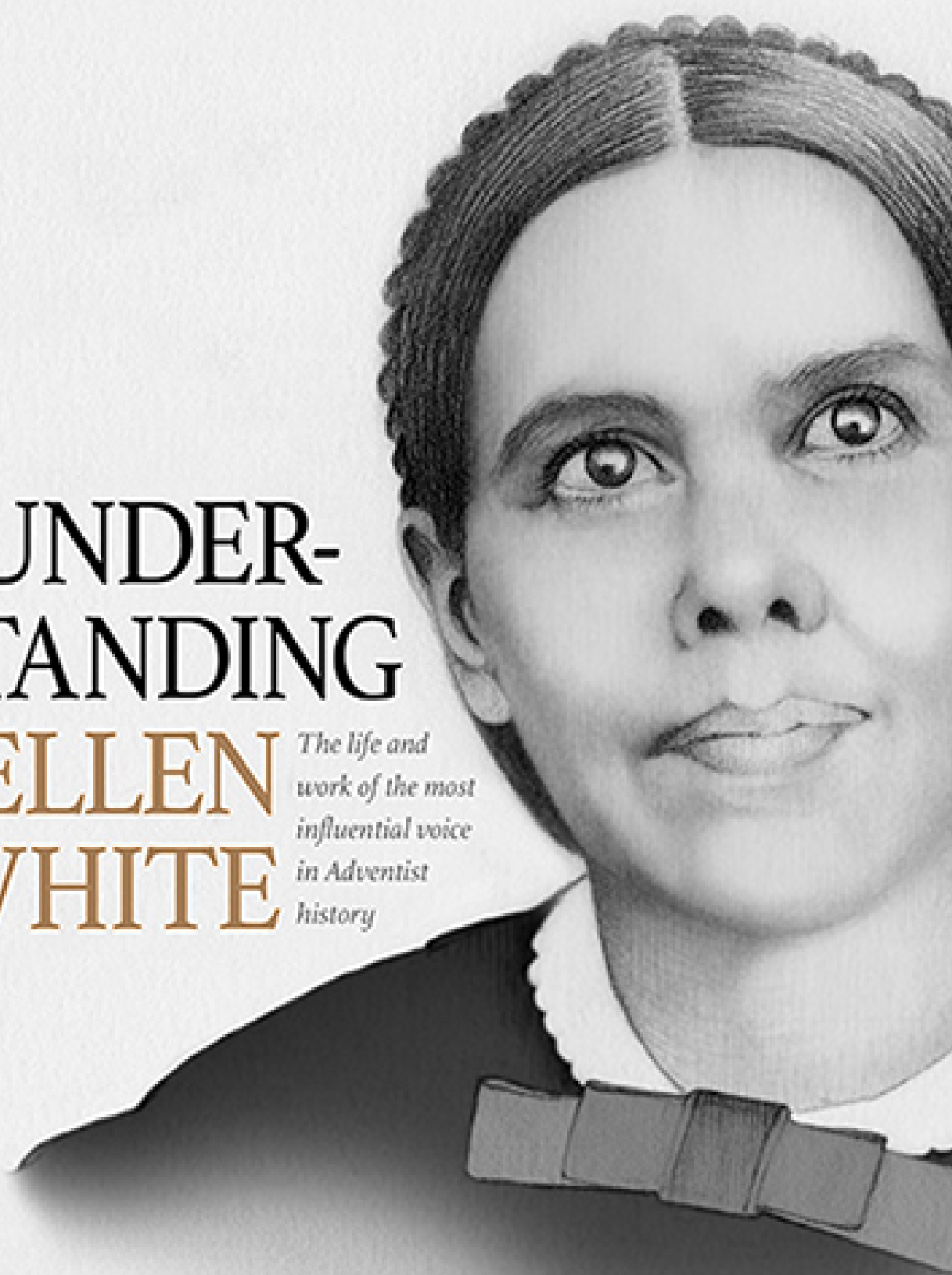
ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

UNDER- STANDING

ELLEN WHITE

*The life and
work of the most
influential voice
in Adventist
history*

MERLIN D. BURT, *editor*



Understanding Ellen White

Ellen G. White

2015

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Information about this Book

Overview

This eBook is provided by the [Ellen G. White Estate](#). It is included in the larger free [Online Books](#) collection on the Ellen G. White Estate Web site.

About the Author

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

Further Links

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Introduction

[v]

Merlin D. Burt

The world and church today are vastly different from that of Ellen White's lifetime. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has become truly a global movement with many millions of members from diverse cultures and backgrounds; many people are not familiar with the history of God's leading and the prophetic experience of Ellen White. The rise of the information age and Internet has opened a wide variety of perspectives on her life and ministry. Many critical sites present arguments against her that misrepresent reality but have influence because people do not have adequate information or an experiential understanding of her writings.

Ellen White is no longer alive to represent herself or her era. This book builds a foundation for interpreting her experience with God and her prophetic ministry. This volume does not attempt to be comprehensive or provide final answers on every issue. Instead it provides succinct and substantive answers to specific questions regarding Ellen White and her prophetic ministry that provide principles for addressing further questions.

Too often Ellen White has been presented as having two passions—rebuking sinners and giving rules. Although she did find herself obligated to do this at various times, it was not her personal life emphasis or even the focus of her ministry. Seventh-day Adventists and others who have a “hard” view of Ellen White need to reframe their understanding in terms of who she really was, what she truly thought, and what she actually said and did.

Basic to any understanding of Ellen White is her own walk with God. Everything she did must be understood and interpreted within this context. To open a window of understanding to Ellen White's heart, readers need to know and even experience her passions. There are two braided golden threads that weave through her entire life and experience that are central to who she was and what she ac-

[vi]

complished—the love of God in Christ and a focus on Scripture. Her orientation toward the love of God and the Bible were integrally interwoven with her prophetic ministry. Her writings, which were guided by prophetic revelation through visions and prophetic dreams, must be read and understood with this perspective.

Ellen White's passion for the love of God in Christ

Ellen White grew up in a deeply religious home. Her father was a class leader in the Methodist Church, and even helped start a branch congregation on the south side of Portland, Maine, U.S.A., during the early 1840s. Ellen's childhood and teenage personality was introverted and melancholy. She had an intense inner life with high personal expectations. Probably her principal fault as a child was keeping things bottled up inside. This resulted in a lengthy emotional struggle without answers to vital questions. Her conversion spanned a period of about seven years and went through three phases. She experienced a deathbed conversion, and wrestled with justification and forgiveness of sin and, finally, the issue of sanctification and holiness in terms of the second coming of Jesus.¹

Her accident, which probably occurred in 1836 or 1837, set a new course for her life. A stone thrown by an older schoolmate broke her nose and made her a virtual invalid for the remainder of her childhood. Due to her injury, it was thought that she would die. In her weakness, she simply gave her heart to Jesus and found peace. However, as she recovered from her accident, she entered a new phase in her conversion process.

Her accident interrupted her educational plans and produced bitter thoughts toward God. Her fear of an eternally burning hell, which she had inherited from her Methodist faith, caused her to view God as an unjust tyrant. Being an avid reader, she was influenced by contemporary Christian biographies that idealized the Christian experience by avoiding the ongoing need for forgiveness of sin. This caused her to feel that she was not a Christian because of her feelings toward God. A pivotal experience in her conversion was realizing that Jesus could forgive her sins, which she experienced at an 1841 Methodist camp meeting in Buxton, Maine, U.S.A. This led to her baptism on June 26, 1842.

While her view of Jesus was transformed by His forgiveness, [vii] she was still fearful of God. After her baptism, a continued sense of her sinfulness and the necessity of holiness in preparation for the second coming of Jesus caused her to doubt her salvation.

At some point after her baptism, and at perhaps the lowest point in her experience, she had a dream of seeing Jesus.

There was no mistaking that beautiful countenance; that expression of benevolence and majesty could belong to no other. As His gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings.

I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes; but He drew near with a smile, and laying His hand upon my head, said, “Fear not.” The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with emotion, sank prostrate at His feet. ²

Ellen White did not identify this view of Jesus as a prophetic dream. It was rather a personal God-given dream that gave her courage to talk with her mother about her doubts and fears. This led to the final step in her conversion process. Eunice Harmon, Ellen’s mother, arranged for Ellen to talk with Levi Stockman—a Methodist Adventist minister whom she trusted. Stockman, who would die of tuberculosis before the 1844 disappointment, was a man of deep spiritual experience. Perhaps for the first time, Ellen opened her heart and told all of her troubles. When she had finally poured out her sorrows, doubts, and fears, she saw that Stockman was weeping as well. The deeply practical help he gave her would affect her for the rest of her life. He changed her view of God, and she remarked in later years regarding this interview:

My views of the Father were changed. I now looked upon Him as a kind and tender parent, rather than a stern tyrant compelling men to a blind obedience. My heart went out towards Him in a deep and fervent love. Obedience to His will seemed a joy; it was a pleasure to be in His service. ³

In later years, the parental or paternal love of God became Ellen White’s favorite theme. ⁴ She also taught that it was Jesus’ favorite theme. ⁵ Her favorite song was “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” by John Wesley. ⁶ The following illustrates her passion on this topic:

[viii] All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more. ⁷

The Holy Spirit led Ellen White to frame the presentation of her lifelong great controversy theme, portrayed in the five-volume Conflict of the Ages Series, in these terms. The first book, *Patriarchs and Prophets* begins with the words: " 'God is love.' 1 John 4:16. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be." The last book, *The Great Controversy*, ends with the following words: "One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. . . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love." ⁸ Her most translated and widely read book is *Steps to Christ* (1892). The first chapter of this book is on the love of God. Other Christ-centered books include *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (1896), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900), *Education* (1903), and *The Ministry of Healing* (1905).

During the 1890s, while she was in Australia, Ellen White did much writing for *The Desire of Ages*. The work on this book brought out strong emotions that were expressed in her personal diary and in her correspondence. The following comments from her diary and other writings reveal the depth of her feelings toward Jesus.

Oh, how inefficient, how incapable I am of expressing the things which burn in my soul in reference to the mission of Christ! . . . I know not how to speak or trace with pen the large subject of the

atonement sacrifice. I know not how to present subjects in the living power in which they stand before me. I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words.⁹

My whole being longs after the Lord, I am not content to be satisfied with occasional flashes of light. I must have more.¹⁰ [ix]

In writing upon the life of Christ I am deeply wrought upon. I forget to breathe as I should. I cannot endure the intensity of feeling that comes over me as I think of what Christ has suffered in our world.¹¹

I awoke at three o'clock a.m. I feel deeply the need of casting my helpless soul upon Jesus Christ. He is my helper. He is my all and in all. I am weak as water without the Holy Spirit of God to help me.¹²

I find tears running down my cheeks when I think of what the Lord is to His children, and when I contemplate His goodness, His mercy, [and] His tender compassion.¹³

Ellen White had a lifelong core passion for Jesus and the love of God. It has been necessary to limit the examples and illustrations, but perhaps one can begin to capture the strong pulse of her Christian experience. This personal experience and her prophetic visions were permeated with this reality and were blended in a harmonious way throughout her life and ministry.

The discussion of Ellen White's prophetic revelation is not merely an academic exercise. The very nature of her message draws a person to a loving God who is revealed in the gift of Jesus.

Ellen White's orientation toward Scripture

The second key focus of Ellen White's life was the Bible.¹⁴ It played a foundational and central role in her personal experience and ministry. Not only did she use Scripture, her writings are full of Scripture and point almost continuously to the Word of God.

During the early months following her first vision, it was Scripture that the Holy Spirit used to help her when she doubted her own experience. She wrote:

While at family prayers one morning, the power of God began to rest upon me, and the thought rushed into my mind that it was mesmerism [hypnotism], and I resisted it. Immediately I was struck

dumb and for a few moments was lost to everything around me. . . . A card was held up before me, on which were written in letters of gold the chapter and verse of fifty texts of Scripture. After I came out of vision, I beckoned for a slate, and wrote upon it that I was [x] dumb, also what I had seen, and that I wished the large Bible. I took the Bible and readily turned to all the texts that I had seen on the card. I was unable to speak all day. ¹⁵

These texts were indelibly imprinted on her mind and are recorded in her book *Early Writings*. During her early experience, she also held Bibles in vision on various occasions. Her prophetic ministry was to uplift the Word of God. This was also her last message to the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church at the 1909 General Conference Session. One who was there that day described how she closed her sermon. “Mrs. White spoke a few words of good cheer and farewell, and then turned to the pulpit, where lay a Bible. She opened the book, and held it out with hands that trembled with age. And she said: ‘Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book.’ Without another word, she closed the book, and walked from that platform.” ¹⁶

She understood that her special role as a modern prophet was to testify to the centrality the Bible. She was a prophet to point Seventh-day Adventists and the world to Scripture. She wrote:

I have a work of great responsibility to do—to impart by pen and voice the instruction given me, not alone to Seventh-day Adventists, but to the world. I have published many books, large and small, and some of these have been translated into several languages. This is my work—to open the Scriptures to others as God has opened them to me. ¹⁷

Steps to Christ was first published by Fleming H. Revell, a non-Adventist Christian publishing house. ¹⁸ It was her intention that her writing would lead people to the Bible and Jesus whether they thought of her as a prophetic voice or not.

It is vital to understand Ellen White’s personal experience in relation to the Bible. She earnestly studied the Bible and committed much of it to memory. She did not give merely a token acknowledgment to Scripture. Both her personal and public writings are centered on the Bible and contain almost continual allusions, refer-

ences, and quotations to it. The theological and lifestyle standards she promoted were invariably linked to Scripture.

If these two principles—her passion for the love of God in Christ and her orientation toward Scripture—are correctly understood and integrated in looking at Ellen White’s life and experience, then the other issues addressed in this book will have a proper context.

¹See Merlin D. Burt, “Ellen G. Harmon’s Three-Step Conversion Between 1836 and 1843 and the Harmon Family Methodist Experience” (research paper, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1998).

²Ellen G. White [EGW], *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1915), 34, 35

³EGW, “Life Sketches Original Manuscript” (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White® Estate, n.d.), 43.

⁴EGW, “The New Zealand Camp Meeting,” *Review and Herald*, June 6, 1893.

⁵EGW, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1941), 40. See also EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 6:55.

⁶EGW to Sister Sisley, October 23, 1906, Letter 324, 1906; EGW, “The Work in Oakland and San Francisco, No. 3,” *Review and Herald*, December 13, 1906, 10.

⁷EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:740.

⁸EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1958), 33, 34; EGW, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1939), 678.

⁹EGW to O. A. Olsen, July 15, 1892, Letter 40, 1892.

¹⁰EGW diary, July 15, 1892, Manuscript 34, 1892.

¹¹EGW diary, July 29, 1897, Manuscript 70, 1897.

¹²EGW diary, October 11, 1897, Manuscript 177, 1897.

¹³EGW interview with C. C. Crisler, July 21, 1914.

¹⁴See R. Clifford Jones in chapter 3 on the relation of Ellen White’s writings to the Bible.

¹⁵EGW, *Early Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 22, 23.

¹⁶William A. Spicer, *The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1937), 30.

¹⁷EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:236.

¹⁸EGW, *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892).

Chapter One - The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture

Jon Paulien

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White had the biblical gift of prophecy. They compare her with what the Scriptures say about prophets in both the Old and New Testaments. A strong basis for their conviction is what Paul said about spiritual gifts in Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans. The Adventist view of the gift was also influenced to some degree by how her gift functioned in practice. ¹

The Old Testament evidence

In the Old Testament there are three Hebrew word roots for the concept of “prophet-prophecy-prophecy.” The most prominent of these (*nabi'*) is normally translated *prophet* or (*naba*) *prophecy* in English and is always translated with *prophet* words in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament). ² During the period of the judges in earlier Old Testament history, prophetic figures were also referred to as “seers” (1 Sam. 9:9). ³ The two Hebrew words for seer (*rō'eh* and *hōzeh*) can be used interchangeably (Isa. 30:9, 10).

There is a difference in the Old Testament between the noun and the verb form of “prophet-prophecy” The root meaning of the noun *prophet* (*nabi'*) is “speaker” or “proclaimer.” But it can also mean “the called one.” In its verbal form it is normally used for “prophetic speech” and sometimes for frenzied and unusual behavior (Num. 11:25-27; 1 Sam. 10:5, 6, 10ff.; 18:10, 11; 19:18ff.; 1 Kings 18:29).

In general, prophets in the Old Testament represented God to people on earth (Amos 3:7). The prophet would receive instruction from God and would then pass that instruction on to the people (Exod. 4:15, cf. Exod. 7:1), who were expected to follow it (2 Chron. 20:20). This role was in contrast to that of the priests, who in worship represented the people before God. While the role of the

priest was hereditary, one could become a prophet only through a direct calling by God ([Isa. 6:1-9](#); [Jer. 1:1-10](#); [Ezek. 2:1-7](#); [Amos 7:14-17](#)).⁵ Whereas most prophets in the Old Testament were men, four women are designated as “prophetesses”: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah ([Exod. 15:20](#); [Judg. 4:4](#); [2 Kings 22:14-20](#); [2 Chron. 34:22-28](#); [Isa. 8:3](#)).

Prophets in the Old Testament received information from God in two primary ways ([Num. 12:6-8](#)). One of these was more auditory. The prophet heard words directly from God and was expected to pass on the message as it was given by God. This kind of revelation lay behind the repeated use of such phrases as “thus says the Lord” ([1 Sam. 10:18](#); [2 Sam. 12:11](#); [1 Kings 20:28](#); [2 Kings 1:4](#); [2 Chron. 34:23](#); [Isa. 7:7](#); [Jer. 8:4](#); [Ezek. 3:27](#)). The second way that prophets received information from God was through dreams and visions ([Num. 12:6](#); [1 Sam. 3:1](#); [Isa. 1:1](#); [Jer. 24:1](#); [Ezek. 8:4](#); [Dan. 7:2](#); [Hab. 2:2, 3](#)). Generally, the earlier prophets of the Old Testament received direct speech from God, while in the later period dreams and visions became a more common mode of special revelation. Some prophets predicted future events ([Isa. 40-66](#); [Jer. 33](#); [Ezek. 36-48](#); [Dan. 2](#); [7](#); [Joel 3:9-21](#)), but many prophets did not predict the future. Their primary message was to give God’s perspective and provide warning and encouragement for their time and place ([2 Chron. 20:20](#)).

In the Old Testament, much of the prophetic writings are in Hebrew poetry (Isaiah and Micah, for example). The literary style and quality of the prophetic writings reflect the personality, education, and emotional state of the prophet. The prophetic writings also include long historical narratives (books such as 1 Samuel and 2 Kings), exploring how the history of Israel was affected by obedience or disobedience to the covenant. Later prophets such as Zechariah and Daniel had apocalyptic visions, viewing the future through symbolism.

Prophets and prophecy occurred in Old Testament times from the very beginning. Enoch and Noah are antediluvian examples ([Gen. 5:24](#); [Jude 14](#); [Gen. 6:13-21](#)). Abraham was called a prophet ([Gen. 20:7](#)), and this was also the case with Miriam ([Exod. 15:20](#)), Moses ([Deut. 18:15, 18](#); [34:10-12](#)), and the seventy upon whom the “spirit of Moses” had fallen ([Num. 11:16-30](#)). Although we can

- [14] infer something about the nature of prophecy from these individuals' statements and behaviors, there is little direct information as to exactly how this office or gift operated in their lives. The most interesting text is [Numbers 12:6-8](#), where it is said that "prophets" received dreams and visions, but Moses communicated with God face to face. In this case, Moses was more than a prophet. His leadership authority in the situation exceeded that of his sister and brother, both of whom are referred to as prophets ([Exod. 7:1](#); [15:10](#)—in Aaron's case the term is used in a limited sense).

In the period of the judges, Deborah is the only person titled as a prophet until one gets to the time of Samuel, who is the first prophet from whom we can glean considerable information about the nature of the gift. The gift seems to have flourished in the time of the monarchy, with Nathan and Gad at the time of David, and Ahijah in the time of Solomon. Later, in addition to Elijah and Elisha, the monarchy was served by canonical prophets, who wrote books of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah. During the period of the exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel served the people of God as prophets. And finally, after the return from Exile, Judah was served by the canonical prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Another major distinction in the Old Testament is between true and false prophets. The writing prophets, in particular, were often confronted by other prophets whose messages contradicted theirs ([Isa. 9:13-16](#); [28:7](#); [Mic. 3:5-7](#); [Jer. 14:13-16](#); [27:9, 10](#); [29:8, 9](#); [Ezek. 13:2-17](#)). At times like these, the false prophets tended to uphold tradition and thus proclaimed messages that were comfortable to the people. The true prophets in the Old Testament, on the other hand, brought a word from God that contradicted tradition and brought them into conflict with popular views. ⁶

How were people to know that someone consistently spoke or wrote from a genuine prophetic relationship with the true God? The authority of the true prophet in the Old Testament was confirmed by the quality and usefulness of what the prophet said ([1 Sam. 3:19-21](#)), by miracles ([2 Kings 2:13-15](#)), by the fulfillment of predictions ([Jer. 28:9](#)), and by the consistency between their teachings and previous genuine revelations ([Deut. 13:1-5](#)). False prophets, on the other hand, could be detected by their desire for money ([Mic. 3:11](#)), a

willingness to say what people wanted to hear ([Isa. 30:10](#); [Mic. 2:11](#)), a failure of their predictions to occur ([Deut. 18:22](#)), and by the inconsistency between their teachings and the testimony of earlier revelation ([Deut. 13:1-5](#); [Jer. 27:12-16](#)). ⁷

There are numerous parallels between the Old Testament prophets and the ministry of Ellen G. White. God communicated to her both in visions and dreams and, at times, in direct speech. While at times she spoke and wrote about future events, the primary emphasis of her testimonies was to give God's viewpoint in specific situations and to provide warning and encouragement for those she addressed. Like the writing prophets of the Old Testament, her messages often went against the grain and challenged the church and its leadership to get out of its traditional comfort zones and get in line with God's advancing purpose for His people. Some people have been troubled by her application of specific texts, but there is a broad consistency in her writings with previous revelation (Scripture). And like the Old Testament prophets, her life and ministry have been spiritually useful to many.

[15]

The New Testament evidence

When the early church chose the Greek word for prophet to refer to individuals in their midst, it was clearly building on the Old Testament concept of the prophet. ⁸ The “prophet-prophecy-prophecy” word group in the New Testament needs to be understood. ⁹ These words are scattered throughout the New Testament, but are particularly concentrated in [1 Corinthians 12-14](#) and the book of Revelation. The “apostle-apostleship” word group is also important to this study. ¹⁰ It is particularly concentrated in the writings of Paul and of his companion Luke. ¹¹

Successors of the Old Testament prophets

[Luke 11:47-50](#) (parallel to [Matt. 23:29-37](#)) is part of Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. Just as their ancestors killed the (Old Testament) prophets (verses 47, 48), so they would kill the “*prophets and apostles*” that God would send to them

(verses 49, 50). According to this text, both apostles and prophets would be the successors of the Old Testament prophets.

The complementary character of apostles and prophets can be seen as well in [Ephesians 2:20](#). In [Ephesians 2:19-22](#), the church is portrayed as a house built of people upon a solid foundation, which is the apostles and prophets in their relationship to the cornerstone Jesus Christ. Who are these apostles and prophets? In [Ephesians 3:5](#) and [4:11](#), they are clearly in the New Testament era, not in the Old. The apostles and prophets together were agents of God's revelation to the fledgling church.

The apostle word group

[16] The root meaning of *apostle* concerns one who is “dispatched for a specific purpose,” a messenger or ambassador of some kind. While used in Scripture as a noun, it is really an adjective, “the *sent* one.” This word is related to the verbal form *apostello*, which is usually translated “send.” The status of an “apostle” depends on the status of the one who sends him or her ([John 13:16](#)). The apostle can be simply a messenger between ordinary individuals. But when the “apostle” is sent by a king or by God, their status becomes extraordinary. In the New Testament, therefore, the apostle is highly honored by other believers as a special envoy direct from God.¹²

In the fullest sense, then, Jesus is the ultimate Apostle ([Heb. 3:2](#)), the One in whom the definitive revelation of God has taken place ([Heb. 1:1-3](#)).¹³ All other apostles derive their authority from Him. The earliest definition of apostleship in New Testament times, therefore, limits the office to those “who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” ([Acts 1:21, 22](#), NIV; cf. [25](#)).

This would seem to limit the office to those who walked with the God-man throughout His time on earth. Paul expands this definition, however, as his connection with Jesus was limited to visionary experience well after the Resurrection ([1 Cor. 9:1, 2; 15:1-11; Gal. 1:15, 16](#)). So apostleship was not limited to the twelve disciples. Nevertheless, the office requires some sort of direct calling from

the New Testament Jesus, in Paul's case a call to reach out to the Gentiles ([Acts 9:15](#); [Eph. 3:1, 8](#)). Individuals such as Apollos and Timothy who meet the other criteria, but did not have a direct call from Jesus, are not called apostles ([1 Cor. 3:3-9](#); [2 Cor. 1:1](#); [Phil. 1:1](#); [1 Thess. 3:2](#)). While apostles were generally men, such as Peter ([1 Pet. 1:1](#); [2 Pet. 1:1](#)), James ([Gal. 1:19](#)), and Paul ([Rom. 1:1](#); [1 Cor. 1:1](#), etc.), one apostle in the New Testament was perhaps a female, named Junia ([Rom. 16:7](#)).¹⁴ The apostles, driven by the Spirit, take up the role that Jesus had played on this earth ([John 14:12-17](#)).

As a result, the apostle is to be obeyed just as much as the word of the Lord Himself ([1 Thess. 2:13](#)). This is true not only of the apostle's personal presence, but in the apostle's absence his written word substitutes for his presence ([1 Cor. 5:3, 4](#); [Col. 2:5](#); [2 Cor. 13:10](#); [Eph. 3:4](#)). It is to be obeyed without question ([1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 25, 40](#); [9:14](#); [14:37, 38](#); [1 Thess. 4:11](#); [2 Thess 3:4, 6, 10, 14](#)). The unique authority of the apostle is due to his or her nearness to the Christ event.

The duties of the office centered on traveling from place to place, proclaiming what the apostle had experienced with Jesus ([1 Cor. 9:1, 5](#); [Eph. 3:5](#)). In the process, apostles would found and administer new churches ([1 Cor. 15:10, 11](#); [Eph. 2:20](#)).¹⁵

It is interesting that although Paul speaks prophetically to the churches ([1 Cor. 14:6](#)),¹⁶ he never calls himself a "prophet." His own self-identity is as an apostle ([Rom. 11:13](#); [1 Cor. 9:1, 2](#); [2 Cor. 12:11, 12](#); [1 Tim. 2:7](#); [2 Tim 1:11](#), also in the opening lines of most of Paul's letters). This suggests that the designation "apostle" includes the gifts and activities of the prophet and more ([2 Cor. 12:1-7](#); [Eph. 3:3-7](#)).¹⁷ [17]

In [1 Corinthians 12:28-31](#), the gifts of the Spirit are listed with ordinal numbers that point to a hierarchy of authority. Paul also urges believers in Corinth to strive for "the greater gifts" ([1 Cor. 12:31](#), NIV). That Paul intends a hierarchy in this list is further substantiated by two elements in the context: (1) In [1 Corinthians 14:5](#), the gift of prophet is listed as more important than speaking in tongues, which is listed eighth in order ([1 Cor. 12:28](#)). (2) As important as apostle and prophet are to the church, in the chapters that follow this list, genuine love is portrayed as superior even to the

greatest of the gifts (1 Cor. 13:13). So in terms of offices, apostle is listed as first in rank in the church and prophet is second. This ranking is grounded in the direct knowledge the apostles had of the Christ event and the personal commission each had received from Jesus.

The apostle is everything the prophet is and more, according to the New Testament. They are equal when it comes to being the objects of direct revelation. But the apostle's authority of office is even greater than the prophet because of the special commission of leadership and the unique relationship in time to the first-century Christ event. In the Old Testament, Moses—who was more than a prophet—led the children of Israel and established the “church structure.” In the same way, the New Testament apostles were commissioned to begin the Christian church and establish its structure. The Old Testament prophets were called to reform the people when they fell away from God. They did not lead the “church,” rather they spoke to the “church” from outside the leadership structure. The same can be said for New Testament prophets.

No later prophet can fill the apostolic role. Although Ellen White plays an important authoritative role for Seventh-day Adventists, she will never be placed in the canon; she is a “lesser light” that points us to the “greater light” of Scripture.¹⁸ Ellen White wrote clearly that her writings were not a part of the canon:

[18] 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.¹⁹

Inclusion in the New Testament canon is grounded in the context of the first advent of Christ.

Prophets and prophesying

In addition to the distinction between apostles and prophets, it is also necessary to distinguish between prophets, on the one hand, and prophecy or prophesying on the other hand. A prophet prophesies and produces prophecies, but not every prophecy comes from a prophet, and not all who prophesy are prophets. There is a sense in which all who partake of the Spirit may be called upon to “prophesy” at one point or another. This is underlined by Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:17, 18](#), quoting [Joel 2:28, 29](#)).

In this context Peter makes the radical observation that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will cause both men and women to “prophesy.” Such prophecies will often be accompanied by visions and dreams, and all who receive the Spirit (“on all flesh”) can be called upon by God to prophesy. This broad view of the gift of prophecy is seen also in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5 and chapter 14, where believers are encouraged to “desire” prophesying (verse 1; cf. 39), and to “all prophesy one by one” (verse 31; cf. 24, 25).

In other words, God is free to get a message through by any means of His choosing. He used Balaam’s donkey ([Num. 22:21-25](#)) and even His enemy, Caiaphas ([John 11:51](#)), to prophesy. But it is equally clear that not all who prophesy are prophets. Caiaphas was not a prophet. Certainly Balaam’s donkey was not a prophet. It is even doubtful whether any of the Corinthians mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 were prophets.²⁰ Whereas all prophets prophesy, not everyone who prophesies is a prophet. In the New Testament, the office of the “prophet” was limited to a few leading individuals (cf. [Acts 13:1](#); [15:32](#); [11:27-30](#); [21:10-14](#)) who might also be apostles. These were people of great and continuing authority (such as Barnabas, Paul, Silas, and Agabus).²¹

This might shed light on Paul’s counsel in [1 Thessalonians 5:19-22](#): “Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (NASB).

Paul does not say here that “prophets” should be examined (though Scripture speaks to this elsewhere). What is to be examined is the claimed product of the Spirit’s work (including prophecy). Not to do so could allow evil to enter the church in the guise of the

good (cf. verse 22). That which claims to be prophetic revelation is to be examined in the light of previous revelation. All that claims to be prophecy is not necessarily from God.

A related reference is [Romans 12:6](#). According to this text, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If your gift is *prophesying*, then prophesy in accordance with your faith” (NIV; italics added). A person who has the gift of “prophecy” (the office of a prophet is not in view here) is to exercise it “according to the analogy of the faith.”

“According to the analogy of the faith” is an ambiguous expression. The underlying Greek can naturally express several ideas: (1) that the one who prophesies will do so to the degree that he or she has faith that God is speaking through them at that point; (2) that the one who has the gift should always prophesy in agreement with “the faith,” that which the church generally holds on the basis of Scripture; and (3) that the Spirit will only manifest the gift of prophecy through those who already have faith in Christ. Whatever option best expresses Paul’s intention, it should be kept in mind that the text does not address the office of prophet, but rather the broader New Testament category of “prophecy” and “prophesying.”

The New Testament prophet

What exactly is the function of the New Testament prophet? The Greek root of *prophet* is a compound word, combining a Greek word for “speaking” with the prefix “*pro*,” which is ambiguous in meaning. It can mean “speaking openly” or publically, much like preaching. But it can also mean “speaking ahead of time” or “in advance.”²² In ancient Greece, the word came to be used for appointed people through whom the gods revealed their will.²³ So by New Testament times the prophet comes to be known as “a proclaimer or expounder of divine matters or concerns that could not ordinarily be known except by special revelation.”²⁴

The New Testament adds at least three criteria for a true prophet to those of the Old Testament. First, those who prophesied in Corinth would submit to the authority of Paul, an apostle and an author of what would become New Testament Scripture ([1 Cor. 14:37](#)). So any noncanonical prophet in the New Testament era was subject to the

authority of the New Testament, which was written by the apostles. Second, the true prophet will manifest the presence of the Spirit by a true confession of Jesus Christ ([1 John 4:2, 3](#)). Since false prophets can confess the name of Jesus also ([Matt. 7:21-23](#)), this criterion by itself is not decisive. Third, the life of the true prophet will reflect the high ethical principles of the revelation, while the revelations of the false prophet will produce evil fruits ([Matt. 7:15-23](#); [Rev. 2:20](#)). This latter point needs to be tempered, however, by the recognition that some canonical prophets, such as David and Solomon, made some very immoral life choices.

[20]

In the epistles of Paul, prophets generally exhort people to obey the will of God that has been revealed to them through the prophet or through earlier revelations in the Scriptures; they rarely predict future events. In Revelation, the prophetic role is reversed: prediction of future events is central to the “prophecy” ([Rev. 1:3](#)), and exhortation takes a more marginal role.

New Testament prophets can be seen at work in the book of Acts. In [Acts 11:27-30](#), the story is told of a delegation of prophets who came to Antioch from Jerusalem. One of them, Agabus, foretold “by the Spirit” a worldwide famine that was about to happen (verse 28). The message was accepted as authoritative, and action was taken so that the brethren in Judea would not suffer unduly. Here a New Testament prophet (1) foretold something that was about to happen, and (2) the message called for an obedient response.

In [Acts 15:30-32](#), two prophets, Judas and Silas, were sent by the council in Jerusalem to report the decision of the council. As prophets, they not only read the epistle but spoke many words to encourage and strengthen the church. The phrase “being prophets themselves” (verse 32, NASB) seems to set them in continuity with those (the apostles and elders in Jerusalem) who had sent the epistle. The purpose of the epistle was the unity of the church, and God used Judas and Silas to support that purpose “with many words” of encouragement.

In [Acts 21:10-14](#), Agabus again appears and foretells the captivity of Paul in Jerusalem. Here the prophet is seen delivering a message from God to an individual. He does not specify whether or not Paul should go to Jerusalem, he just informs him of roughly what will happen to him there. Interestingly, there is a division in

the church regarding how to apply this prophecy. Luke and others around Paul at the time believe it means he should not go to Jerusalem. Paul, on the other hand, determines to go anyway. After some discussion of the matter, Paul's colleagues give in to his determination.

[21] This incident is an excellent example of the church struggling to understand how a prophecy should be applied in a specific situation. Agabus's message or role as a prophet was not in question. But it was recognized that the prophecy did not specify what Paul's action should be. Paul, following the leading of the Holy Spirit as an apostle, chose to go to Jerusalem anyway, and the prophecy of Agabus was fulfilled in a general way.²⁵

This story is extremely relevant to the church today. Like Paul and his followers, the words of the true prophet need to be accepted by us today as a word from God. But like them, we also need to use sanctified common sense in applying such counsels to our own situation. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the original utterance will assist in the application. But that does not mean that genuine believers will have no difference of opinion as to how the word from God applies in a given situation. Believers need to be both humble and gracious as the church wrestles with complex issues in the light of inspiration. We “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:9), and some aspects of the will of God in specific situations will not always be clear.

Some may argue that there is no need for common sense and discernment (“I take it as it reads”). But counsel written to another time and place does not always fit neatly into a radically different situation. This means that genuine prophetic messages can be applied in disastrous ways by sincere followers of the prophet. For example, a father writes a letter to his lazy son, urging him to action. But if that letter were mistakenly sent to his workaholic son, great damage would result. Circumstances alter cases, and through careful discernment, studied in context with the whole of revelation and guided by the Holy Spirit, the written word from the past can become a living and powerful word from the Lord for today!

Outside the book of Acts there are several more important examples of the nature of the prophetic office in the New Testament. In the letters of Paul to Timothy, mention is made of very specific prophecies regarding Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14). These prophetic

messages were evidently delivered, perhaps by Paul, at the time of Timothy's ordination to the gospel ministry. These "prophecies" may have been along the lines of [1 Corinthians 14:24, 25](#), where prophetic messages expose the secrets of a person's heart. This kind of thing often occurred in Ellen White's ministry.

Key passages

The two parts of the New Testament where the language of prophets and prophecy are most heavily clustered are [1 Corinthians 12-14](#) and the book of Revelation.

1 Corinthians 12-14

The major passage that deals most directly with the question of prophets and prophecy in the New Testament is [1 Corinthians 12-14](#). [22] The Corinthians want to know about the workings of the Holy Spirit in the church. Paul, however, is more concerned about the unity of the church (cf. the one-body imagery of [12:12-27](#)), which is a co-theme of this section. In [1 Corinthians 12](#), the work of the Spirit is divided into two lists of gifts (verses [7-11](#) and [28-31](#)), which are commonly assumed to be equivalent. However, there are significant differences between the two lists.

The first list ([1 Cor. 12:7-11](#)) is made up of "manifestations" that are accomplished by the Spirit, not offices or roles. The focus of this list, therefore, is on specific expressions of the Spirit's work, such as words of wisdom and knowledge. So this list concerns the products of the Spirit's work in human beings, manifested in actions. Therefore, you do not find "apostle" or "prophet" in this list, but there is mention of "prophecy." In contrast to the second list, individuals have no steady claim on these manifestations, they are given by the Spirit to whomever He wills and whenever He wills.

The second list (verses 28-31) is made up of gifts in the form of offices into which God has placed people. These roles in the church are listed in plural, with "apostles" and "prophets" being the first two. In contrast to the first list, these offices are not arbitrary on the part of the Spirit; they can be sought or "eagerly desired" (NIV and

ESV of verse 31; cf. 11). As we have seen above, they are listed in a hierarchical order of authority.

This passage explicitly articulates the New Testament distinction between the office of the prophet (the few) and the general manifestation of prophecy and prophesying among all the believers. In order of church leadership, a prophet stands above all other offices except that of apostle (cf. [1 Cor. 14:5](#)). The message of the prophet is incomplete in comparison with the clarity of eternity ([1 Cor. 13:9-12](#)). God's revelation to us is like an adult attempting to explain adult things to a two-year-old. It is the clearest revelation of God's will available to us, yet it is incomplete on account of our own limitations of understanding.

[23] Coming to chapter 14 we must note a number of facts: (1) It was not the purpose of this chapter to lay out the nature of prophecy. Its purpose was to bring order and unity into the worship services in Corinth (cf. verse 40). (2) The Corinthian situation was an aberration, not the norm. Thus we must not assume that Paul's discussion of the question there is normative for us in every detail. (3) The apostle clearly exercises his apostolic authority over those in Corinth who would claim to be prophets (verse 37). It was the function of an apostle as a founder of the church to have leadership authority. The quality of special revelation is the same for apostle and prophet. There are no degrees of inspiration.

The use of *prophet* to describe individuals in Corinth seems to contradict the earlier distinction between the office of the prophet and the manifestation of prophecy and prophesying in a more general sense ([1 Cor. 12](#)). Certainly, if the Corinthians manifested genuine gifts from God, the use of *prophecy* and *prophesying* would better fit what occurred in their midst. Yet in [1 Corinthians 14:29](#), Paul regulates these activities by ordering the Corinthian "prophets" to limit their activities to two or three at a time. Having said that, however, Paul himself seems to doubt that these are real prophets. In verse 37, he challenges the would-be prophets: "If anyone *thinks* himself to be a prophet . . ." (italics added). Therefore, while some statements in chapter 14 (such as verses 3-6, 22-25) seem to be universally applicable, much of what we find here is colored by the bizarre situation of the Corinthian church, a situation so bizarre that a Corinthian prophet could curse Christ and think he was in

the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The temptation to diminish the role of the New Testament prophet on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14 must be tempered by the evidence of Revelation.

The book of Revelation

The book of Revelation, written by the apostle John, focuses on John's role as a prophet. The "words of this prophecy" are to be obeyed (Rev. 1:3). Their authority is so unquestionable that not a word is to be added or subtracted (Rev. 22:18, 19). The author of the book lays no claim to apostleship, although he could have. It is as a New Testament prophet that he presents his work. A crucial passage in this regard is Revelation 19:10. There it is stated that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Revelation 19:10 must be understood in the light of 22:9 and its context.

The parallel between Revelation 19:10 and Revelation 22:9 clearly indicates that the prophets are those who inherently possess the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit behind all prophecy (Rev. 19:10).²⁶ This fits in perfectly with Ephesians, where the substance of the revelation received by the New Testament apostles and prophets was Christ's proclamation of peace (Eph. 2:17) and the "mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). Clearly, like the apostle, the testimony of the prophet is a witness to Christ. According to Revelation, while the apostle is an eyewitness to the earthly Christ event, the prophet is an eyewitness of the glorified Christ. And as Christ is the Word of God, the prophet speaks with authority just as the apostle does.

Such prophecy was not to cease but was to continue into the future (Rev. 10:11; 11:3, 6, 10).²⁷ In these passages the word *testimony* is once again connected to the work of the prophet (verses 3, 10). So for John, the kind of gift he had received from God was not limited to his time, but also would be manifested afterward as well. [24]

Revelation 12:17 extends the gift of prophecy all the way to the end of time. After portraying in symbols the Christ event and the fate of God's people through history, chapter 12 concludes with a statement that the remnant just before the closing crisis of earth's history will have the testimony of Jesus. This phrase is an exact ver-

bal parallel to [Revelation 19:10](#), which is equated with the prophets of [Revelation 22:9](#). In addition to this, [Revelation 1:2](#) portrays the testimony of Jesus as what John “saw” not what John “wrote.” The testimony of Jesus in [Revelation 1:2](#) is the visionary, prophetic gift that John received from God. [Revelation 12:17](#) indicates that such a visionary, prophetic gift would return in the time of the end-time remnant. Though few scholars have noted these parallels, they are too striking to be coincidental.

Thus Revelation underlines four ideas that concern our topic: (1) The New Testament prophet is a counterpart of those in the Old Testament ([Rev. 22:9](#), cf. [Luke 11:47-50](#)). (2) The inspiration authority of the true New Testament prophet is the same as that of the apostle. (3) The prophet as well as the apostle is an eyewitness of Christ. (4) This gift does not cease with the canon but is to be expected again at the end of earth’s history.

The New Testament prophet and current Adventist issues

Ultimately all authority is grounded in God Himself. As Creator, God is the final authority in the universe. But God has chosen to express His authority through self-revelation. So the question that matters most is, *Where can we find a reliable account of God’s self-revelation?*

The Bible is certainly such a revelation of God. Since Christians accept that claim, they should submit to its authority and make it their rule of faith and practice. Many, however, have difficulties with the fact that so many different interpretations of that same Bible are in circulation. Is there a reliable way to interpret the Bible? How can a book speak with authority if it is not perceived clearly?

[25] Many Adventists have endeavored to attack this problem by suggesting that Ellen White provides God’s final inspired commentary on the biblical text. Human nature being what it is, however, the commentary often supersedes the Bible in many minds, and this she herself refused to allow: “The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.” ²⁸

But while the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested, many wrest that Word to their own destruction: “Some who profess to make the word of God their study are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the word that they have neglected to follow. . . . If you had made God’s word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies.” ²⁹

Thus Ellen White saw her writings as subject to the Bible, but if the visions come from God, they have authority. “The waymarks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.” ³⁰

How should Seventh-day Adventist Christians relate to these two authorities? The New Testament evidence gives us a few clues. In addition to the authority of the Old Testament and the earthly life of Jesus, there are three further sources of authority in the New Testament. These are the apostles, the prophets, and the “prophesiers.” “Prophesiers” are “driven by the Spirit” to speak for God on specific occasions but not in terms of a formal office.

Of the three sources, apostle was the highest and most universal authority, a position that was unquestionable once established. Then came the prophet, whose authority might be more local and was usually noncanonical, but was equal in inspiration as a recipient of revelation. The messages of the prophesiers were questioned because there was often doubt about the divine origin of a particular message.

The Old Testament has three similar groups: Moses, the prophets (canonical and noncanonical), and the occasional “prophesiers” (1 Sam. 10:5-13; 19:8-24; 1 Kings 20:35-43; 2 Kings 2:3-7; etc.). It is tempting to equate these with the three that have been suggested in the New Testament: (1) apostles (source of the New Testament canon), (2) prophets (noncanonical prophets of the New Testament era), and (3) prophesiers (agents of the Holy Spirit’s work throughout the New Testament era).

[26] However attractive this neat division might be, there are problems with it. Chief among these is the fact that, in terms of revelation, there is no clear distinction made between apostles and prophets in the New Testament.³¹ But if the apostles, as sources of revelation, are limited to the first century (as many suggest), then a clearer distinction might be a division between the “founders”—made up of both apostles and prophets—whose work is complete ([Eph. 2:20](#)), and those New Testament prophets whose work, though not canonical, would continue to the end of time (cf. [Rev. 10, 11, 12](#)).

In this context, Ellen White’s gift can be equated with the non-canonical prophets of both Old and New Testaments. She counsels both individuals and the church at large. She reveals the secrets of people’s hearts. She describes heavenly perspectives and places through dreams and visions. She exhorts and encourages, and she speaks with authority in local situations. More than this, she foretells the future, including scenes at the end of history, as did the prophet John in Revelation. Her work is distinguished from the “founders” (apostles and prophets), who wrote the New Testament. It is also distinguished from the “prophesiers,” whose authority is more pastoral. Ellen White doesn’t fit the latter category because of the clear and continuing prophetic nature of her gift and the consistent regard with which her contemporaries treated that gift.

How shall we relate her direct authority in the immediate situation to the need for general authority in the Adventist Church today? Here the same principles should be used as would apply in biblical interpretation. Whereas the written words of the dead prophet are normally less clear in application than the direct word of the living prophet, they still bear witness to God’s explicit instruction in a specific context.³² Guided by the Holy Spirit, the church will use biblically informed discernment, testing, and careful evaluation ([1 Cor. 14:29](#); [1 Thess. 5:19-21](#); [Rom. 12:6](#)) as it applies the message (sometimes for another time and place) to its own living challenges.

³³

In conclusion, Ellen White’s claims are very clear; she was a messenger of the Lord and her words have divine authority. This does not allow us to treat her casually. Some have argued that she was a deceiver (knowingly misleading her audience). Others have suggested that she was brain-damaged or suffering from delusions

of grandeur. Neither her life nor her writings are consistent with such negative evaluations. It is better to take her claimed role at face value, a role for which the New Testament calls. Her best intention for everything she wrote must be weighed, using correct principles of interpretation, while also giving thanks to God for the additional clarity her writings bring to our understanding of His will.

¹ Among others: Joseph Bates, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *Review and Herald*, April 21, 1851, 69, 70; D. T. Bourdeau, "Spiritual Gifts," *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1862, 5, 6; James White, "The Spirit of Prophecy," *Review and Herald*, February 1, 1870, 45.

² The English word prophet originated in the Greek.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New King James Version®.

⁴ Rolf Rendtorff, "[prophetes], etc.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:796-799.

⁵ Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1960), s.v. "prophet."

⁶ Rendtorff, "[prophetes], etc.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 806, 807.

⁷ A similar listing can be found in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "prophet."

⁸ G. V. Smith, "Prophet; Prophecy," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, fully rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:1003.

⁹ Prophetes, prophetis, propheteia, propheteuo, prophetikos.

¹⁰ Apostolos, apostole.

¹¹ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "dnoatoAoc; [apostolos], etc." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:421.

¹² Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "dnoatoAoc; [apostolos]."

¹³ Rengstorff, "dnoatoAoc; [apostolos], etc." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 423.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 160-204.

¹⁵ Hans Dieter Betz, "Apostle," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1:310.

¹⁶ Gerhard Friedrich, "[prophetes], etc.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:850. There are many parallels between Paul's own biographical statements in his letters and the prophets of the Old Testament. Paul clearly understands his apostolic mission to be similar to their prophetic one. See M. Eugene Boring, "Prophecy (Early Christian)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:498.

¹⁷Two models for this expanded understanding would be the role of Moses in the Old Testament (Num. 12:6-8) and John the Baptist in the New (Luke 7:26).

¹⁸Ellen G. White [EGW], "An Open Letter From Mrs. E. G. White to All Who Love the Blessed Hope," *Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903, 15; quoted in *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 93.

¹⁹EGW, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1939), viii.

²⁰Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37—"If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet . . ." (emphasis added).

²¹The term prophet is used only twice in relation to a woman in the New Testament, to Anna (Luke 2:36) and to Jezebel, an example of a false prophet (Rev. 2:24)! The daughters of Philip, e.g., are not called "prophets" but are said to "prophesy." In Titus 1:12, the pagan writer Epimenides is also called a prophet.

²²Rendtorff, "npōnTn̂ [prophetes], etc.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 783.

²³*Ibid.*, 791.

²⁴Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "npōnTn̂ [prophetes]."

²⁵While, in retrospect, one might question the prophecy of Agabus for seeming inaccuracy (it is the Romans, not the Jews, who end up binding Paul in Jerusalem: Acts 21:33), it is instructive that the original hearers of the prophecy did not do so. At its crucial point (the consequences of Paul's trip to Jerusalem), the prophecy was accurate. Most prophecies contain conditional elements, and circumstances affect the details (see Isa. 11:15, 16 as an example of a prophecy that was fulfilled in principle but not in detail).

²⁶The additional phrase in Revelation 22:9, "and of those who keep the words of this book," is not grammatically connected to the "brothers" of John, who are called prophets in Revelation 22:9 and have the testimony of Jesus (spirit of prophecy) in Revelation 19:10. It merely reemphasizes that the angel is not worthy of worship, not by John himself, not by any other prophet like John, not even by the lowliest of John's readers.

²⁷It is interesting to note that all of our three key words—prophet, prophecy, and prophesy—are applied to the work of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

²⁸EGW, *The Great Controversy*, ix.

²⁹EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 5:663-665.

³⁰EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:207, 208.

³¹Both are "sent" by Jesus (Luke 11:49, 50). Both are counterparts of the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 23:29-37). Both are part of the "foundation" (Eph. 2:20). Both receive revelation concerning the "mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4, 5). Both author canonical New Testament writings (Revelation).

³²On the difference in the way one treats the oral words of a living prophet and the written words of a dead prophet, see Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2004), 62-78.

³³In the field of mission studies, this kind of careful work is called "critical contextualization." For a detailed "how-to" approach to contextualization, see Jon Paulien,

“Dealing With Syncretism in Insider Movements,” in *Faith Development in Context: Presenting Christ in Creative Ways*, ed. Bruce L. Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, 2005), 217-251.

[27] **Chapter Two - Revelation and Inspiration: Ellen**
[28] **White's Understanding**

[29]

[30]

Merlin D. Burt

Ellen White believed that she presented messages written under the influence of inspiration. She declared, “The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy.”¹ Speaking of God’s prophetic revelation to her, she clarified that “in ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit.”² The quality of inspiration in both the Bible and Ellen White’s writings is the same, even though the purpose is different. The Bible remains the basis of all Christian faith and practice. A clear differentiation between the purpose and role of the Bible as compared to Ellen White’s writings is outlined in the next chapter. But in either case, a correct understanding of divine revelation and inspiration is crucial to any attempt to appropriately interpret and understand the divine communication process.³

While the Bible clearly shows the inspiration of the Old and New Testament prophets, Seventh-day Adventists have a unique perspective on inspiration because of the lifelong ministry of Ellen White. We can look more closely at the process because we have more information on her life and writings. Her experience is often similar to biblical prophets.

[31] This chapter will (1) provide a working definition for some important terms used to discuss divine revelation and inspiration; (2) present common understanding on inspiration; (3) explain some problematic paradigms that have been historically used to explain the inspiration process; and (4) show Ellen White’s own incarnational view of how the inspiration process worked in her own life and ministry.

Definition of important terms

For the Christian, God is the source of existence, identity, meaning, and purpose. He is the absolute authority as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and, in a personal sense, of every person whether they recognize it or not. Because God has not usually revealed Himself directly through voice and visible demonstration, people are dependent upon His self-revelation through the creation or providence and through the prophetic word. The sixty-six books of the Bible given over a period of roughly fifteen hundred years, and culminating with the incarnation of Jesus and the gospel story, establish the fundamental basis for understanding who God is—His character and will.

Divine revelation has often been divided into two categories: general and special revelation. These are theological terms that help us organize our understanding. Special revelation will be further explained in the subcategories of prophetic revelation, inspiration, and illumination. It should be understood that these are simplistic and descriptive terms used to help us understand various aspects of divine communication. These various operations of the Holy Spirit overlap and have further complexities that are beyond the scope of this chapter.

General revelation

God has revealed Himself to everyone in a general or universal sense through nature, intuitive knowledge, conscience, and providence. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” ([Rom. 1:20](#); see also [Gen. 1:26, 27](#); [3:15](#); [Acts 17:26-28](#)). ⁴ General revelation is gathered from what can be observed externally or internally through natural means. Alone, general revelation does not provide an understanding that brings salvation. The Holy Spirit uses these means to touch the mind and heart of every person.

Special revelation

In comparison to general revelation, special revelation comes only when God reveals His message more directly. God cannot be known unless God specifically reveals Himself. The Bible came through special revelation. Although there are various ways of categorizing special revelation, three will be mentioned that are active in the Christian faith, with the first two particularly applying to the prophetic role.

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Prophetic revelation

An explicit communication of God through the Holy Spirit occurs in prophetic revelation. In this process God usually reveals His message to a prophet directly or through a divine vision or dream ([Num. 12:6](#); [Amos 3:7](#)). Much of the Bible came to us through this process. Ellen White claimed to experience this type of revelation.

Confusing prophetic revelation and illumination sometimes leads sincere people who experience the working of the Holy Spirit through illumination to think they have the prophetic gift. God does at times give personal supernatural guidance and communication to people, but this does not necessarily convey prophetic status or authority. Personal revelation has importance for the person who receives the communication but not to the church at large, and of course it must be in harmony with the Bible. Prophets are called to bear a particular message(s) from God to others. They function as divine messengers on God's behalf. It is vital to understand that all true modern prophetic revelation and illumination is oriented toward Scripture.

Inspiration

Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit in conveying the divine communication through a person in either oral or written form. In the Bible, God's inspired communication through a human process is both trustworthy and authoritative. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Functionally, revelation

and inspiration work together seamlessly under the operation of the Holy Spirit to reveal and convey God's message as He intends.

Seventh-day Adventists accept the absolute authority of Scripture as a revelation from God to understand truth and equip people to live the Christian life. The Holy Spirit through illumination helps us to understand and be transformed by bringing the inspired prophetic revelation to life in our heart and mind. Once a person has begun to acknowledge and worship God, then His revelation through the Bible becomes personally authoritative and transformational. The Bible is a product of inspiration.

Ellen White's writings are also a result of the inspiration process, but as noted at the beginning of this chapter, there are important distinctions between her writings and the Bible.

Illumination

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Illumination is the special revelation work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. It is a supernatural work of God to give the Bible or inspired writings living power and provides saving understanding. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you" (Ps. 119:105; John 16:13, 14; see also 1 Cor. 2:9-16). Illumination should not be confused with prophetic revelation. In 2 Peter 1:19, the sure prophetic word causes Jesus, the "Morning Star," to arise in our hearts. The same Holy Spirit who gives the prophetic message to a prophet brings illumination to believers. Though both are special operations of the Holy Spirit, the prophetic word is the definitive source and underlying authority that defines and verifies God's communication.

Common views on inspiration

Over the years Christians have typically viewed inspiration over a broad spectrum from verbal dictation to existential encounter. Various systematic theologians have categorized different ideas on how inspiration operated in the prophet's experience. These ideas are varied and sometimes complex and confusing. Functionally these

views can be reduced to three, which are familiar to Adventists. The following diagram represents the spectrum of thought on the subject.

Verbal ——— [U+2 6 6 6] Divine

Thought ——— [U+2 6 6 6] Divine/Human

Encounter ——— [U+2 6 6 6] Human

At one extreme, with verbal dictation, the Holy Spirit has almost complete control over the entire process. On the other extreme, existential encounter, everything is based on the impressions of the person about God, and the process is almost entirely human. As you come closer to the middle, there is a blending of the two into what has often been referred to as thought inspiration that gives due respect to the divine communication and the human impressions. A little more needs to be said about each of these categories—verbal, encounter, and thought inspiration.

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Verbal inspiration view

The verbal inspiration view ranges from a dictation or mechanical inspiration view to a divine management of the verbal content. Early twentieth-century fundamentalists closely interacted with Adventism in various causes and influenced Adventist views on inspiration. When strict verbalists argued for the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, they said that in the original autographs, God dictated the Bible in much the same way that He gave the Ten Commandments from Sinai. Some allowed that God worked within the vocabulary and language limitations of the prophet, but God chose most of the words that were used. The human aspect was removed or minimized. God essentially inspired not just the men of the Bible but also managed their words. Thus, in the verbal inspiration view, the prophets functioned more as God's pen than as His penmen. ⁵

Illumination or encounter view

The illumination view, advocated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (a late seventeenth to early eighteenth-century historical-critical theologian), Unitarians, and some encounter theologians of the early twentieth century, claims that inspiration works in all believers as the Holy Spirit heightens the spiritual perceptivity. Those with this

view did not see a qualitative difference between what the prophets experienced and what any Christian may experience. This view de-emphasizes, if not denies, the idea of new objective truth or propositional special revelation. It diminished the Bible to a mostly naturalistic process. Adventists who tend towards this end of the spectrum might respect Ellen White but consider her to be a remarkable person with only devotional or experiential authority.

Thought inspiration view

In the thought inspiration view, God makes sure that the prophet understands the revelation sufficiently to accurately convey the meaning in a trustworthy manner to the intended recipient using his or her own words. It does not exclude the possibility that God at times does guide the words of the prophetic messenger, but this is not the usual method. In this view, God's normal way of working is to create an accurate understanding of the divine communication in the mind of the prophet. The messenger then conveyed this understanding under the direction and supervision of the Holy Spirit in such a way that God's message was communicated.

Ellen White and thought inspiration

[35]

Ellen White's own statements are closer to the thought inspiration view. She wrote:

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words and thoughts receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God. ⁶

Many Adventists claim to believe in thought inspiration. But it has a significant diversity of interpretation. It can range from almost a strict verbal view to nearly a strict encounter view. If it leans towards the strict verbal view, it is believed that thoughts require words and therefore God must manage the words that create the thoughts. This more verbal perspective on thought inspiration can

limit the ability of the prophet to grow in their understanding or allow them to make inconsequential mistakes, which requires a level of accuracy that is not evident in Scripture or Ellen White's writings.

Some who claim thought inspiration lean toward a strict encounter view. They believe that God inspired the thoughts of the prophet, which were divine but allowed for significant errors in the prophet's presentation. For example, they incorrectly presume that God inspired Moses with thoughts about Creation, but he drew largely from accounts by his contemporaries and thus may not be presenting a historically accurate description of a six-day creation ([Gen. 1](#)). Some Adventist thinkers who do not embrace all aspects of the encounter view advocate thought inspiration in this manner. They subjectively limit inspiration to matters of salvation with wide latitude for error on other matters.

In a functional way, some within the Seventh-day Adventist Church are either encounter or verbalist leaning in their orientation, even though they claim to believe in thought inspiration. The closer to the middle one goes, the more moderate the view becomes and the weaknesses of either extreme are reduced. But these common descriptions are inadequate. Ellen White combined thought inspiration with an incarnational view of the process of inspiration, which transcends these narrower definitions.

[36] As helpful as a consideration of these models of inspiration may be, they all have significant limitations. Thus a more incarnational, integrated, or wholistic approach, as experienced by Ellen White, might be suggested. Before examining this concept in more detail, a few historical examples of problematic approaches to combining ideas on inspiration need to be considered.

Some problematic paradigms

Some in Adventist history have tried to integrate the various views in problematic ways by arguing for degrees of inspiration. Two examples follow: one from Adventist history and the other more recent.

G. I. Butler, General Conference president, and Uriah Smith, *Review and Herald* editor, argued that when Ellen White was shown something in vision and wrote "I was shown," then it was inspired

in the highest degree. When she was expressing her own opinion, it was not inspired. Butler developed this view in a ten-part series of articles in the *Review and Herald* in 1884.⁷ He argued that there were five degrees of inspiration: Ellen White directly rejected this view. She also wrote to Uriah Smith and others who suggested that some of what she had written was just her own opinion and therefore not inspired:

Weak and trembling, I arose at three o'clock in the morning to write to you. God was speaking through clay. You might say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your minds things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. 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.⁸

A modern example of the debate over approaches to inspiration appears in *Prophets Are Human and More Than a Prophet: How We Lost and Found Again the Real Ellen White* by Graeme S. Bradford when compared with *The Greatest of All the Prophets* by Russell Standish and Colin Standish.⁹

Bradford theologically followed the approach of graduated levels of inspiration and authority similar, in some respects, to Butler and Smith. Additionally, he cited modern evangelical systematic theologians and thinkers such as Wayne Grudem and D. A. Carson, though he diverged from some of their views on verbal inspiration. In 2002, Bradford published *Prophets Are Human*, which presented an extended Bible study between fictional personalities Dr. Smithurst and a couple named Doug and Jean. Although readable and evangelistic, the book gave a theologically and historically loose presentation with particular emphasis on the human dimension of Ellen White's experiences.¹⁰

In 2006, Bradford published a more formal examination of Ellen White's prophetic gift in *More Than a Prophet*. This book received promotion through its publisher, Samuele Bacchiocchi. It gave a more careful explanation of Bradford's view on the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. He argued for different categories of the gift of prophecy with different degrees of inspiration authority.¹¹

[37]

He saw Ellen White as having prophetic characteristics on different levels: (1) like “Daniel and John” with “apocalyptic visions”; (2) like Agabus with a widespread ministry to different congregations but less than the apostles; and (3) like the “prophets” in 1 Corinthians 14 who sometimes made mistakes, and needed to be evaluated by the congregation.¹² It followed that the reader was left to determine which level of authority or inspiration to apply to Ellen White’s various writings. Thus some of her writings, according to Bradford, had full inspiration authority while others contained mistakes.

In 2004, independent reformist writers Russell and Colin Standish published a response to the ideas in Bradford’s first book, *Prophets Are Human*, and other publications in *The Greatest of All the Prophets*.¹³ The Standish brothers broadly condemned church leaders across the theological spectrum but were particularly strident in their opposition to then-current developments in Australia. They presented a functionally verbal approach to inspiration that was widely critical of Seventh-day Adventist teachers, authors, and leaders and in some cases factually inaccurate. They concluded, “One particle of error destroys truth irrespective of the quantity of truth remaining” and argued that even minor historical details in Ellen White’s writings were without error.¹⁴ This position, as we will see, was out of harmony with Ellen White’s own understanding of inspiration and created new problems that diminish confidence in her writings.

Thus these various approaches demonstrate the confusion that has existed in the church and the need for a correct view of inspiration. A more comprehensive and wholistic approach to the subject of inspiration that includes Ellen White’s own understanding is needed.

¹⁵

Ellen White’s incarnational view of inspiration

Ellen White illustrated and compared inspiration to the incarnation of Jesus. She saw divine revelation and the human experience as blended. Thus more simplistic approaches such as verbal, encounter, or even thought inspiration are limited in scope and do not individually capture the complexities of the divine/human revelation and inspiration process. Two statements help clarify her view.

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. . . . The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).¹⁶ [38]

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God’s condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought.¹⁷

The divine message is understood in the mind of prophetic messenger through an organization of ideas and thoughts. It becomes a part of the prophet’s orientation and experience. Ellen White’s focus was on the message. Words convey thoughts and are therefore very important, but for Ellen White the emphasis was on the thoughts. She was always careful to give preeminence to the divine activity in the prophetic revelation process. She attributed the thoughts she received to God rather than herself. In her best-known statement on inspiration, she drew from the wording of Calvin Stowe but changed the words to reflect her own view.¹⁸ Stowe wrote that the thoughts were not inspired but rather the men were inspired. He further suggested that the prophet “conceived” the thoughts. Ellen White completely removed Stowe’s idea that the thoughts were not inspired and wrote that the Holy Ghost “imbues” the prophet with thoughts.¹⁹

When the Holy Spirit works through the process of inspiration, He is not limited to only one aspect of the human messenger. The mind—including thoughts, emotions, and personality—and the body and its sensory responses are all involved. The whole person is brought under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Yet the human messenger remains with all of his or her human weaknesses. God

condescends in order to enable us to better understand and relate to His communication.

[39] It was through her senses that Ellen White gained an understanding of the divine message. Through visions and in other ways, God guided, influenced, and sometimes even controlled her human senses, including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and her mental, emotional, and social responses in order to communicate with her. Ellen White would often receive visionary experiences that included pictorial depictions and verbal explanations. She saw all of these as valid aspects for God to use in the revelation and inspiration process as it related to her work as a special prophetic messenger of the Lord. It was an incarnational or wholistic process.

Visionary experiences and pictorial depictions

There are thousands of times in Ellen White's writings where she writes "I was shown" or "I saw." Although she sometimes heard the divine messenger speaking, many of her visionary revelations were in the form of dynamic scenes or representations of people, places, and events either past, present, or future. She was also shown allegorical or symbolic portrayals or illustrative stories that were not usually actual events. At times, visions were repeated until she understood the real meaning of what she was seeing. Her understanding of what she was shown would often grow over time.²⁰ In the inspiration process, she received divine help in understanding and in describing to others these representations. In some ways her experience was like Ezekiel, or Daniel, or John (in the book of Revelation).

Ellen White's first vision was symbolic. She saw Jesus leading the people of God on a path to the New Jerusalem. She described aspects of what she was shown and then gave applications for the disappointed Millerites.²¹

Ellen White sometimes experienced things virtually that allowed her to correctly communicate God's message. In her new earth vision during the spring of 1845, she was taken to the future and walked with Jesus in the re-created earth. She smelled the flowers, heard the sound of birds, felt the rapture of the redeemed. She also had the verbal explanations of Jesus while socially interacting with

the redeemed. The tangible nature of the vision stopped just short of tasting the banquet of heaven with the fruit of the tree of life, and she was told to tell others what she had been shown.

In communicating these representations, she would often retell in her own words what she was shown with an interpretation. Many times these would be in the form of counsel to individuals or to the church. The interpretations were usually simple and direct. Here are two vivid examples:

The world was spread out before me and I saw darkness like the pall of death. What did it mean? I could see no light. Then I saw a little glimmer of light and then another, and these lights increased and grew brighter, and multiplied and grew stronger and stronger till they were the light of the world. These were the believers in Jesus Christ. ²² [40]

To J. H. Kellogg, she wrote:

Many other scenes connected with your case have been presented to me. At one time you were represented to me as trying to push a long car up a steep ascent. But this car, instead of going up the hill, kept running down. This car represented the food business as a commercial enterprise, which has been carried forward in a way that God does not commend.

At another time you were represented to me as a general, mounted on a horse, and carrying a banner. One came and took out of your hand the banner bearing the words, "The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," and it was trampled in the dust. I saw you surrounded by men who were linking you up with the world. ²³

Thus the divine thought would be conveyed through visionary experiences or pictorial depictions, which she would then share in a trustworthy manner under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. ²⁴

Words and instructions

Ellen White was clear that though the thoughts came from God, the words were her own: "I would state that 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 unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation." ²⁵ The words of the

angel were usually explanatory to help her understand what she was shown.

After receiving a pictorial representation of how there is order in heaven, she wrote: “Said the angel, ‘Walk carefully before Him, for He is high and lifted up, and the train of His glory fills the temple.’ I saw that everything in heaven was in perfect order. Said the angel, ‘Look ye; Christ is the head; move in order, move in order. Have a meaning to everything.’ “²⁶ These visions gave immediate help to the church as they struggled to understand God’s will regarding organization. These initial communications of the divine message sometimes seemed unpolished and formative.

Later Ellen White would write general counsel based on specific visions or a thematic grouping of numerous divine communications. She wrote to a man who misunderstood inspiration as being verbal:

[41] In your letter, you speak of your early training to have implicit faith in the testimonies, and say, “I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments.” My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause have made such claims.²⁷

Though the words were usually Ellen White’s own, she sometimes received assistance in choosing the right words. The following is one way this would happen.

In the night season *I am speaking and writing clear words of admonition*. I waken so burdened in soul that I am again driven to take up my pen. In various ways matters are opened up before my mind, and I dare not rest, or keep quiet.²⁸

Another way in which she would receive guidance with the actual words, though it seems to be the exception rather than the rule, was that Ellen White would write and later read what she had written as if for the first time.

In the night I am aroused from my sleep, and I write in my diary many things that appear as new to me when read as to any who hear them. If I did not see the matter in my own handwriting, I should not think my pen had traced it.²⁹

When she and her assistants later gathered her writings and prepared a book for general readership, she would write more comprehensively and usually did not quote the words of the angel or make reference to her various visions. Instead, she shared the principles within the context of the salvation theme. As she prepared the material, it was message or thought based. At times God would help her with the actual words to convey the thought. "Most precious, simple, elevating truth is in these precious volumes. When writing these precious books, if I hesitated, the very word I wanted to express the idea was given me."³⁰ "There are those who say, 'Someone manipulates her writings.' I acknowledge the charge. It is One who is mighty in counsel, One who presents before me the condition of things."³¹ Thus, God used all aspects of her human resources to ensure that she conveyed the message He intended in a trustworthy manner.

Although inspiration sometimes influenced the specific words she spoke or wrote, usually she drew from her own expression based on her understanding of what she was shown. She was aided in her understanding and expression by other sources such as her reading, study, and various human interactions that helped her to round out both her understanding and that of the reader. Her reading of various materials and what she heard from others enhanced her understanding of what God had revealed to her and thus improved her presentation. For more information on this, see chapter 11, "Ellen White and Sources."

[42]

Although Ellen White understood inspiration as bringing together the human and the divine, she did not therefore conclude that all of her human experiences and communications were under the direction of inspiration. Her everyday life and family relationships were much like any other person's.

There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God.³²

It is important for the reader to be aware of Ellen White's distinction between the sacred and common as it related to her writings and experience.

Too often those who read the Bible or Ellen White's writings have tried to define revelation and inspiration in narrow terms that lead to confusion and sometimes a loss of faith in the divine communication. It is best to let the Bible and Ellen White's writings define how inspiration worked rather than constructing an artificial framework that is incomplete.

Both the Bible and Ellen White in her writings present a consistent picture of an incarnational view of inspiration where the working of the Holy Spirit impacts the entire person and experience of the prophet. Often this was done through divinely selected representations with commentary. This was for the purpose of making the divine message clear to the messengers and to provide ways for them to convey the message to the intended recipients. The prophets conveyed the divine message or the divine thoughts using their own words, though when necessary, God assisted the prophets in the choice of their words. The message produced is the product of God working through the human instrument; the divine and human components cannot be separated. Though the human "vessel of clay" with its weakness and limitations remains, through the Holy Spirit, God ensures that His word is communicated and the message is trustworthy. As outlined in the next chapter, this communication was not separated from Scripture, but always pointed people to the Bible as the foundation for Christian faith and practice.

¹Ellen G. White [EGW] to J. H. Kellogg, July 2, 1900, Letter 92, 1900.

²EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 5:661.

³See Raoul Dederen, "Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics," in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, 1974), 8; Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 1:294; Siegfried H. Horn, "Inspiration," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, ed. Don F. Neufeld (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1960), 524.

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the *New American Standard Bible*®.

⁵See James M. Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible: Definition, Extent, and Proof" in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, 1910-1915), 3:7-41.

⁶EGW, "Objections to the Bible," Manuscript 24, 1886 (diary entry from 1885 written in Europe); EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:21.

⁷George I. Butler, "Inspiration," *Review and Herald*, January 8, 1884, 57; January 15, 1884, 41; January 22, 1884, 57, 58; January 29, 1884, 73, 74; February 5, 1884, 89, 90; April 15, 1884, 249, 250; April 22, 1884, 265-267; May 6, 1884, 296, 297; May 27, 1884, 344-346; June 3, 1884, 361, 362.

⁸EGW, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1882), 49; see also EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:67.

⁹Graeme S. Bradford, *Prophets Are Human* (Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing, 2004); Graeme S. Bradford, *More Than a Prophet: How We Lost and Found Again the Real Ellen White* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2006); Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (Narbethong, Victoria, Australia: Highwood Books, 2004).

¹⁰See Denis Fortin, "Ellen G. White as Messenger of the Lord: What Else Could Dr. Smithhurst Say?" *Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium 1* (2005): 6-25.

¹¹Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000); D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit—a Theological Exposition of 1 Co-rinthians 12-14* (Homebush West, NSW, Australia: Lancer Books, 1988); Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999); Bradford, *More Than a Prophet*, 70, 71.

¹²Bradford, *More Than a Prophet*, 113.

¹³Standish and Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets*, 12.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 101, 198.

¹⁵My initial thoughts were influenced by Alberto R. Timm, "Understanding Inspiration: The Symphonic and Wholistic Nature of Scripture," *Ministry*, August 1999, 12-17.

¹⁶EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:25.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸C. E. Stowe, *Origin and History of the Books of the Bible, Both Canonical and the Apocryphal* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Publishing, 1869), 19.

¹⁹EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:21; see diagram on p. 34 above.

²⁰Chapter 6 in this book explains in more detail Ellen White's visions and prophetic dreams.

²¹EGW, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1945), 13-20.

²²EGW, Manuscript 16, 1894, 8.

²³EGW, Letter 239, 1903.

²⁴During her more than seventy years of prophetic experience, her most extensive pictorial descriptions were regarding the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Throughout her life she was shown at various times, historical and future events as they related to the cosmic conflict, which she then described and explained. They were later gathered into the five books known as the *Conflict of the Ages Series*.

²⁵EGW, "Questions and Answers," *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867, 260.

²⁶EGW, Manuscript 11, 1850.

²⁷This letter, written from California, on June 14, 1906, was subsequently published in the *Review and Herald*, August 30, 1906, 8.

²⁸EGW, Letter 59, 1895; italics in the original.

²⁹EGW, Letter 118, 1898.

³⁰EGW, Letter 265, 1907.

³¹EGW, Letter 52, 1906.

³²EGW, Manuscript 107, 1909.

Chapter Three - Ellen White and Scripture

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R. Clifford Jones

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Seventh-day Adventists value the life and ministry of Ellen G. White. Having died in 1915, “Sister White,” whose life and work are believed by Seventh-day Adventists to have met the criteria of a prophet, wrote prodigiously, leaving a body of writings that has guided the denomination since its inception. Yet she has not been without detractors and to this day continues to attract a horde of admirers and critics alike.

One topic that has piqued the interest of people familiar with Ellen White, and that has provided fodder for debate, if not controversy, is the relationship of her writings to Scripture. The result of many debates on the issue has been confusion, fueled in part by well-meaning admirers who claim, among other things, that her writings (1) are on par with Scripture, (2) were meant to be an extension of, or addendum to, the Bible, and (3) may be used as the basis of doctrine.

what did Ellen White think of the relationship between her writings and Scripture? What claims did she make about her writings, vis-a-vis Scripture? Did she believe that her writings, being those of an inspired prophet, were on the same functional level as the Bible? Did she ever say that the words she penned were an extension of Scripture and could be used as the basis for doctrine? And if her writings are not to be viewed as being on par with Scripture, what then are we to make of her claims of inspiration?

Answers to these and attendant issues need to be understood. Because it is crucial to contextualize Ellen White, her understanding of the relationship of her writings to Scripture must be examined in relation to that of some other nineteenth-century “prophets,”¹ namely Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, and Ann Lee.

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Ellen White's relation to Scripture

Ellen White was an unmitigated Bible loyalist who used Scripture as the bedrock and hallmark of her writings. What she thought of the Bible emerges early in her experience as an Adventist pioneer. In recounting the experience of those who left their churches and led out in the Advent movement, she said that they early “took the position that the Bible, and the Bible only,” would be their compass.² This was an irreversible position that reverberated throughout White's life and ministry, and heavily shaped her theological understanding. She embraced the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, bemoaning the absence of the principle among the Christians of her era, and imploring all well-meaning Christians to return to it. “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”³

The Bible was the authority for Ellen White even when, or especially when, she had received a vision containing direct instruction from God on a particular subject. In dispensing counsel in individual cases, Ellen White pointed first and foremost to the Bible. “It is my first duty to present Bible principles,” she stated. “Then, unless there is a decided, conscientious reform made by those whose cases have been presented to me, I must appeal to them personally.”⁴ The point cannot be made clearer or emphasized more. Ellen White saw Scripture as primary, foundational, formative, and guiding in matters of faith and action, holding to this view even when she received visions on a particular matter. Only when those in question balked at curbing their ways or being pointed to Scripture did Ellen White sense a need to direct them to the counsel contained in her visions. Following is her most pointed comment in this regard:

You are not familiar with the Scriptures. If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the *Testimonies*. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple direct testimonies. . . . The Lord designs to warn you, to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress your minds with the importance of the truth of His word.

The written testimonies are . . . to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed.⁵

The truth that Scripture was foundational, central, and integral to Ellen White finds support in the fact that she often literally held the Bible on high while preaching and quoted copiously from its pages. On several occasions while in vision she held the Bible aloft; the action in and of itself underscoring the Bible's preeminence and prominence in her life and understanding. Perhaps not coincidentally, she ended the last sermon she was to preach at a General Conference session by holding up her Bible and intoning before the assembled delegates and church leaders, "Brethren and Sisters, I commend unto you this Book."⁶

Yet it is in her use of Scripture that Ellen White shows her deep and abiding appreciation for Scripture. To say that her writings are amply seasoned with Scripture is to utter an understatement. More accurately, Scripture saturates the writings of Ellen White, with extended biblical passages sometimes forming the bulk of a particular testimony or admonition. For example, the chapter titled "Nicodemus" in *The Desire of Ages*, based on [John 3:1-17](#), is an almost running quote of the scriptural rendering of the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Some books by White, such as *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* and *Christ's Object Lessons*, are but commentaries that draw heavily from the parables and words of Jesus to teach timeless truths.

That Ellen White made ample appropriation of Scripture in her writings is indisputable, yet how did she interpret Scripture? As a modern-day prophet, did White's interpretation of Scripture show her to be primarily an exegete, a biblical theologian, an expository preacher, or a topical evangelist and preacher? The evidence suggests that her primary objective when interpreting Scripture was not these but rather to put the passage to work as an instrument of renewal and growth. Ellen White believed that Scripture should impact and transform lives.⁷ Fundamentally, she provided linkages between Scripture and the contemporary context, which is not to say that for her relevancy trumped accuracy. Her use of Scripture is trustworthy.

As far as Ellen White was concerned, her writings, when compared to Scripture, were a "lesser light," not new or additional light. Referring to her writings, White said, "The Lord has sent his people

much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.”⁸ Elsewhere she stated,

[48] The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed. Man’s duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified in God’s word; yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. Additional truth is not brought out; but God through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken them and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse.⁹

The writings of Ellen White were not an addition to, or extension of, Scripture, but instead were subject to it. Again and again, she sought to make it crystal clear that her writings were secondary and subject to Scripture: “He [the Lord] has not given any additional light to take the place of his Word. This light is to bring confused minds to his Word.”¹⁰ In a specific instance she stated, “Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the *Testimonies* is an addition to the Word of God, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this manner to bring the minds of his people to his Word, to give them a clearer understanding of it.”¹¹ Throughout her life, Ellen White resolutely encouraged people to go back to the Bible and to read and absorb it. She passionately pleaded for people not to view her writings as an addendum to Scripture, but only as an attempt by God to bring clarity to some issues.

Moreover, Ellen White did not believe that her writings were to supersede or in some way trump the Bible. Said she,

The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God’s Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God. . . . Our position and faith is in the Bible. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible.¹²

Even so, the writings of Ellen White did not contradict Scripture and were a veritable continuation of the truths contained in the

sacred canon.¹³ Indeed, White asserted that the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy were inspired by the same Source, the Holy Spirit,¹⁴ and that the work of the Holy Spirit was in alignment with Holy Scripture, which confirms and authenticates it. “The work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart is to be tested by the Word of God,” the reason being that “the Spirit which inspired the Scriptures, always leads to the Scriptures.”¹⁵

Ellen White was clear and emphatic that her writings were neither to be viewed nor applied as the Christian’s rule of faith. The Bible, not her writings, was the standard for the believer’s faith and behavior. Her writings were intended to reprove, correct, exhort, and guide people back to the Bible, where all that is necessary for their salvation and Christian growth may be found. She wrote: “I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the ‘last days’; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, she could not be clearer or more emphatic, asserting that “the Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine,”¹⁷ and that “the Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed.”¹⁸

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Ellen White asked that her writings be denied the prominence that belongs only to Holy Scripture in public venues, and she stressed that people err when they point others to her and not to the Bible for warrant and backing for their beliefs and perspectives. She pleaded, “In public labor do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions Bring your evidence, clear and plain, from the Word of God. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White.”¹⁹ As for quoting her when the Bible had not been obeyed, Ellen White said,

How can the Lord bless those who manifest a spirit of “I don’t care,” a spirit which leads them to walk contrary to the light which the Lord has given them? But I do not ask you to take my words. Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible. When you make the Bible your food, your meat, and your drink, when you make its principles

the elements of your character, you will know better how to receive counsel from God. I exalt the precious Word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, “Sister White said this,” and “Sister White said that.” Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands. ²⁰

Her writings, then, play “second fiddle” to the Bible, which, in her thinking, held primacy and preeminence over all her counsel.

Ellen White and her contemporaries

[50] Ellen White’s understanding of the relationship between her writings and Scripture stands in sharp contrast to what other “prophets” of her era thought of the relationship between their writings and the Bible. Joseph Smith and Mary Baker Eddy, for example, were contemporaries who viewed their writings as being, at the very least, on the same level with Scripture. So, too, did Ann Lee, who lived in the eighteenth century.

Ann Lee, founder of the Shaker movement, was a charismatic and controversial figure. Her followers initially thought that she was the woman “clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars” in Revelation and later that she was a female Christ. Lee herself never claimed to be Jesus Christ, though she asserted that when she spoke it was the indwelling Christ that was being heard. Her almost hypnotic personality and mystical draw conspired to make her the embodiment of Shakerism, which in its heyday boasted approximately six thousand followers in the United States. ²¹

Mother Ann, as Lee came to be called, because of her “manifest spiritual authority,” triggered a body of material known as the *Testimonies*. The four-volume set is a “collection of the personal accounts, memories, *testimonies*, and stories which originally circulated orally among the Shakers,” and was “produced by Shakers for Shakers” over a seventy-year span. ²² While Mother Ann herself did not write the material, the *Testimonies* are a fair depiction of her thoughts, words, and actions, and were written to influence present and future generations.

The *Testimonies*, while sprinkled with allusions and direct quotes from the Bible, betray Lee’s belief that her words were as important as those found in Scripture. She claimed to have received significant

revelations directly from God, through which “many deep and important mysteries were there revealed to her; and by the power and authority of the Holy Ghost, she was there commissioned to take the lead of this society.”²³

Mary Baker Eddy and Ellen G. White were contemporaries whose lives parallel each other in several ways. Both were born in New England, were ill early in life, wrote prodigiously, and fought charges of plagiarism. Eddy believed that Scripture was flawed, the result of “scribal error or theological misunderstanding,” and was loathe to embrace any passage of Scripture “without first dissecting and analyzing it.” She unearthed “new layers of meaning” as a result of her vigorous, thorough analyses; many unique, if not radical, interpretations of Scripture flowed from her pen.²⁴

Eddy was familiar with the stories of the Bible, saying that her call to ministry mirrored that of Samuel, though it was a female voice that called her, and she compared herself to the child Jesus who astonished the priests in the temple with His learning.²⁵ After the death of P. P. Quimby, the “magnetic physician” who powerfully influenced her thinking, she retreated to reflect on her mission and search the Bible for guidance and direction. She asserted that “the Bible was my textbook. It answered my questions as to how I was healed; but the Scriptures had to me a new meaning, a new tongue.” In *Science and Health*, Eddy claimed that “the Bible has been my only authority, I have had no other guide in ‘the straight and narrow way’ of Truth.”²⁶

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As author of *Science and Health*, “the textbook of Christian Science,” Eddy believed that “whosoever learns the letter of the book, must also gain its spiritual significance, in order to demonstrate Christian Science.” *Science and Health* has gone through hundreds of editions and is a guiding force for Christian Scientists. They still believe in her interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, her interpretation is “Key to the Scriptures.”

The founding “prophet” of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, Joseph Smith, believed that it was the Holy Spirit that inspired him, an unlettered man, to pen the *Book of Mormon*, as well as the “corrected translation of the Holy Scriptures.” The Bible needed to be corrected because “many parts which are plain and most precious, and also many covenants of the Lord” had been removed so as to

“pervert the right ways of the Lord” and “blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.” The removal of significant parts of the Bible had been done by “the great and abominable church.”

²⁷ Smith believed that the *Book of Mormon* contained the “Word of God,” and Mormons claim that it contains the everlasting gospel.

Ann Lee, Mary Baker Eddy, and Joseph Smith made claims about their writings that Ellen White never made, and Eddy and Smith went as far as presuming that they could correct or upgrade the sacred canon. They claimed to have the authority to do so, with Eddy believing that her writings were “key” to understanding the Bible. The *Testimonies* of Ann Lee may tempt one to equate them with the *Testimonies for the Church* authored by Ellen White, but the temptation must be resisted.

[52] At no time did Ellen White even hint that Scripture could be replaced by her writings, or that her writings could function on par with Scripture. Neither did White believe that Scripture may be fully understood only when viewed through the lens of her writings. It is abundantly clear that Ellen White did not believe that her writings should be used as some sort of final arbiter in matters relating to Christian faith, or as the basis for doctrine. Ellen White immersed herself in the words of Scripture, memorizing extended portions of the Bible and quoting profusely from it. Her counsels were grounded in Scripture, which, to the end of her life, was the organizing principle of her life and ministry.

The unalterable position of Ellen White that Scripture towered in significance over her writings was rooted in the nature of the call and commission she received from God. White asserts that, in conscripting her for service, God told her, “Your work . . . is to bear my word . . . and with pen and voice to reprove from the Word actions that are not right. Exhort from the Word. I will make my Word open to you. . . . In true eloquence of simplicity, with voice and pen, the messages that I give shall be heard from one who has never learned in the schools.” ²⁸

An inspired prophet in the tradition of several noncanonical prophets, Ellen White’s writings, though not on the same level with Scripture, are special. What White wrote was not intended to be treated with benign neglect. Her writings were intended to play a significant role in the life of the believer, to highlight and to exalt

the truths of Scripture, and to point people back to the Bible, “the authoritative, infallible revelation” of God’s will and the “standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.” ²⁹

¹Ellen White never identified herself as a prophet, resisting the designation because, as she put it, “many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word ‘prophet’ signifies.” Ellen G. White [EGW], *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958, 1980), 1:32.

²EGW, Letter 105, 1903. White’s role during this embryonic period was significant. She says that “sometimes the entire night was spent in solemn investigation of the Scriptures, that we might understand the truth for our time. On some occasions the Spirit of God would come upon me, and difficult portions were made clear through God’s appointed way, and then there was perfect harmony.” EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:206,207.

³EGW, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1950), 595. According to Merlin Burt, the phrases “Bible and the Bible only” and “Bible and the Bible alone” appear forty-five and forty-seven times, respectively, in Ellen White’s published writings. Merlin D. Burt, “Ellen G. White and Sola Scriptura” (paper read at the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Presbyterian USA Conversation, Office of the General Assembly PC [USA], Louisville, KY, August 23, 2007).

⁴EGW, Letter 69, 1896. See also EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:30.

⁵EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 2:605.

⁶Quoted in W. A. Spicer, *The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1937), 30.

⁷See Raoul Dederen, “Are There Prophets in the Modern Church?” *Ministry*, July 1977, 24.

⁸EGW, “An Open Letter From Mrs. E. G. White to All Who Love the Blessed Hope,” *Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903, 15.

⁹EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:605.

¹⁰EGW, Letter 130, 1901. See also EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:29.

¹¹EGW, Letter 63, 1893. See also EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:30, 31.

¹²EGW, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1946), 256.

¹³EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:32.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 1:43.

¹⁶EGW, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851), 64. See also EGW, *Early Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 78.

¹⁷EGW, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1923), 126.

¹⁸EGW, “A Missionary Appeal,” *Review and Herald*, December 15, 1885, 770.

¹⁹EGW, Letter 11, 1894. See also EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:29,30.

²⁰EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:33.

²¹Nardi Reeder Campion, *Ann the Word* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 43, 40, 117.

²²Kathleen Deignan, *Christ Spirit: The Eschatology of Shaker Christianity* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 40, 245.

²³*Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴Mary Baker Eddy, *Speaking for Herself*, introduction by Jana K. Riess (Boston: The Writings of Mary Baker Eddy, 2002), xxiii.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 9, 10; 25; xxxiv.

²⁶Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health, With Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1906), 126.

²⁷Joseph Smith, *The Holy Scriptures*, translated and corrected by the Spirit of Revelation by Joseph Smith, Jr., the Seer (n.p.: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: Joseph Smith, I. L. Rogers, E. Robinson, Publishing Committee, 1867), 3.

²⁸EGW, "A Messenger," *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1906, 8.

²⁹EGW, *The Great Controversy*, 9.

Chapter Four - The Authority of Ellen White's Writings

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Alberto R. Timm

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White's prophetic writings are "a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction."¹ But some individuals have proposed alternative views, trying either to diminish or to increase the "authoritative" nature and function of her writings. The diminishing trend includes those who deny completely her prophetic authority,² as well as those who lower it to the level of formative authority,³ "pastoral admonition," and "spiritual insight."⁴ On the other side are those who even attribute canonical status to her writings.⁵

As logical as some of those views may seem to be, they raise basic questions: If Ellen White's prophetic authority was limited only to the "formative" period of the church, could her writings still be considered relevant for us today? If her authority is only of a "pastoral" nature, in what sense does it differ from the authority of pastors or teachers in general? If, on the other hand, she is supposed to have "canonical" status, how does this harmonize with her own principle of uplifting "the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms," and "the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice"?⁶

Canonical and noncanonical prophets

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Some people believe that the canonical writings are much more accurate and authoritative than the noncanonical prophets. So, the natural conclusion would be that Ellen White wrote only on a lower prophetic level. Desmond Ford argued,

Because the writings of Ellen G. White were not intended to be canonical, not purposed as applicable to all people in all places in

all times, therefore the element of miracle associated with them is less than that associated with the writing of Scripture. This is not to say that there is within the canon “degrees” of inspiration. It is to say that outside the canon we should not expect the same precision as was necessary for the Word. ⁷

With this kind of reasoning Ford could dismiss Ellen White’s doctrinal and theological statements (especially those related to the heavenly sanctuary) that diverged from his own views. For him,

So far as Scripture is concerned, the gift of prophecy since the Cross is neither the gift of oracular doctrinal pronouncements, nor authoritative theological truth. It is a practical gift for correction of behavior of professed Christians, and for encouragement in the way. It is not to be compared in its operational purpose with the miraculous providences attending those selected for canonical messages. God’s miraculous care over His instruments is proportionate to their importance in His scale of values. Biblical writers were blessed in a way no subsequent Christians have ever been. ⁸

If there are no “degrees” of inspiration, and inspiration is always the divine assistance for the reliable communication of truth, why should there be degrees of trustworthiness? What biblical basis could sustain such a theory?

A careful overview of what the Bible says about prophetic inspiration leads to some significant conclusions. From the perspective of divine authorship, there is no explicit hierarchy of prophetic authority between literary and nonliterary, canonical and noncanonical prophets. All true prophets are considered God’s spokespeople in comforting, guiding, and admonishing the people. This principle is well expressed in Christ’s words to the Seventy, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” ([Luke 10:16](#)). ⁹

[57] The true noncanonical prophets include Enoch, who is said to have prophesied about Christ’s second coming ([Jude 14](#)); Noah, who was “a preacher of righteousness” to the world of his time ([2 Pet. 2:5](#)); Nathan, who admonished the canonical prophet David ([2 Sam. 12:1-15](#)); Elijah and Elisha, who were powerfully used by God in some of the darkest periods in the history of Israel ([1 Kings 17-21](#); [2 Kings 1-9, 13](#)); and John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah ([Matt. 3](#)), and was even considered the

greatest “among those born of women” ([Matt. 11:11](#)). As far as we know, the only human beings taken to heaven without facing death were the noncanonical prophets Enoch and Elijah ([Gen. 5:24](#); [2 Kings 2:11](#)).

But from the perspective of the *canonical function*, God led in the gathering of the sixty-six books of the Bible to comprise the biblical canon. It is the only and complete rule by which all other true prophetic writings should be evaluated and vindicated. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament and the New Testament canons were completed and closed.¹⁰ This implies that no other inspired writings, as helpful as they might be, should ever be added to the Bible canon (cf. [Gal. 1:8, 9](#); [Rev. 22:18, 19](#)).

With these perspectives in mind, we can say that Ellen White's writings have the same *authorial authority* of all other true prophets, including the canonical ones. This is so because the authority of all true prophetic writings is not in the prophets themselves but in God who inspired them through His Holy Spirit. But the *functional authority* of White's writings is not the same as of the Scriptures, which remain the standard by which all other prophets are to be evaluated. The distinction between authorial and functional authority helps us to avoid both (1) the artificial dichotomy between canonical and noncanonical prophets, and (2) the false generalization of granting canonical status to all true prophets, including Ellen White.

Not “degrees of revelation”

Other people believe that the authority of the prophetic writings varies according to the source behind the information communicated. For example, in 1883 Uriah Smith was convinced that, in regard to Ellen White's writings, he had to “discriminate between ‘testimony’ and ‘visions,’ “¹¹ attributing to her visions a higher level of authority and trustworthiness than to her testimonies.

In 1980, Desmond Ford proposed a theory that distinguished between “degrees of revelation” and “degrees of inspiration.” Thus Ellen White's writings were less reliable in their very nature than the Scriptures. He stated,

Because God's attention to matters is proportionate to their importance, He has exercised more miraculous superintendence over

[58] Scripture than over the writings of Ellen G. White. This is not to speak of degrees of inspiration, but rather degrees of revelation. God's work is ever perfect for its purpose—but that purpose is His not ours.¹²

Though it may not be his intention in this statement, Ford undermines the trustworthiness not only of Ellen White's writings but even some canonical writings. If there are indeed "degrees of revelation," then one might conclude that the apocalyptic books of the Bible (such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation), based on prophetic visions and dreams, should be seen as more reliable than the historical ones (such as 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles), which were based to a large extent on historical research. By accepting such a theory, there would be the temptation to suggest another artificial canon within the canon.

By studying the New Testament use of the Old Testament,¹³ one sees no distinction between "more reliable" or "less reliable" passages based on "degrees of revelation." In fact, many of the Old Testament themes in the Revelation of John are from the nonapocalyptic, historical writings (e.g., [Rev. 2:14](#) from [Num. 31:16](#); [Rev. 2:20](#) from [1 Kings 16:31](#) and [2 Kings 9:22](#); [Rev. 7:4-8](#) alludes to the tribes of ancient Israel; [Rev. 16:2-11](#) echoes [Exod. 7:14-25](#); [9:8-11](#); and [10:21-23](#); etc.). We should recognize that the inspired writings are trustworthy, whether derived from supernatural revelations (like the Revelation of John) or from historical research (like the Gospel of Luke). Biblically, all prophetic writings were produced by men and women "moved by the Holy Spirit" ([2 Pet. 1:19-21](#)), and the same principle also applies to the writings of Ellen White.

Prophetic authority does not mature¹⁴

There are also those who suggest that the later writings of each prophet, and even of the accumulated prophetic body, are more accurate and reliable than the early ones.¹⁵ One writer on this topic argues that "the growth from Sinai to Golgotha, from command to invitation, from fear to love, is a Biblical pattern" that "is also reflected in the experience and theology of Ellen White."¹⁶ It is argued that it took the Israelites "1,400 years to make the journey from one mountain [Sinai] to the other [Golgotha]," and it took Ellen White

sixty years of life until the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference, where “the bright rays of light from Calvary finally dispelled the last shadows of Sinai.” ¹⁷ So, in this opinion, “on the one hand stands the ‘encouraging’ God of *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* [both published after 1888]; on the other, the ‘discouraging’ God of the *Testimonies* [several of which were published prior to 1888].” ¹⁸

This “maturing” theory raises some serious questions: How long does it actually take for a prophet’s writings to mature? If historical maturity was reached only at Golgotha, should we consider all pre-Golgotha prophetic writings as immature? Would one suppose that Paul reaches the culmination of his theology with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which are practical books, rather than in his earlier writings, such as Romans and Galatians? If Ellen White’s writings reached maturity only after forty years of her prophetic ministry, what can we say about those canonical prophets with a much shorter ministry? Would not this approach place the reader as the judge of Scripture and of Ellen White’s writings?

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Whatever direction one chooses to go in answering these questions, it seems that there is only one acceptable solution for such tensions: early prophetic writings may be less comprehensive or refined than later writings, but they are equally trustworthy and reliable, because their trustworthiness and reliability rest not on the prophets themselves but rather on God who revealed Himself through the prophets.

Prophetic authority and the Advent movement

Foundational to understanding Ellen White’s prophetic authority is to identify why it came into existence in modern times and what role it plays for the end-time remnant people of God (cf. [Rev. 12:17](#)). There are at least two major aspects that deserve special attention. First, her ministry provided early Sabbatarian Adventism with helpful prophetic insights and encouragement in the process of establishing a new movement focused on the restoration of Bible truths. The need for such a restoration derived from the fact that postapostolic Christianity absorbed so much from the Greco-Roman culture that its original commitment to God’s Word was largely lost (cf. [Dan. 8:9-13](#); [Acts 20:29, 30](#); [2 Thess. 2:1-12](#)). Accepting the

primacy of culture over revelation, the medieval Christian tradition not only generated a nonbiblical culture but also propagated aggressively the value system of that culture instead of the everlasting gospel.

Jacques Ellul touches the very core of the problem when he asks,

How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of the law, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul? I say advisedly “completely opposite.” There is not just contradiction on one point but on all points.

[60] On the one hand, Christianity has been accused of a whole list of faults, crimes, and deceptions that are nowhere to be found in the original text and inspiration. On the other hand, revelation has been progressively modeled and reinterpreted according to the practice of Christianity and the church. ¹⁹

Undoubtedly, sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers tried to restore the authority of Scripture over unbiblical traditions by means of the basic hermeneutical principles of *sola Scriptura* (the exclusiveness of Scripture) and *tota Scriptura* (the totality of Scripture). But on a practical level, those Reformers were more successful in emphasizing the supremacy and exclusiveness of Scripture over other sources of truth than in restoring the entirety of Bible truth lost over more than a millennium of tradition.

Building on the Protestant hermeneutical legacy, Sabbatarian Adventists began to use more consistently the *tota Scriptura* principle in the process of (1) discovering those doctrines derived from the historical fulfillment of specific end-time prophecies of Scripture and (2) restoring those doctrines of Scripture that had been overlooked and disregarded by the larger Christian church. ²⁰

The whole discovery-restoration process was indeed biblically based and prophetically assisted through the ministry of Ellen White. The biblical basis was due to the fact that all Seventh-day Adventist doctrines were derived from and grounded on the Scriptures. Far from replacing the study of the Bible, Ellen White’s prophetic assistance actually encouraged a deeper investigation of Scripture. Her major prophetic role in the formation of doctrine was to confirm biblical truth and reprove error. So, George R. Knight states correctly

that “we can best view Mrs. White’s role in doctrinal development as confirmation rather than initiation.”²¹ According to T. H. Jemison, her writings have served “three basic purposes: (1) to direct attention to the Bible, (2) to aid in understanding the Bible, and (3) to help in applying Bible principles in our lives.”²² This is in harmony with Ellen White’s own self-understanding of her role.

A second major aspect of Ellen White’s prophetic role is to provide inspired motivation to continue in the already-restored biblical faith. The need for such help comes from the fact that all religious movements tend to lose over the years their early restorationist commitment. Those movements are usually launched with the purpose of reforming the culture in which they exist. But in the second century of their existence, after the pioneers and those who knew them passed away, those very same movements tend to lose their own identity and to be reabsorbed by the culture they originally intended to reform.²³ The original message and lifestyle of the movement are reread into a new cultural setting to such extent that they end up losing much of their prophetic meaning. The acculturation process obscures the capability of many church members to distinguish between the holy and the profane (cf. [Ezek. 22:26; 44:23](#)).

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The fact that Seventh-day Adventism came into existence as an end-time restorationist movement does not mean that it is invulnerable to losing its original identity. But that risk can be minimized and even overcome by faithfully following the same prophetic guidance that assisted the rise and early development of the movement. [Proverbs 29:18](#) warns: “Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint” (RSV). The word *prophecy* in the Hebrew actually means a “prophetic vision.” Underlying this statement is the foundational principle that whenever God’s people disregard genuine prophetic revelations, they tend to drift toward the unbiblical ideologies of contemporary cultures (cf. [2 Chron. 36:11-16](#)). On the other hand, the acceptance of God’s true prophets helps believers to overcome antibiblical cultural temptations (see [2 Chron. 20:20](#)).

Ellen White’s long-term prophetic ministry brought significant doctrinal, administrative, outreach, and lifestyle stability to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After her death, her writings continued

to provide the same stability for the denomination. In 1907, she stated,

Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people.²⁴

Yet the stability provided by Ellen White's writings has been seriously undermined by many who are unable to distinguish between universal principles and the current application of those principles found in her writings (see chapter 5).

Prophetic authority in today's changing world

Our world has changed significantly since Ellen White's death in 1915. From a philosophical perspective, modernism was overshadowed by postmodernism, and postmodernism gave place to a new trend sometimes called "post-postmodernism" and "pseudo-modernism,"²⁵ or even "post-contemporary."²⁶ In many workplaces, the traditional career *ladder* has been replaced by career *roller coasters*.²⁷ Within the religious realm, by 2015 Christianity was already fragmented into some forty-five thousand different denominations.²⁸ Postmodern theology has transferred the focus of authority from the consistent and coherent teachings of the Bible to the emotional and contradictory opinions of the multitude of readers.²⁹ Overwhelmed with uncertainties and anxieties, many—including

[62] Christians—seek assurance today in mysticism and even modern prophetism.³⁰

By contrasting our contemporary world to the world in which Ellen White lived, one might easily wonder: Are her writings still relevant and authoritative in the twenty-first century? Crucial to answering that question is one's hermeneutical perspective—or way of viewing things. For instance, twentieth-century modernists are tempted to consider her writings as obsolete and irrelevant. While many twenty-first-century millennials will probably appreciate the spiritual tone of her writings but not acknowledge any absolute authority. Yet the method of allowing the prophetic writings to

interpret themselves and accepting their authority in our lives allows the reader to regard her writings as still prophetically relevant and authoritative for each generation.³¹

In a world without absolute values and an unknown future, Ellen White's writings play a crucial role. They (1) uplift "the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms"³² (2) They counteract the Satanic delusion that "the requirements of Christ are less strict than they [Adventists] once believed, and that by conformity to the world they would exert a greater influence with worldlings."³³ (3) They unveil the final events of earth's history that bring the redeemed children of God to His everlasting kingdom ([Rev. 21:1-4](#)). And (4) they reveal God's perspective and priorities in human history.³⁴

Ellen White's writings are still a considered a powerful prophetic filter in-tended to remove misinterpretations of Scripture developed over the centuries within human tradition. Instead of replacing the Bible, her writings draw the attention away from artificial human interpretations back to Scripture, so that its original message can continue to flow pure and refreshing to us today. Seventh-day Adventism will be able to keep its prophetic identity as long as it remains grounded on the unmovable platform of Scripture ([Matt. 7:24-27](#)) and faithful to the legacy of light inherited through Ellen White's prophetic ministry ([2 Chron. 20:20](#)).

Recognizing the authority of Ellen White's prophetic message suggests a process that brings a person from uncertainty to confidence. Ellen White herself understood the need to evaluate and consider before accepting that God was indeed speaking. The key word for Ellen White in accepting her authority is "experience."³⁵ Divine illumination must attend a reasoned consideration of her writings and ministry. It is the Spirit of God, the same Spirit that brings assurance as we read the Bible, who uses Ellen White's writings to connect us to God and to the message of the Bible. This brings recognition of the veracity of a prophetic special revelation. The only way one can come to a personal experience as it relates to Ellen White is to actually read her writings.

¹Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 39, 40; see also Gerhard Pfandl, "Authority of Ellen G. White and Her Writings," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013), 627-629.

²E.g., D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1919); Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982).

³"But the point is that our Millerite ancestors and their heirs [including Ellen White] were convinced from their study [of Daniel 8:14] that 1843-1844 was the time, and it is more important what they believed and what they did about it than what Daniel had in mind. The issue is resolved by history rather than by exegesis!" Jack W. Provonsa, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1993), 133, 135; italics in the original.

⁴Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion, 1980), 379.

⁵David Paulson wrote in 1906 to Ellen G. White: "I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments." Quoted in Ellen G. White [EGW], *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:24; italics in the original.

⁶EGW, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1911), 595; EGW, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851), 64. See also EGW, *Early Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 78.

⁷Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 389.

⁸Desmond Ford and Gillian Ford, *The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual Identity* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 187.

⁹Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New King James Version®.

¹⁰Gerald A. Klingbeil, "The Text and the Canon of Scripture," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid, *Biblical Research Institute Studies* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 1:91-110.

¹¹U[riah] Smith to [D. M.] Canright, August 7, 1883.

¹²Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 377.

¹³E.g., F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2007); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2012).

¹⁴The basic content of this section is taken from Alberto R. Timm, "Divine Accommodation and Cultural Conditioning of the Inspired Writings," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, nos. 1-2 (2008): 161-174.

¹⁵Alden Thompson, "From Sinaito Golgotha," five-part series in *Adventist Review*, December 3, 1981, 4-6; December 10, 1981, 8-10; December 17, 1981, 7-10; December 24, 1981, 7-9; December 31, 1981, 12, 13. See also Alden Thompson, *Escape From the Flames: How Ellen White Grew From Fear to Joy—and Helped Me Do It Too* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005).

¹⁶Thompson, "From Sinai to Golgotha," December 10, 1981, 10.

¹⁷Ibid., December 31, 1981, 13.

¹⁸Ibid., December 17, 1981, 7.

¹⁹Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.

²⁰Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Doctrines*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1995), 116.

²¹George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1999), 37.

²²T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1955), 371.

²³Alberto R. Timm, "Podemos ainda ser considerados o 'povo da Bíblia'?" *Revista Adventista* (Brazil), June 2001, 14. I am indebted to George W. Reid who first called my attention to the concept that religious movements tend to lose their original identity in their second century of existence.

²⁴EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:55.

²⁵Alan Kirby, "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond," *Philosophy Now*, November/December 2006, https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond.

²⁶Christopher K. Brooks, ed., *Beyond Postmodernism: Onto the Postcontemporary* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

²⁷Spencer G. Niles and JoAnn Harris-Bowlsbey, *Career Development Interventions in the 21st Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002), 126.

²⁸"Status of Global Mission, 2014, in the Context of AD 1800-2025," accessed May 13, 2014, www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/.

²⁹E.g., George Aichele et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁰E.g., Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy: God's Prophetic Voice Today: Guidelines for Receiving, Understanding, and Fulfilling God's Personal Word to You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1987); Barbara L. Potts, *Praying With Authority and Power: Taking Dominion Through Scriptural Prayers and Prophetic Decrees* (Hagerstown, MD: McDougal, 2004); Donald Codling, *Sola Scriptura and the Revelatory Gifts: How Should Christians Deal With Present Day Prophecy?* (Rice, WA: Sentinel Press, 2005).

³¹Sometimes referred to as the historical-grammatical method in opposition to the historical-critical method of the modernists. See "Methods of Bible Study," in George W. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 329-337.

³² EGW, *The Great Controversy*, 595.

³³ EGW, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1962), 474.

³⁴ E.g., EGW, *The Great Controversy*, 582-678; EGW, *Last Day Events: Facing Earth's Final Crisis* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1992).

³⁵ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 1:382, 383

Chapter Five - How to Read Ellen White's Writings [64]

[65]

George R. Knight [66]

It is one thing to read the words of Ellen White, but often another to understand what she meant by them. By misusing her words, people have at times made her say the opposite of what she meant. She had to face the problem in her ministry and has supplied us with counsel and illustrations that help us grasp some of the basic principles of interpretation that she utilized and approved of. The following principles of interpretation are important when reading Ellen White's writings. ¹

1. Begin with a healthy outlook

Our mind-set influences our daily lives more than most people think. Those, for example, who are always looking for the negative in life have no trouble finding it. The same can be said of those with a positive outlook. Thus one's outlook is of crucial importance in how we read Ellen White's writings (and also Scripture). This section sets forth three suggestions that will make our reading more profitable.

First, begin your study with a prayer for guidance and understanding. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the work of prophets across the ages, is the only One who is capable of illuminating the message in their writings. An attitude of prayer softens us and opens our minds, hearts, and lives toward a sincere desire to know God's truth and to apply it to our lives.

Second, we need to approach our study with an open mind. No person is free of bias, but we don't need to let our biases control us. To the contrary, we need to become aware of our biases toward or against any topic and their effect on what we read and how we react to that reading. Thus part of our prayer for the Spirit is that He will help us to keep our minds open and balanced. Ellen White treated the problem nicely when she wrote that "if you search the [67]

Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says”² She could have said the same regarding her own writings.

Third, a healthy mind-set in the reading of Ellen White is that of faith rather than doubt. As she put it, “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.”³

The three factors we have discussed dealing with a healthy outlook are closely related. A positive desire for the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth will naturally lead to openness of mind and a posture of faith. Likewise, an atmosphere of doubt leads to close-mindedness and a reticence to ask for the Spirit’s guidance. It is safe to say that the fruit of our reading will depend to a great extent on the attitudes we bring to the task.

2. Study Ellen White’s writings in the light of Scripture

It is a temptation for some people to study the Bible through the eyes of Ellen White. In fact, that is exactly what some Adventists have advocated. For example, in the struggle over the identity of the “daily” of Daniel 8 early in the twentieth century, those who advocated the older position held that the new view would subvert the denomination’s theology because a statement in Ellen White’s *Early Writings* supported the traditional Adventist interpretation. S. N. Haskell argued that to make any changes in the established position would undermine Ellen White’s authority. He was quite explicit on his view of the relation of her writings to the Bible. “We ought,” he wrote, “to understand such expressions by the aid of the Spirit of Prophecy [i.e., Ellen White’s writings]. . . . For this purpose the Spirit of Prophecy comes to us. . . . All points are to be solved” in that manner.⁴

[68] Ellen White disagreed with that approach. She requested that her writings “not be used” to settle the issue. “I entreat of Elders Haskell, Loughborough, Smith, and others of our leading brethren, that they make no reference to my writings to sustain their views of

‘the daily’. . . . I cannot consent that any of my writings shall be taken as settling this matter.”⁵

She had taken the same position at the 1888 General Conference Session when some were seeking to use her writings to identify the nature of the law in Galatians. Her response to that attempt was that they should not use her writings to prove the point, but should rather “go to the Bible and get the Scripture evidence.” “If you will search the Scriptures on your knees, then you will know them and you will be able to give to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is within you.”⁶

Ellen White never viewed herself as the final divine commentary on the Bible. Never did she take the position that “you must let me tell you what the Bible really means” She always pointed her readers to the fact that her prophetic function is one of “bringing [them] back to the word [the Bible] that they have neglected to follow.” On another occasion, she penned that “little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light [her writings] to lead men and women to the greater light [the Bible] .”⁷

To Ellen White, the Bible “is the only rule of faith and doctrine” and she advocated that people study that Book as God gave it.⁸ She ever pointed her readers to the Bible as God’s guide for their lives. And it is within the context of the biblical message that her writings have meaning and significance. Thus it is absolutely crucial that we study her writings in the light flowing out of the Bible rather than to study the Bible in the light of her writings.

3. Focus on central issues

A person can read inspired materials in at least two ways. One is to look for the central themes of an author; the other is to search for those things that are new and different. The first way leads to what can be thought of as a theology of the center, while the second produces a theology of the edges.

For years I followed the second way in my reading of Ellen White and the Bible. Without thinking through the consequences of what I was doing, I began to make collections of those Bible verses and Ellen White quotations that seemed out of the ordinary, that provided “new light” that no one else had discovered or was emphasizing.

[69] In the process I often searched for the more extreme statements on the “new and different” topics I was interested in, removed them from their contexts, and formed my own compilations. After I was quite satisfied with my discoveries, my mission then was to convince fellow believers on the “advanced insights” I had culled from Ellen White and the Bible. Unfortunately, that method led to distortions and emphases not found in the original inspired writings.

One of the tragedies of many avid readers of Ellen White is that they tend to focus on reading for a theology of the edges. Mrs. White had to take a firm stand against such a use of her writings during her own lifetime. She cautioned her readers “to beware of these side issues, whose tendency is to divert the mind from the truth”⁹ She counseled: We should be careful how we receive everything termed new light.

We must beware lest, under cover of searching for new truth, Satan shall divert our minds from Christ and the special truths for this time. I have been shown that it is the device of the enemy to lead minds to dwell upon some obscure or unimportant point, something that is not fully revealed or is not essential to our salvation. This is made the absorbing theme, the “present truth.”¹⁰

Closely related to the principle of focusing on central issues is that of emphasizing the important. This is significant because too many readers of Ellen White have gotten into massive and divisive arguments over such topics as the proper length of Communion towels, the propriety of shaving one’s beard, and the esoteric aspects of health reform.

What makes the teachings of many advocates of “new light” so impressive is their obvious sincerity and the fact that much of what they have to say may be needed truth. How can we tell when we are on center or chasing stray geese near the edges of what is really important? Let’s let Ellen White supply us with her answer to that question.

One significant passage on the topic appears in the book *Education*. “The Bible,” she writes, “is its own expositor.” She continued:

Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its *grand central theme*, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great

controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.

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In such passages we find our marching orders for the reading of both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. *Read for the big picture; read for the grand central themes.* The purpose of God's revelation to humanity is salvation. That salvation focuses on the cross of Christ and our relationship to God. All our reading takes place within that context, and those issues closest to the grand central theme are obviously of more importance than those near its edges.

It is our task as Christians to focus on the central issues of the Bible and Ellen White's writings rather than on marginal ones. If we do so, the marginal issues will fit into place in their proper perspective within the context of the "grand central theme" of God's revelation to His people. On the other hand, concentrating primarily on the marginal issues of Christianity not only leads to distorted understanding, but also creates problems as we seek to apply God's counsel to daily life. Dwelling on the marginal is fertile ground for imbalance and fanaticism.

"And what," some may be asking, "is the difference between a central theme and a marginal one?" Ellen White answers that question for us. "The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters," she writes, "is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God." In another connection she notes that "there is danger of bringing before the people theories which, while they may be all truth, will create controversy, and will not lead men to the great supper prepared for them."¹² She often offers specific examples of marginal issues. To one person she wrote that "you have no time to engage in controversy regarding the killing of insects" And in another place she points out that "when men pick up this theory and that theory, when they are curious to know something it is not

necessary for them to know, God is not leading them. . . . It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand” ¹³

We find a general principle in those quotations. The closer a topic is to the core of the plan of salvation or the essential knowledge needed for salvation or to those issues that will advance a Christian’s spiritual journey, the closer it is to the great central thrust of the Bible.

4. Account for problems in communication

[71] As we read Ellen White’s writings we need to keep constantly before us the difficulty she faced in basic communication. On one level there were the differing personality types she had to deal with. Some readers, for example, were sensitive, while others were insensitive. As a result, the same counsel could lead to extremes for certain individuals, while hardly moving others.

Beyond the difficulty of varying personalities, but related to it, is the problem of imprecise meaning in language and the fact that different people with different experiences interpret the same words differently. “Human minds vary,” Ellen White penned in relation to Bible reading:

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. . . . *The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word;* there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.

The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ. ¹⁴

What Ellen White said about the problems of meanings and words in regard to the Bible also holds true for her own writings. Communication in a broken world is never easy, not even for God’s prophets. On the other hand, we don’t need perfect knowledge in

order to be saved. As Ellen White repeatedly notes, the Bible (and her writings) was given for “practical purposes.” Human language, in spite of its weaknesses, is capable of communicating God’s message.¹⁵

The communication problems stemming from different mind-sets, personality types, and backgrounds even enter into the reasons for having more than one account of the life of Christ in the New Testament. The following statement helps us appreciate the challenges God faced in communicating with intelligent beings on a sinful planet.

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record and thus have given us a connected account of Christ’s earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way.¹⁶

We need to keep the basic problems of communication that we have examined in mind as we read the writings of Ellen White. At the very least, such facts ought to make us cautious in our reading so that we don’t incorrectly emphasize this or that particular idea that might come to our attention as we study God’s counsel to His church.

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5. Study all available information on a topic

It is crucial to make sure that we have read widely what Ellen White has presented on a topic and study those statements that may seem extreme in the light of those that might moderate or balance them. Arthur White pinpointed this important issue when he wrote:

Many have erred in interpreting the meaning of the testimonies by taking isolated statements or statements out of their context as a basis for belief. Some do this even though there are other passages, which, if carefully considered, would show the position taken on the basis of the isolated statement to be untenable. . . .

It is not difficult to find individual sentences or paragraphs in either the Bible or the Ellen G. White writings, which may be used

to support ones own ideas rather than to set forth the thought of the author. ¹⁷

This quotation reminds me of an experience I had as a young pastor in the San Francisco Bay area. I had made friends with a zealous and sincere group of Adventists who wanted to follow the Bible and the writings of Ellen White with all their hearts. If Ellen White said it, they did it. There was no discussing an issue once they had her words on the topic. They were going to be faithful to what they referred to as the “straight testimony.” The item that struck me about their church service was that they knelt for each and every prayer, including the invocation and benediction.

When I inquired as to the reason for the practice, the leader pointed out that Ellen White said that “the proper position always” for prayer is on our knees. “Both in public and private worship it is our duty to bow down upon our knees before God when we offer our petitions to Him. This act shows our dependence upon God” ¹⁸

I assured my friend that I believed in reverence and kneeling in prayer, but I also told him that his interpretation of Ellen White’s passage seemed strained to me and out of harmony with the general tenor of both her writings and the Bible.

He flatly disagreed, since he had her words and that was enough. [73] If she said “*always*” they would *always* kneel in prayer. There was no need to talk the matter over or to read more on the topic. After all, he had “the truth,” and all that remained was to put it into practice. And he did. I even remember kneeling for grace before meals at his home.

I wasn’t at all convinced that my friend had “the truth” on the topic, even though I was absolutely sure that he had a few “quotations” from Ellen White to substantiate his practice. But *there is a difference between a handful of quotations and the truth.*

How, you may be thinking, can I be so sure of my point? It’s not all that complicated. I merely kept on reading on the topic of the correct position in prayer. In this case I didn’t have to read very far. On the last page of the section on “The Attitude in Prayer” in the third volume of *Selected Messages* that my friend had quoted from, I read that “it is *not always necessary to bow upon your knees* in order to pray. Cultivate the habit of talking with the Saviour when you are alone, when you are walking, and when you are busy with your daily

labor.” Beyond such quotations is the fact that *Selected Messages* provides several illustrations of Ellen White having people standing and sitting during prayer in public worship contexts. ¹⁹

When I pointed out the balancing statements on kneeling for prayer and asked why he insisted on reading Ellen White only as meaning *always* when she also said “*not always*,” he quickly argued that the not-always statements were for the general public and not God’s special end-time people.

That conclusion, I thought to myself, can be substantiated from neither the Bible nor Ellen White. Yet he had a forceful quotation and neglected balancing data as he pushed ahead with his theory.

Along this line we find two approaches to Ellen G. White’s writings. One assembles all her pertinent material on the subject. The other selects from Ellen White only those sentences, paragraphs, or more extensive materials that can be employed to support a particular emphasis. The only faithful approach is the first. One important step in being true to Ellen White’s intent is to read widely in the available counsel on a topic.

6. Avoid extreme interpretations

The history of the Christian church is laced with those who would place the most extreme interpretations on God’s counsels and then define their fanaticism as “faithfulness.” Unfortunately, the same has been true of some in the Adventist branch of the Christian tree. A leaning toward extremism seems to be a constituent part of fallen human nature. God has sought to correct that tendency through His prophets. [74]

Though balance typified Ellen White’s writings, it does not always characterize those who read them. A case in point is Ellen White’s counsel to a physician who had taken “extreme views of *health reform*” after reading her writings. “Health reform becomes health deform, a health destroyer, when it is carried to extremes.” ²⁰

Ellen White had to deal with extremists throughout her ministry. In 1894 she pointed out that

there is a class of people who are always ready to go off on some tangent, who want to catch up something strange and wonderful and new; but God would have all move calmly, considerately, choos-

ing our words in harmony with the solid truth for this time, which requires to be presented to the mind as free from that which is emotional as possible, while still bearing the intensity and solemnity that it is proper it should bear. We must guard against creating extremes, guard against encouraging those who would either be in the fire or in the water. ²¹

Nearly four decades earlier, Mrs. White had written that she “saw that many have taken advantage of what God has shown in regard to the sins and wrongs of others. They have taken the extreme meaning of what has been shown in vision, and then have pressed it until it has a tendency to weaken the faith of many in what God has shown” ²²

7. Study each statement in its historical and literary context

One of the most important principles in interpreting Ellen White’s writings is to study them in their context. The first aspect of context is historical setting.

Along that line, I will never forget my first day as a school principal in the era of the miniskirt. My first phone call was from a woman who wanted me to pontificate on the proper length of skirts. Among other thoughts, my mind drifted to a suggestion that Ellen White had made in the 1860s that women should shorten their skirts eight or nine inches. Now, there was an interesting thought. To shorten some of the skirts that I had seen in the late 1960s and early 1970s by eight or nine inches would have put the bottom of the hemline somewhere above the top of the waistband.

[75] Now, it doesn’t take a great deal of insight to know that to cite Ellen White on shortening skirts by eight or nine inches was quite inappropriate in the age of the miniskirt. That is obvious. But, and this is an important point, for many other statements it is not nearly so clear as to whether they apply exactly to a specific individual in another time and place. It takes study into the original counsel in its historic context to make such determinations.

W. C. White hits on this point when he writes that “*when we take what she has written, and publish it without any description, or particular reference to the conditions existing when and where the testimony was given, there is always the possibility of the instruc-*

*tion being used as applying to places and conditions that are very different.”*²³

A second crucial aspect of context is literary setting. People have too often based their understandings of Ellen White's teachings upon a fragment of a paragraph or upon an isolated statement entirely removed from its literary setting. Thus she writes that

many study the Scriptures for the purpose of proving their own ideas to be correct. They change the meaning of God's Word to suit their own opinions. And thus they do also with the testimonies that He sends. They quote half a sentence, leaving out the other half, which, if quoted, would show their reasoning to be false. God has a controversy with those who wrest the Scriptures, making them conform to their preconceived ideas.²⁴

Again she comments about those who by “separating . . . statements from their connection, and placing them beside human reasonings, make it appear that my writings uphold that which they condemn.”²⁵

Ellen White was repeatedly upset with those who pick out “a sentence here and there, taking it from its proper connection, and applying it according to their idea” Such “poor souls,” she noted, became “bewildered, when could they read in order all that has been given, they would see the true application, and would not become confused.”²⁶ On another occasion she observed that “extracts” from her writings “may give a different impression than that which they would were they read in their original connection.”²⁷

W. C. White often had to deal with the problem of people using material out of its literary context. In 1904, he noted that “much misunderstanding has come from the misuse of isolated passages in the Testimonies, in cases where, if the whole Testimony or the whole paragraph had been read, an impression would have been made upon minds that was altogether different from the impression made by the use of selected sentences.”²⁸

As to her attitude toward selecting abstracts from her writings to make a private compilation, W. C. White had the following to say:

Sister White maintains that to be properly understood, her writings should be read in their connection. She says that she was not commissioned of God to write proverbs. Moreover she feels that it is an injury to the cause of truth for men to select from her writings

short passages here and there, presenting her strongest statements on one phase of a subject, while leaving out other qualifying passages, and such presentation of other phases of the subject as are essential to a well-balanced and comprehensive view of her teachings.

She says: [“]If those advocating health reform will take my books where all phases of these subjects are presented, or if they will study my articles as a whole, they will get precious truths But for them to take a sentence here, and a paragraph there, and a few lines somewhere else, and group them together according to their fancy or judgment, they may sadly misrepresent my teachings and give the people distorted views of Health Reform, or of whatever subject they are handling.[”] ²⁹

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of studying Ellen White’s articles and books in their contexts rather than merely reading topical compilations or selecting out quotations on this or that topic through the use of the *Comprehensive Index* to her writings or electronic resources such as the White Estate’s CD-ROM, *The Published Ellen G. White Writings*. Such approaches, if used exclusively, would make the *Index* and the CD-ROM disk the worst thing that ever happened to Ellen White studies. Such tools have their places, but we should use them in connection with broad reading that helps us to be more aware not only of the literary context of Ellen White’s statements but also of the overall balance in her writings.

8. Recognize Ellen White’s understanding of the ideal and the real

Ellen White often found herself plagued by “those who will select from the testimonies the strongest expressions and, without bringing in or making any account of the circumstances under which the cautions and warnings are given, make them of force in every case Picking out some things in the testimonies they drive them upon every one, and disgust rather than win souls.” ³⁰

Her observation not only highlights the fact that we need to take the historical context of Ellen White’s statements into consideration when reading her counsel, but it also indicates that she put some statements in stronger or more forceful language than others. That

idea leads us to the concept of the ideal and the real in Ellen White's writings.

When Ellen White is stating the ideal, she often uses her strongest language. It is as if she needs to speak loudly in order to be heard. One such statement appears in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*. "Never can the proper education be given to the youth in this country, or any other country, unless they are separated a wide distance from the cities"³¹ Now, that is about as forceful a statement as she could have made. Not only is it adamant, but it appears to imply universality in terms of time and space. There is no stronger word than *never*. In its strictest meaning it allows no exceptions. She uses the same sort of powerful, unbending language in terms of location—"in this country, or any other country." Once again a plain reading of the words permits no exceptions. We are dealing with what appears to be a universal prohibition regarding the building of schools in cities. But the statement is stronger than that. Such schools are not merely to be out of the cities, but "separated a wide distance" from them. [77]

But there were exceptions. For example, by 1909 the Adventist work in large cities was increasing. And those cities had families who could not afford to send their children to rural institutions. As a result, Ellen White counseled the building of schools in the cities. "So far as possible . . . schools should be established outside the cities. But in the cities there are many children who could not attend schools away from the cities; and for the benefit of these, schools should be opened in the cities as well as in the country."³²

By this time you may be asking yourself how the same woman could claim that proper education could "never" be given in Australia "or any other country, unless [schools] are separated a wide distance from the cities" and yet still advocate the establishment of schools in the cities.

The answer is that rural education for all children was the *ideal* that the church should aim at "so far as possible." But the truth is that the hard facts of life make such education impossible for some. Thus *reality* dictated a compromise if Christian education were to reach children from poorer families. Ellen White understood and accepted the tension between the ideal and the real.

Unfortunately, many of her readers fail to take that fact into consideration. They focus merely on Ellen White's strongest statements, those that express the ideal, and ignore the moderating passages. As a result, as we noted above, "picking out some things in the testimonies they drive them upon every one, and disgust rather than win souls."

Ellen White has more balance than many of those who claim to be following her. Faithful followers must take into account her understanding of the tension between the ideal and the real in applying her counsel.

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9. Use sanctified common sense

Seventh-day Adventists have been known to differ and even argue over some of Ellen White's counsel. That situation is especially true of those statements that seem so straightforward and clear. One such statement appears in volume 3 of the *Testimonies*: "Parents should be the *only* teachers of their children until they have reached eight or ten years of age."³³

That passage is an excellent candidate for inflexible interpretation. After all, it is quite categorical. It offers no conditions and hints at no exceptions—no "ifs," "ands," "ors," or "buts" to modify its impact. A struggle over that statement has provided us with perhaps the very best record we possess of how Ellen White interpreted her own writings. She applies many of the principles explained in this chapter and combines them under the principle of using sanctified common sense.

The Adventists living near the Saint Helena Sanitarium in Northern California had built a church school in 1902. The older children attended it, while some careless Adventist parents let their younger children run freely in the neighborhood without proper training and discipline. Some of the school board members believed that they should build a classroom for the younger children, but others held that it would be wrong to do so, because Ellen White had plainly stated that "parents should be the *only* teachers of their children until they have reached eight or ten years of age."

One faction on the board apparently felt that it was more important to give some help to the neglected children than to hold to the

letter of the law. The other faction believed that it was an inflexible command that must be obeyed.

To put it mildly, the issue split the school board. Now, the most interesting fact in this case is that the school was situated on Ellen White's property. Thus the board was able to request an interview with her to discuss the question of school-age attendance and the responsibility of the church for the education of its young children. Fortunately, the entire interview was transcribed, typed out, and preserved in Ellen White's manuscript file.³⁴

The interview itself is one of the most remarkable documents in the Ellen White corpus of writings. It clearly demonstrates some of the principles Ellen White used in interpreting her own counsels in a real-life situation. *It is a document that every student of her writings should read.*

Early in the interview Ellen White reaffirmed her position that the family should ideally be the school for young children. "The home," she said, "is both a family church and a family school."³⁵ That is the ideal that one finds throughout her writings. The institutional church and school are there to supplement the work of a healthy family. That is the ideal. [79]

But, as we discovered in our last section, reality is often less than ideal. Thus Ellen White continued in the interview: "Mothers *should* be able to instruct their little ones wisely during the earlier years of childhood. *If* every mother were capable of doing this, *and would* take time to teach her children the lessons they should learn in early life, *then* all children could be kept in the home school until they are eight, or nine, or ten years old."³⁶

Her realism continues as the interview progresses. Unfortunately, she noted, many did not take their responsibilities seriously. It would have been best if they had not become parents. But since they had unwisely brought children into the world, the church should not stand by idly without giving any guidance to the children's characters. She held that the Christian community had a responsibility to train such neglected ones, and she even went so far as to claim that the church needed to reform its ideas in regard to establishing kindergartens.

During the interview she remarked that "God desires us to deal with these problems sensibly."³⁷ Ellen White became quite agitated with those readers who took an inflexible attitude toward her writings

and sought to follow the letter of her message while missing the underlying principles. She evidenced disapproval of both the words and attitudes of her rigid interpreters when she declared: *“My mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, ‘Why Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so; and therefore we are going right up to it.’”* She then added that *“God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.”*³⁸ Ellen White was anything but inflexible in interpreting her own writings, and it is a point of the first magnitude that we realize that fact.

Part of the problem is that we “grab” an Ellen White quote merely because it is clear and forceful and push it into situations in which it does not apply. In the process we not only at times contradict Christian principles, but we make nonsense out of the counsel itself and offend people. Thus she gave her impassioned utterance about those who have taken one of her statements and “are going right up to it” She had no doubt that the mindless use of her ideas could be harmful. Thus it is little wonder that she said that “God wants us all to have common sense” in using extracts from her writings, even when she phrased those extracts in the strongest and most unconditional language.

[80] Ellen White argued for sanctified common sense as a practical matter in real-life circumstances. She was not proposing that clear biblical doctrines or teachings are subject to rationalistic manipulation or historical criticism.

We have a precious gift in the writings of Ellen White. But, unfortunately, those writings have not always been studied as carefully as they should have been. That was true in her lifetime, and it remains so in ours. Fortunately, because of the problems in her day, she has provided us with priceless counsel on how to interpret her writings in our times.

In our day there is an opposite danger that has become common in regard to Ellen White’s writings. While some may misinterpret or misrepresent them, others do not read them at all. The intent is that the above-mentioned principles should guide a thoughtful reading of Ellen White’s writings. Then the divine counsels God gave can properly benefit and inform our own Christian experience

and the life of the church. The solution to misinterpretation is proper interpretation, not an elimination of God's message. We must both read and understand Ellen White's writings to receive benefit from them.

¹For more detailed information, see George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1997) and George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1999).

²Ellen G. White [EGW], *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1941), 112.

³EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 4:232, 233.

⁴S. N. Haskell to W. W. Prescott, November, 15, 1907.

⁵EGW, "Our Attitude Toward Doctrinal Controversy," July 31, 1910, Manuscript 11, 1910..

⁶The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1:153, 152.

⁷EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:663; emphasis supplied. See also EGW, *Colporteur Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1953), 25.

⁸EGW, "The Value of Bible Study," *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1888, 449.

⁹EGW, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), 47.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹EGW, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1952), 190; emphasis supplied.

¹²*Ibid.*, 125; EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:174.

¹³EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:171, 174.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1:19, 20; emphasis supplied.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶EGW, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1913), 432.

¹⁷Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate®, 1959), 88.

¹⁸EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:311, 312; emphasis supplied.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 316; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:267-269; emphasis supplied.

²⁰EGW, *Counsels on Diets and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1946), 202; emphasis supplied.

²¹EGW, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1962), 227, 228.

²²EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:166.

²³W.C. Whiteto C. W. Irwin, February 18, 1913; emphasis supplied.

²⁴EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:82.

²⁵EGW, Letter 208, 1906.

²⁶EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:44.

²⁷Ibid., 58.

²⁸W.C. Whiteto W. S. Sadler, January 20, 1904.

²⁹W.C. Whiteto W. L. Brisbin, October 10, 1911.

³⁰EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:285, 286.

³¹EGW, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 312; emphasis supplied.

³²EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:201; emphasis supplied.

³³Ibid., 3:137; emphasis supplied.

³⁴See EGW, Manuscript 7, 1904. Much of that document has been reproduced in *Selected Messages*, 3:214-226.

³⁵EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:214.

³⁶Ibid., 214, 215; emphasis supplied.

³⁷Ibid., 215.

³⁸Ibid., 217; emphasis supplied.

Chapter Six - Ellen White as God's Spokesperson [81]

[82]

Herbert Douglass [83]

Ellen Harmon was a reluctant seventeen-year-old when she experienced her first vision in December 1844. Over the next seventy years she had hundreds of visions and dreams. Her last recorded vision was on March 3, 1915. ¹ The purpose of this chapter is to describe how Ellen White's visions happened and to explore resulting interpretive issues. ²

How the visions happened

No one set of circumstances describes how Ellen White received her visions. Nevertheless, many witnesses would agree that in her public visions they often began with exclamations of "Glory," or "Glory to God," followed by a complete loss of awareness to her surroundings. She did not appear to breathe during the course of a vision, whether it lasted a few minutes or for several hours. Immediately on entering a vision, with eyes wide open as if seeing some far object, her muscles became rigid and joints fixed; yet, her frequent movements and gestures were free and graceful. Stronger people attempted to control these movements on a few occasions without success. During her visions, her face was pleasant and retained its natural color with no appearance of faintness. Often she would lie or sit, while at other times she remained standing. When coming out of vision, no matter how bright her environment, her eyes required a time of adjustment, as when a person comes from the bright sunshine into a dark room. After the vision was over, she would often speak or write out what she had seen. ³ [84]

Often her visions occurred while praying, whether in public or in private. A typical description went as follows: "While engaged in earnest prayer, I was lost to everything around me; the room was filled with light, and I was bearing a message to an assembly that seemed to be the General Conference." ⁴

Without Ellen White's ministry, it has been frequently noted, the Adventist Church would probably not have survived the nineteenth century. And if it did, it would have had limited growth like the Advent Christian and Seventh Day Baptist Churches are today.

Physical phenomena in connection with her visions were more commonly observed in the first decades of her ministry. They provided tangible and convincing evidence to early believers of the supernatural character of her visions. During the last thirty years of Ellen White's life, after her prophetic role was firmly established, she usually experienced "dreams" or "visions of the night."⁵ This was not unlike the experience of Daniel and others like him.⁶ Ellen White differentiated between ordinary dreams and visionary dreams.⁷

What the visions accomplished

In light of Ellen White's ministry and visions, there are several standing conclusions that have been reached: (1) The messenger and message are inseparable.

(2) Bible study precedes confirmation by the visions. (3) The thread of coherency and unity pervades her writings. (4) Prophets did not see the whole picture from the very beginning, but their messages became more precise as time continued. (5) Ellen White herself recognized that her judgment and perception had greatly broadened and deepened through the years.⁸ (6) A clear correspondence exists between Ellen White's experience and that of prophets in the Bible.

Understanding the dynamics of receiving and communicating her visions

Several key points need to be considered when we examine how Ellen White received guidance through her visions. Understanding the following points helps explain certain difficulties some have had in interpreting her writings: (1) It is important to understand that Ellen White had no control over when and where she received a vision. (2) She was dependent upon the guidance of the Spirit as to what she could remember from a vision or even when she would remember it. God sometimes placed information in her mind that

was brought to her consciousness only when it was needed. (3) She was not always able to determine whether what she saw in vision was past, present, or future. (4) She did not always fully understand aspects of what she was shown in vision but eventually God would make it clear for her. (5) On rare occasions she misinterpreted some aspects of a vision but God was careful to correct these types of mistakes through other visions. (6) Finally, sometimes she would receive “scenes” or motion-picturelike information with little or no verbal information. She used various support aids to assist her in rounding out her understanding of what she had seen, aids that would enrich her vocabulary and improve her writing style in describing what she was shown.

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When and where she received visions

Ellen White received visions at various times of the day and night. Sometimes they were given at times that might have seemed to some as inappropriate or disruptive. Her first vision in December 1844 came unexpectedly during family worship in Elizabeth Haines's home in Portland, Maine. Sometimes she would receive a vision as she was preparing to speak or while she was speaking to an assembled group. Probably her most important vision on the great controversy between Christ and Satan occurred on a Sunday afternoon during a funeral service at a schoolhouse in Lovett's Grove, Ohio, March 14, 1858. About forty believers and other guests had gathered that weekend for meetings. After James White had finished his funeral sermon, Mrs. White felt urged by the Spirit of the Lord to speak about the coming of Christ and the resurrection. While speaking, she was taken off in vision. The vision continued for two hours, and the funeral service was disrupted.⁹

Often visions would come to her while she was praying. W. C. White remembered one experience he observed in Minnesota during 1870. James and Ellen White were conducting an unsuccessful revival service. First, James prayed and then Ellen. After praying for about two minutes, Ellen White stopped for about half a minute. W. C. White wrote:

I was kneeling with the congregation, and I turned to see what was the occasion of the silence. Just then she burst forth in prayer.

Her voice was melodious, and triumphant, and the remainder of her prayer greatly moved the people present. During the period of silence, a revelation was given her regarding the condition of the Minnesota Conference, also conditions regarding the work in Battle Creek, also regarding other matters of general interest in the cause.

[86] W. C. White observed that later she wrote “diligently” for two weeks to record what she had been shown during that half minute pause in prayer.¹⁰ The point to understand is that Ellen White had no control over the frequency, duration, location, or content of her visions.

What she remembered from her visions and when

Ellen White was just as dependent upon God to remember what she was shown as she was to receive the vision. She wrote:

Some scenes presented before me years ago have not been retained in my memory, but when the instruction then given is needed, sometimes even when I am standing before the people the remembrance comes sharp and clear, like a flash of lightning, bringing to mind distinctly that particular instruction. At such times I cannot refrain from saying the things that flash into my mind, not because I have had a new vision, but because that which was presented to me perhaps years in the past has been recalled to my mind forcibly.¹¹

The story of her Salamanca vision illustrates this point. In November 1890, while in Salamanca, New York, Ellen White had a vision concerning many current church issues, but one in particular involved a committee meeting of publishing leaders in Battle Creek, Michigan. She was shown that our religious liberty publications should not hide the distinctive message and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The morning after her vision, she tried to tell her son Willie about the vision, but strangely that part about the committee meeting was gone from her mind. On several occasions during her trip she attempted to tell her son more of the vision but was unable to remember the details.

In March 1891, she was in Battle Creek for the General Conference Session. On Sabbath afternoon March 7, during her sermon, she again attempted to tell of her Salamanca vision but, like before, she could not remember the details. Ellen White went to bed weary

that evening, not planning to attend the early Sunday morning meeting. But she was awakened early to write the details of the vision and was instructed to attend the workers meeting at 5:30 A.M. Upon arriving with a bundle of manuscripts in her arm, she was invited to speak.

She then proceeded to describe a meeting where a group of men were hoping to drop the name "Seventh-day Adventist" and "Sabbath" from the columns of the *American Sentinel*, an Adventist religious liberty periodical. Unknown to her, the meeting she described had occurred the night before. In fact, it had continued until the early morning hours at about the very time she was awakened to write her testimony for that morning. She did not realize that the meeting had just occurred, but instead thought it had happened some months before. A. T. Robinson remembered the look of perplexity on her face when people at the early morning meeting stood to confess their wrong course at the recently concluded committee meeting. Several other eyewitness accounts were given of Ellen White's testimony at the Sunday morning meeting. The important point is that Ellen White had been shown the meeting some months before but only remembered it at the time it was needed. ¹²

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Visions revealing the past, present, and future

W. C. White recollected a couple of experiences that illustrate that Ellen White at times found it difficult to know whether what she was shown was past, present, or future, or simply a warning of what might happen. He explained how humans draw fine distinctions between the past, present, and future but how "with God, all is present." One of the stories was of a letter he had received when Ellen White and her son were far away from Battle Creek. The letter reported that a member had been removed from membership in the church. When he told his mother, she did not seem surprised and indicated that it was because of "too much affection for a young lady." When he asked her how she knew about it, she said, "Some months ago they were represented to me as standing in a public place, he with his arm around her, and she looking lovingly into his face." She then made a vitally important statement. "I did not

know at the time whether it was a picture of an actual occurrence or a warning as to something that they should avoid.” ¹³

At another time, a minister in Australia came to W. C. White distressed that he had received a testimony reproving him for something he never did. Willie’s advice to him was to take it as a warning and to act in such a way as to totally avoid the danger. Some months later, this man was doing the very thing he had protested innocence of previously. ¹⁴

[88] A major challenge was made by J. H. Kellogg and others that W. C. White and others influenced the content of Ellen White’s visions or what she wrote as coming from vision. A common example of this occurred during the late 1890s and early 1900s. J. H. Kellogg made a major issue of the fact that Ellen White had written him a letter rebuking him for constructing a building in Chicago that had not been built. However, Judge Jesse Arthur later reported that plans had been in the works to erect just such a building in Chicago. ¹⁵ Ellen White, who was in Australia at the time, had seen what would happen if the plans were carried out. She did not know that the building had not yet been constructed. Though it caused both her and her son much trouble, it did cause Kellogg to abort his plans. The point to remember was that Ellen White was not always able to determine the timeframe of what she was shown.

Understanding what she was shown

Ellen White’s understanding on some topics unfolded over time. W. C. White recalled the following:

Some of you will remember that beautiful chapter in the last of Great Controversy in which is described the experience of God’s people who have been in dungeons and hiding places, and as they come, a voice sounds forth, “They come! They come! Holy, harmless, and undefiled.” When Mother [Ellen White] was writing the last chapters of Great Controversy, she was heard three times in the night, uttering these words as the scene was presented to her over and over. One morning she said, “Now I have got it, I know where to place it. I have found its relation.” ¹⁶

This dynamic of unfolding understanding is clarified by understanding how Ellen White’s visions came. Most often, like Bible

prophets, she was shown *actual representations or pictures*. These might be *actual views* of past, present, or future events, or they might be *symbolic representations*. Sometimes in vision she was given specific verbal or visual instruction by her angel guide. Literally hundreds of statements exist where Ellen White wrote “said the angel” or quoted the angel’s words. On occasion she would have a *flash of insight* that was more than an impression that presented a thought, a concept, or an understanding about a situation. An example would be her experience while giving a sermon in Los Angeles. She had a momentary vision or prophetic insight: “Like lightning things flashed before my mind. Several persons were presented to me as standing in a position where they greatly hindered the work that was essential for the healthful, spiritual growth of the churches.”¹⁷ What she was shown did not have captions, and unless the angel gave her information, she could not always tell what she was seeing. However, the repetition of visions with additional information plus her own reading, especially of historical volumes, helped her to connect what she was shown in vision to events and places.

Temporary misinterpretation of some aspect of a vision

Ellen White, at times, misinterpreted an aspect of what she was shown in vision. God would over time correct this misunderstanding through Bible study or additional visions as He helped her understand unfolding truth. Examples include the “shut door” interpretation (discussed in chapter 12) and the development of Adventist understanding on the time to begin the Sabbath.

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James and Ellen White accepted the Sabbath in the late summer or early fall of 1846 through reading Joseph Bates’s tract *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign* in connection with their own Bible study. Bates taught that the Sabbath should begin at 6:00 P.M.¹⁸ Through his influence, Sabbatarian Adventists continued to keep the Sabbath from 6:00 P.M. Friday to 6:00 P.M. Saturday until November 1855. During those nine years of transition, some Adventists thought the Sabbath should begin at sundown and others said sunrise. In 1847, at Topsham, Maine, Ellen White had a vision clarifying that sunrise could not be the correct time. The angel said to her, “From even to even shall ye celebrate your Sabbath.” Per-

haps at the urging of Joseph Bates, those present, including Ellen White, interpreted this to mean that the Sabbath should begin at 6:00 P.M.¹⁹ Ellen White and others drew conclusions from her vision that she had not actually been shown. J. N. Andrews studied the subject from the Bible and history, and his findings were presented on November 17, 1855, at a gathering of Adventists in Battle Creek, Michigan. Most accepted his presentation, except Joseph Bates and Ellen White! Several days later, on November 20, Ellen White had a correcting vision that validated Andrews's Bible study, and both she and Joseph Bates capitulated wholeheartedly.

Later, Uriah Smith wrote a response to J. V. Himes, who charged that Ellen White only had "visions" that were convenient for her and supported her positions. Smith wrote: "Lest any should say that Sr. White, having changed her sentiments, had a vision accordingly, we will state that what was shown her in vision concerning the commencement of the Sabbath, was contrary to her own sentiment at the time the vision was given."²⁰ Thus on occasion after the church had engaged in careful Bible study, Ellen White also grew in her own understanding and was aided by clarifying visions.²¹

In 1858, she wrote to her close friends, the Haskells, rebuking them for insisting that eating pork was a violation of Leviticus 11:7: "I saw that your views concerning swine's flesh would prove no injury if you have them to yourselves; but in your judgment and opinion you have made this question a test. If God requires His people to abstain from swine's flesh, He will convict them on the matter."²² She was not necessarily saying that pork eating was allowed, but rather that God would work with the church in their study of the Bible on the topic.

[90] But light did come to Ellen White in her 1863 health vision, validating Haskell's Bible study. In 1864, in her first published presentation of that vision, a fifty-page chapter entitled "Health," in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 4, she said: "God never designed the swine to be eaten under any circumstances."²³

Here we learn how Ellen White changed her mind between 1858 and 1863. (1) She had received no light from God on swine's flesh before 1863. (2) She didn't think it should cause division among Adventists, because she didn't think the issue was a test question. (3) When God makes His will known, it will be revealed to more "than

two or three.” (4) The test of this logic is that when the vision did come, the whole church saw the issue clearly—no division arose.

There is biblical precedent for this type of help by God in the revelation process. Daniel is a good example of the prophet needing to have additional help to correct a misunderstanding of a vision. [Daniel 8:14](#) showed a period of 2,300 days or years. When Daniel received this vision, he “fainted, and was sick certain days” ([Dan. 8:27](#)). The angel had told him that the vision was for “many days” and the “last end.” Daniel interpreted the vision as being in reference to the return of the Jews from exile. This greatly distressed him.

Several years passed. In 538-537 B.C., Darius the conqueror of Babylon was king. Daniel had studied the prophecy of Jeremiah 25:10-14, that the Jewish captivity in Babylon would last only seventy years. But he kept thinking about the 2,300 day/years. He thought God was changing His plan and that the Jews would be in captivity for thousands of years. In his prayer recorded in Daniel 9, Daniel begs God not to defer His promise. The angel Gabriel is sent to answer his prayer and explain the previous vision. He begins by saying that “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people” ([Dan. 9:24](#)). The Hebrew word for determined literally means “cut off.” The seventy weeks of years, or 490 years, are cut off from the 2,300 years, and the angel explains when the prophecy would begin. The key point here is that Daniel misunderstood part of his Daniel 8 vision for some years until God finally made it plain.

Divine correction for incorrect counsel

On rare occasions Ellen White gave incorrect counsel based upon what she had been previously shown and needed divine intervention to provide correction. It is important to note that God was always careful to correct this type of mistake with a vision.

In 1902, the newly established publishing house in Nashville, Tennessee, was steadily losing money, and A. G. Daniells, the General Conference president, talked with Ellen White about closing the operation. Ellen White had been shown in vision the importance of avoiding debt and agreed with Daniells's proposal. Yet he reported that “a few days later, a letter was received from Mrs. White, stating that she had spoken according to her own judgment in agreement

with the presentation we had made to her. She was now instructed by the Lord to tell us that she had been wrong in giving this counsel, and that *the printing house in the South should not be closed*. Plans must be laid to prevent further indebtedness, but we were to move forward in faith.”²⁴ Ellen White frankly wrote to key church leaders: “During the night following our interview in my house and out on the lawn under the trees, October 19, 1902, in regard to the work in the Southern field, the Lord instructed me that I had taken a wrong position”²⁵ Ellen White’s experience was like that of Nathan the prophet who counseled David to follow his heart’s desire to build the temple. “Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart; for God is with thee. And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David My servant, Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not build me an house” (1 Chron. 17:2-4).

These stories should give greater confidence in God’s leading of the church through the prophetic gift. If the prophet makes a critical mistake, God is careful to give correction.

Dramatic predictions of world events

As God’s spokesperson, Ellen White was given remarkable visions of world events that no contemporaries had foreseen. One of Ellen White’s most stunning predictions was that of the impending American Civil War. On January 12, 1861, in Parkville, Michigan, three months before the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the congregation watched with intense interest for twenty minutes, while Ellen White was in vision.

Afterward, she shared briefly what had been revealed to her. J. N. Loughborough, an eyewitness, recalled her words:

Men are making light of the secession ordinance that has been passed by South Carolina [Dec. 20, 1860]. They have little idea of the trouble that is coming on our land. No one in this house has ever dreamed of the trouble that is coming. I have just been shown in vision that a number of States are going to join South Carolina in this secession, and a terrible war will be the result. In the vision I saw large armies raised by both the North and the South. I was shown the battle raging.²⁶

Then, looking over the congregation she continued: "There are men in this house who will lose sons in that war." This prophecy [92] was literally fulfilled within a year.

On August 3, 1861, at Roosevelt, New York, Ellen White had her second Civil War vision, focusing on the evil of slavery—the North was to blame for the continuing extension of slavery, and the South for the sin of slavery. She went on to say that many "have flattered themselves that the national difficulties would soon be settled, and confusion and war will end; but all will be convinced that there is more reality in the matter than was anticipated. Many looked for the North to strike a blow and end the controversy." ²⁷

Another example of this kind of fulfillment was Ellen White's previews of the rise of modern spiritualism. These were given when spiritualistic manifestations were local, isolated, and more of a curiosity than anything else. Those 1848 displays of strange rappings involving the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York, were shown to her as the revival of spiritualism in modern times. She said: "I saw that the mysterious knocking in New York and other places was the power of Satan, and that such things would be more and more common, clothed in a religious garb so as to lull the deceived to greater security." ²⁸

Spiritualism has perhaps never been more prominent in the history of the world than it is today. Adherents include people on all levels of society and in every economic class. Politicians and heads of government freely admit their reliance on spiritualist mediums of some kind. Who, other than Ellen White in 1849, had the insight to label the Fox sisters phenomenon as the beginning of a worldwide, sophisticated movement with tremendous implications for last-day events? Some have argued that the Fox sisters fabricated their experience. Whether this is the case or not, it remains true that their experience marked the beginning of the rapid expansion of spiritualism.

There are many dynamics to the process of special revelation through visions and dreams and the transmission of the prophetic word to the intended recipients. There is a balance between the divine and the human. The critical point to understand is that God supernaturally works to make sure that His intended message is given. It may not be immediately or fully explained, but God leads

His messenger and His people to the understanding and experience that He intends. Some of the misunderstandings of Ellen White's statements are due to an unawareness of how God gave the prophetic revelation. The process is dynamic and at times requires time for clarification and even correction.

¹Arthur L. White suggested that Ellen White had about two thousand visions during her lifetime. He arrived at this conclusion based on what James White wrote in 1868 (*Life Incidents* [Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868], 272) that Ellen "had during the past twenty-three years between one and two hundred visions," an average of one every six weeks. Because her night visions appear more frequent in the later years, he estimated that she had an average of two or three visions per week. Thus the overall average was estimated at a vision once every two weeks. See Arthur L. White, "Variation and Frequency of the Ellen G. White Visions" (Center for Adventist Research [CAR], Berrien Springs, MI, April 5, 1982).

²Sections of this chapter were drawn largely from the detailed outlines for the Issues in Ellen G. White Studies class taught by Merlin D. Burt at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

³See Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1931), 150-155.

⁴Ellen G. White [EGW], *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1962), 461.

⁵"Dreams from the Lord are classed in the word of God with visions, and are as truly the fruits of the Spirit of prophecy as visions." EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 5:658.

⁶See Daniel 7:1.

⁷EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:658.

⁸*Ibid.*, 5:686.

⁹W C. White, "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White: A View of the Age-Long Conflict," *Review and Herald*, February 20, 1936, 6.

¹⁰W C. White, *Lectures at the Advanced Bible School*, 1936, CAR.

¹¹EGW, *The Writing and Sending out of the Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1913), 24.

¹²See Robert W Olson, comp., "The Salamanca Vision and the 1890 Diary" (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1983); A. L. White, "The Story of the Salamanca Vision" (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Publications, 1954).

¹³W C. White, "The Visions of Ellen G. White," December 17, 1905 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate), 4.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Jesse Arthur to W. C. White, August 27, 1902 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate).

¹⁶W. C. White, "The Visions of Ellen G. White," 4.

¹⁷EGW, Manuscript 29, 1902, January 31, 1901.

¹⁸Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign, From the Beginning to the Entering Into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandment* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846), 32.

¹⁹[Uriah Smith], *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White, a Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 90.

²⁰Uriah Smith, "Not Satisfactory," *Review and Herald*, August 30, 1864, 109.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:206, 207.

²³EGW, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1864), 4:124.

²⁴Arthur Grosvenor Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1936), 326; emphasis supplied.

²⁵EGW, Letter 208, 1902, December 26, 1902.

²⁶Quoted in Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 158. 27.

²⁷See appendix O in Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 572, 573, for a sample listing of fourteen comments of national leaders in the early 1860s regarding the Civil War crisis.

²⁸EGW, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1945), 43.

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Chapter Seven - Humanity of the Prophets

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Alberto R. Timm

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible and the prophetic writings of Ellen White as fully inspired by the Holy Spirit through a mysterious process of divine-human interplay. ¹ The apostle Peter refers to that process by saying that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20, 21). ² The divine-human interplay cannot be limited to the predictive element of the Scriptures. It is of such an all-encompassing nature that Paul could even state that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Ellen White sheds light on the topic by suggesting a pertinent analogy between the divine-human nature of Christ and the nature of the Bible. She explains:

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” John 1:14. ³

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Since the early 1970s there has been an ongoing discussion in some Adventist academic circles about the nature of both the Scriptures and Ellen White writings. ⁴ The argument is that if we accept the fact that all prophetic writings were “given in the language of men,” and “everything that is human is imperfect,” ⁵ then we have to admit also that such imperfections have distorted, at least to a certain degree, the divine message carried by those writings. After all, does not Paul speak of the gospel message as a divine “treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7)? Does not Ellen White mention that in her own writings God was “speaking through clay”? ⁶ By contrast, others counter argue that the whole idea of questioning the prophetic writings is theologically illegitimate, because Ellen

White states that “it is not the province of any man to pronounce sentence upon the Scriptures, to judge or condemn any portion of God’s Word.”⁷ So, to what extent did the human weaknesses of the prophet affect the integrity of the prophetic message?

The present chapter considers, initially, the role played by the prophet’s human feelings and personal growth within the inspired writings; then, the issue of the indebtedness of those writings to the general culture in which they came into existence; and, finally, the interrelationship between the unfolding of the prophetic messages across time and their own integrity within this process. Undoubtedly, any attempt to deal with the humanity of the prophet is conditioned largely by the interpreter’s ideological framework. But a special attempt is made here to allow the inspired writings to speak for themselves, avoiding, as much as possible, idealistic and humanistic rereading of the inspired writings. Due to the conciseness of the approach, the study will point out only basic concepts that can be further developed elsewhere.

Human feelings

The Roman Catholic practice of canonizing the so-called saints (including many people mentioned in the Bible) helped to consolidate the unrealistic notion of perfect, sinless prophets. But in [James 5:17](#) we read that even the prophet Elijah, who was taken into heaven without facing death, was “a man with a nature like ours.” So true prophets, like other human beings, had to grow in “holiness” (cf. [Heb. 12:14](#)), without ever reaching a sinless human nature. Ellen White explains:

Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which

we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience.⁸

It is no surprise that God's prophets faced negative human feelings, which are sometimes communicated in their inspired writings. A classic example is the personal reluctance several prophets felt when called by the Lord. For example, Moses argued that he could not be a prophet because he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue" ([Exod. 4:10](#)). Contemplating the glory and majesty of God, Isaiah declared, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" ([Isa. 6:5](#)). Amos stated humbly, "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit" ([Amos 7:14](#)). And Ellen White, after being called to travel and share with others the content of her visions, prayed "for several days, and far into the night," that such a "burden" should be removed from her, "and laid upon some one more capable of bearing it."⁹ However, none of these individuals were released from their prophetic offices. Instead, God empowered them by the Holy Spirit so that they could overcome, or work in spite of, their own weaknesses.

In fulfilling their ministry, prophets were sometimes filled with negative human feelings in regard to their own lives. Elijah was so discouraged the day after the great victory on Mount Carmel that he even prayed, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" ([1 Kings 19:4](#)). Daniel "fainted and was sick for days" because he did not understand the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings ([Dan. 8:27](#); cf. [8:14](#)). Disappointed with the fact that the Lord did not destroy Nineveh, Jonah was not afraid to state, "It is better for me to die than to live" ([Jon. 4:8](#)). And Ellen White wrote on September 7, 1888, of her discouragement as a result of her recent sickness:

I was completely prostrated with sickness I felt no desire to recover. I had no power even to pray, and no desire to live. Rest, only rest, was my desire, quiet and rest. As I lay for two weeks in nervous prostration, I had hope that no one would beseech the throne of grace in my behalf. When the crises came, it was the impression that I would die, and this was my thought. But it was not the will of my heavenly Father. My work was not yet done.¹⁰

Human longing for justice is the leading motif of several imprecatory psalms, with their prayers of vengeance and curses to the wicked (see Pss. 35; 58; 69; 109; 137; etc.). The psalmist's belligerent attitude toward his persecutors contrasts sharply with Christ's and Stephen's prayers in favor of their own enemies (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). While reading those psalms, one might be tempted to assume that they are just uninspired portions within the overall inspired writings. But such a view is unacceptable because it contradicts the principle that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Furthermore, we should not forget that the New Testament quotes the imprecatory psalms as inspired and authoritative, and that in the Old Testament the enemies of God's covenant people were considered as the enemies of God Himself.¹¹ It seems plausible, therefore, to accept those psalms as being as fully inspired as the others, fitting within the theological framework of the divine justice well expressed by the holy-war motif of the Old Testament.

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So, prophets did express in their writings negative human feelings of other people, as well as their own (see Pss. 32; 51; 73), without overshadowing the inspiration process. Unreliable feelings and even sayings were recorded in those writings "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

Personal growth

Another significant aspect of prophets' humanity is their personal growth over time in the understanding of and commitment to the truth. For example, John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah and acknowledged Jesus of Nazareth as the true One (Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-8, 15-36; cf. Isa. 40:3-5). But later on, while in prison, the Baptist was in doubt regarding this very same matter, and even sent two of his own disciples to inquire of Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus asked those disciples to bear witness of His mighty acts, which most certainly helped John to overcome his own doubts (Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23). There is in the overall story a clear move, first from conviction into doubting, and then back into full confidence.

[99] Another insightful example of personal growth can be seen in the disciples' understanding of the Messiah. When Jesus told His disciples that He would "suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day," Peter rebuked Him saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" And Jesus replied, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" ([Matt. 16:21-23](#)). But after having witnessed those events taking place, Peter made Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension the core of his preaching, as evident in his Pentecostal sermon ([Acts 2:22-36](#)); his temple sermon after the healing of the lame man ([Acts 3:12-26](#)); his defense before the Sanhedrin ([Acts 4:8-12](#)); his sermon to Cornelius ([Acts 10:34-43](#)); and his statement in [1 Peter 2:21-25](#). Peter's experience shows a clear move in personal growth from ignorance and self-trust to full trust in the Christ event.

There are also several instances in Ellen White's experience in which she grew in her understanding of truth. ¹² During the first two years of her prophetic ministry, she kept Sunday and gave it up only after reading Joseph Bates's pamphlet titled *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign* (published in August 1846). ¹³ In regard to eating pork, it took her several more years to understand that the health instructions given in Leviticus 11 are universal principles still applicable for us today. ¹⁴ But even before understanding those matters, she did not teach from revelation that either Sunday worship or eating pork was the will of God, otherwise she would have been a false prophet.

Behind such personal growth is the notion that for all Christians (including prophets) "understanding" and "obedience" are not single static experiences but rather processes mediated by Scripture. Once somebody accepts Christ as his or her personal Savior and Lord, and is converted, the principle motivation for obedience is God's grace in his or her life. According to Paul, "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" ([Phil. 2:13](#)). But then, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Christian will continue to search the Scriptures earnestly with the following question in mind, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" In an ongoing learning process, Christians will discover new glimpses of truth that they are then called to incorporate into their life.

Some aspects of the prophets' personal growth emerge within their own writings, but without undermining the prophetic messages. Despite "orthographical or grammatical mistakes, as well as other kinds of language imperfections, such as *lapsus linguae* (a slip of the tongue) or *lapsus memoriae* (a slip of the memory)," the Holy Spirit was in control of the inspired message and always corrected them "in matters important to the church."¹⁵ Additionally, divine correcting intervention is evident when the prophet does not fully understand the mind of God. This is evidenced in the way the Lord corrected Nathan's wrong advice to David about the building of the Jerusalem temple (see [2 Sam. 7:1-17](#); [1 Chron. 17:1-15](#)). Divine revelation is not necessarily limited to the prophet's understanding level. This is quite evident from the fact that many times prophets carried messages they themselves did not fully understand (see, e.g., [Dan. 8:27](#); [12:4](#), [8-10](#)). In regard to the 1901 General Conference, Ellen White wrote, "God presented this [an allusion to [2 Kings 6:15-22](#)] to me, and I did not know what it meant. I did not understand it. I pondered over it, and then, as the lesson was fulfilled, I began to grasp its meaning."¹⁶

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Thus, by alluding to their own negative human feelings and personal growth in understanding and commitment, the prophets did not distort the integrity of the message entrusted to them by God.

Cultural dialogue

In addition to the issue of the prophet as a person and their growing understanding, one must also take into consideration the cultural context in which the prophetic message was originally communicated. Any serious attempt to understand the nature of the inspired writings should consider the issues of divine accommodation and cultural conditioning.¹⁷ While dealing with this subject, we should keep in mind that Bible prophets and Ellen White were real human beings, "with a nature like ours" ([James 5:17](#)), living in a real world. But up to what extent were their writings influenced by the surrounding cultures in which they lived? How can we distinguish in those writings universal principles from specific localized counsels?

In addressing these subjects, we have to recognize first of all that languages are vehicles of culture and, therefore, cultural ex-

pressions. Since the divine messages were communicated in the respective languages of their original audiences, it is not surprising that they contain numerous contemporary cultural expressions and illustrations.

[101] All inspired writings were given in a specific historical context. Except for some reflections on the far past (ancient history) and distant future (apocalyptic prophecies), their content deals mostly with contemporary issues. Such contemporary focus involves divine accommodations and thematic contextualizations into the culture of the individual and/or people to whom the divine messages were originally addressed. In other words, the divine messages were given intentionally in a way that people could understand, and in a language they were familiar with. But the divine origin of those messages prevents us from speaking about them as culturally conditioned, in the sense of being mere products of their own culture. Indeed, a careful study of the inspired writings demonstrates that much of their content comprises reproofs and admonitions against many negative cultural trends—for instance, the “wickedness of man” ([Gen. 6:5](#)); “inhabitants of the land” ([Exod. 34:12, 15](#)); “path of sinners” ([Ps. 1:1](#)); and “world” ([John 17:9-16](#); [Rom. 12:2](#); [1 John 2:15-17](#)). So instead of being friendly to culture expressions, those writings are filled with anti cultural warnings, strongly critical of the culture of those days. ¹⁸

At any rate, there is an ongoing dialogue throughout the inspired writings between universal principles and specific localized counsels, which are not always easily distinguishable from one another. But in general terms universal principles tend to recur in various prophetic writings penned under different cultural settings, while localized counsels are usually bound to one specific cultural context. However, we have to recognize that in the inspired writings there are universal principles behind even specific counsels given in a particular situation. It is precisely this backing up that makes those writings of a timeless nature and of universal application, distinct from all other ancient writings.

After dealing briefly with the prophets’ human feelings and personal growth, as well as with the cultural dialogue found within their writings, we have to also consider the doctrinal and theological development of a prophet across time.

Unfolding message

Some Seventh-day Adventist authors have reflected on the nature of doc-trine, with sporadic references to the way Ellen White changed some of her views over time.¹⁹ There is, however, at least one Adventist author who argues for the existence in the Bible, as well as in the writings of Ellen White, of a supposed growth (perhaps evolution) from some kind of primitivism into theological maturity.²⁰ This view raises some serious questions: Do the writings of a prophet actually show a theological development across time? If so, what are the reasons behind it? And more, can we regard such development as a move from the “primitive” to the “mature”? Would this not be a humanistic view in which God Himself is in need of later revising His earlier revelations?

A chronological study of inspired writings demonstrates the existence of significant doctrinal-theological developments within those writings as a whole, and within the writings of some prophets in particular. Undoubtedly, the intellectual abilities of the prophets influenced to a certain extent the way in which the prophetic messages were presented. A classic example is the contrast between Paul’s more theological approach and Peter’s simpler style (cf. [2 Pet. 3:15, 16](#)). Even realizing that those abilities might be improved during a lifetime, we should avoid the reductionist notion of viewing the developments under consideration as a mere result of the prophets’ spiritual and cognitive personal growth. Such developments were actually generated by a complex interplay of several factors.

One of the main factors within the development process is the accumulation of knowledge through successive divine revelations, unfolding the truth and deepening its understanding. This process is well described by the analogy of Proverbs 4:18: “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day” (NASB). A good example is Ellen White’s 1858 great controversy vision published originally in the 219-page *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1;²¹ and which was enlarged later on, first into the four volumes of *The Spirit of Prophecy* series (1870-1884)²² and, finally, into the five volumes of the *Conflict of the Ages Series* (1888-1917).²³ Instead of regarding the original 1858 account as primitive and immature, it would be more appropriate to consider it

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a helpful concise framework, enriched over the years by the more detailed accounts of the later enlarged volumes.

Another major factor is people's willingness to accept the messages God sends them. Since people tend to be slow and even reluctant to follow God's revelations (see [1 Cor. 3:1, 2](#); [Eph. 4:14](#); [Heb. 5:11-14](#)), these have to be delivered at the pace of the children ([Gen. 33:14](#), NASB). Jesus stated to His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" ([John 16:12](#)). However, if people continue to be unwilling to listen to the messages, God might use more radical devices to wake them up. Ellen White warns that "God will arouse His people; if other means fail, heresies will come in among them, which will sift them, separating the chaff from the wheat."²⁴ In reality, positive theological developments usually take place within a receptive context or under a crisis situation that needs to be overcome.

One of the best examples of a crisis situation that unleashed a significant literary production were the events related to the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. In the years following the conference, Ellen White penned some of her most significant works on Christ and His saving grace.²⁵ So, we ask, was her post-1888 literary production an evidence of a prophetic maturing in understanding justification by faith, after holding for more than forty years a supposed immature approach to the topic? There is no doubt that prophets, as mentioned earlier, grow in understanding and commitment, and that she learned new glimpses of truth during those discussions. Yet, she stated in 1889 that she had been presenting the light on justification by faith to the people "for the last 45 years—the matchless charms of Christ."²⁶ If we take this statement seriously, then we have to assume that her post-1888 emphasis was due less to a personal maturing on the topic and more to the church's increasing receptiveness to the subject. That crisis situation made some pastors and many church members more open to (or at least more tolerant of) the preaching of justification by faith, which in earlier years would have been regarded by many as an unacceptable evangelical or anti law compromise.²⁷

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In general terms, there is a theological development in the inspired writings in the sense that later accounts usually are broader and more complex than earlier ones. However, there are also in-

stances in which exactly the opposite takes place. For instance, the very first Creation accounts are indeed the more complete ones (see Gen. 1 and 2), and what follows are just sporadic allusions to them. In the inspired writings, we do have an evident building up of knowledge. But the God who inspired those writings is not dependent on an evolutionary process in order to give a full revelation of truth.

God's prophets of the past were real human beings, who lived in the same sinful world that we do, and who struggled at times to keep their own human feelings under control. Like all other sons and daughters of God, they also grew in knowledge and commitment to the increasing light shining on their path. Many of those personal aspects of life appear here and there within the inspired writings, but without distorting the divine message they carry. Positive feelings and growth were recorded as examples to be followed, while negative moods and behaviors were preserved as warnings, alerting us not to fall into the same traps and encouraging us to overcome our own weaknesses (cf. [1 Cor. 10:11](#)). Instead of being uninspired insertions into the inspired writings, those records were preserved intentionally for us who have to struggle in a real world with our own human nature like the prophets did with theirs.

Our understanding of the inspired writings should avoid, on one side, the idealistic theory of inerrancy, which downplays their human nature, and on the other side the humanistic perspective, which tends not only to empty them of divine inspiration, but also to place them merely on the same cultural level of other ancient pieces of literature. It is only by understanding and maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the inspired writings that one feels compelled to make them his or her life guide in the journey towards eternity.

¹See Fundamental Beliefs nos. 1 ("Holy Scriptures") and 18 ("Gift of Prophecy") in Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 17th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 9, 15.

²Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New King James Version®.

³Ellen G. White [EGW], *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1911), vi.

⁴Some insights into the historical development of those discussions were provided by Alberto R. Timm in his articles "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical

and Prophetic Inspiration (1844-2000),” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, nos. 1-2 (1999): 486-542 (especially 513-541); and “Development of Contemporary Issues Related to Ellen G. White,” *Ellen White Issues Symposium* (Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University) 9 (2013): 90-110. The discussion was revived in the mid-2000s through publication of several popular books, such as Graeme Bradford, *Prophets Are Human* (Victoria, Australia: Signs, 2004); Graeme Bradford, *People Are Human* (Look What They Did to Ellen White) (Victoria, Australia: Signs, 2006); Graeme Bradford, *More Than a Prophet, Biblical Perspectives*, vol. 18 (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2006); Alden Thompson, *Escape From the Flames: How Ellen White Grew From Fear to Joy—and Helped Me to Do It Too* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005).

⁵EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958, 1980), 1:20.

⁶EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 5:67.

⁷EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:42.

⁸EGW, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 560-561. See also EGW, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1937).

⁹EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:62.

¹⁰EGW, “Engaging in Worldly Speculation,” *Manuscript 2*, 1888 (September 7); in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1:47.

¹¹See Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), 19-23.

¹²See Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 154-158.

¹³Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign, From the Beginning to the Entering Into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandment* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846).

¹⁴EGW, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 5 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald®, 1859), 29. Cf. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 157, 158.

¹⁵Juan Carlos Viera, “The Dynamics of Inspiration,” *Adventist Review*, special edition, May 30, 1996, 27, 28. See also Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1973), 47, 48; Roger W. Coon, “Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works—Part II,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 44 (December 1981-January 1982): 18, 19.

¹⁶EGW, “Notes From General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, May 7, 1901, 296. See also EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:206, 207.

¹⁷Some helpful insights on this subject appear in Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 550-552; Alberto R. Timm, “Divine Accommodation and Cultural Conditioning of the Inspired Writings” (unpublished paper presented at the Ellen G. White Estate Advisory, Silver Spring, MD, October 12-15, 2006).

¹⁸See, e.g., G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment*, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, no. 2 (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1950); Floyd V. Filson, *The New*

Testament Against Its Environment, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, no. 3 (London: SCM Press, [1950]).

¹⁹See, e.g., Rolf J. Pohler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development*, *Friedensauer Schriftenreihe, Reihe A: Theologie*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000); George R. Knight, *In Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000).

²⁰Alden Thompson, “From Sinai to Golgotha,” five-part series in *Adventist Review*, December 3, 1981, 4-6; December 10, 1981, 8-10; December 17, 1981, 7-10; December 24, 1981, 7-9; December 31, 1981, 12, 13; Alden Thompson, *Escape From the Flames* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005).

²¹EGW, *Spiritual Gifts: The Great Controversy, Between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1858).

²²EGW, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association and Review and Herald®, 1870-1884).

²³EGW, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan, as Illustrated in the Lives of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1890); EGW, *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1917); EGW, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1898); EGW, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*; and EGW, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1888 [revised in 1911]).

²⁴EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:707.

²⁵See EGW, *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892); EGW, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1896); EGW, *The Desire of Ages*; EGW, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald®, 1900).

²⁶[EGW], “Christ and the Law,” Manuscript 5 (June 19), 1889, in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 348, 349. See Norval F. Pease, *By Faith Alone* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1962), 107-126.

²⁷See George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle Over Righteousness by Faith* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1989), 15-39.

Chapter Eight - Ellen White and the Development of Seventh- day Adventist Doctrines

Denis Fortin

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God bestows upon all members of His church, in every age, spiritual gifts that are to be employed in ministry for the common good of the church and humanity. These gifts are apportioned by the Holy Spirit to each believer and provide abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained mission and functions.¹ Adventists believe these gifts are to function for the perfecting of the saints and for the edification of the body of Christ until His return. Just as they were needed in the early church to confirm the work of the apostles and to provide guidance in the young congregations, these gifts are also needed today. While Adventists recognize the unique position of the Bible as the sole criterion by which all claims to spiritual gifts must be evaluated, the Bible itself points to a continuing manifestation of spiritual gifts in the Christian church until the return of Christ and particularly in the time of the end. On the basis of [Revelation 12:17](#) and [Revelation 19:10](#), Adventists hold that the gift of prophecy is an identifying mark of the people of God in the last days. This gift they believe was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.

Adventists have argued that while Ellen White's ministry and writings are valued as a genuine gift of the Spirit, her authority is considered subject to the Bible. Adventists see a similarity between the ministry of noncanonical prophets and that of Ellen White. The Bible describes the work of many prophets who did not write any portion of Scripture. Enoch, Gad, Nathan, Huldah, and even John the Baptist are such noncanonical prophets. Although true prophets are empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister to God's people during a particular period of time, these prophets did not write any section of the Bible. Yet their ministry is considered genuine, valid, and authoritative. Adventists perceive the role and ministry of Ellen

White in a similar way. Her ministry is believed to be a spiritual gift to the church in the last days to provide guidance to Adventists in the fulfillment of their mission and to help prepare God's people for the second advent of Christ.

Historically, Adventists have opposed the use of creeds and other formal statements of doctrinal beliefs that presumably could never be altered; instead they have claimed the Bible as their only creed. This position stems from their understanding of the role of spiritual gifts in the church and that the Holy Spirit continues to lead Christians in the discovery and understanding of biblical truths.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church arose as a movement of Christian believers who together rediscovered some teachings of Scripture that had been forgotten or neglected through time. Starting with the biblical teaching on the imminent second advent of Christ preached during the Millerite movement, early Adventists went on to rediscover and to incorporate into their beliefs other neglected teachings, such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the conditional immortality of the soul, the heavenly ministry of Christ and pre-Advent judgment, the health message, and many others. It would have been almost impossible for early Adventists to rediscover these truths if they had been bound either by one of the ancient ecumenical creeds or by one of the Protestant confessions of faith. Creeds and confessions of faith have had the tendency to reduce Christianity to a few beliefs to the exclusion of other important doctrines. For that reason, the Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs begins with a preamble that this statement can be amended as the church sees the need under the leading of the Holy Spirit. ²

When it comes to the writings of Ellen White, the main question in the minds of many Adventists and some others pertains to the relationship of Ellen White's writings to the Bible and their role in the shaping of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. This chapter builds on the understanding of Ellen White and Scripture detailed in chapter 3. It will (1) examine her role in the development of distinctive Adventist doctrines, and (2) reflect on the continuing theological value of her writings.

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Ellen White's role in the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines

Ellen White believed in the supremacy and ultimate authority of the Word of God. Many passages in her writings could be cited to highlight her unwavering faith in the supreme authority of Scripture for Christian beliefs and practice. Her writings were never intended to replace the Bible or to be treated as additional Scripture, but rather to help people see the precious gems of truth in the Bible and to point them to the Bible as their authority and guide. She also taught that knowledge or acceptance of her writings or prophetic was not a test of fellowship and that her writings were not to be used to prove biblical teachings to unbelievers. ³

One of the subjects concerning Ellen White's ministry that is frequently questioned is her involvement and influence on the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. Many believe that her visions were the origin of the distinctive doctrines of Adventism. However, a brief look at the historical development of the distinctive beliefs of Adventism reveals a different picture. Adventist pioneers accepted a set of beliefs based on their study of the Bible, and Ellen White's influence in these early years was usually limited to confirmation and clarification of these doctrines. Although her visions sometimes enriched an understanding of some doctrines, they were never the basis for doctrinal beliefs.

Second advent of Christ

Adventists take their name from their belief in the imminent, visible, and literal second advent of Christ, which will then be followed by the millennium (a teaching called premillennialism). They are not the only Christians who believe in a premillennialist eschatology. Before the time of Ellen White, many believed in the second coming of Christ. She herself learned of this doctrine as a young Methodist girl, along with other members of her family, as she listened to lectures of William Miller, a Baptist lay preacher, and other early Adventist preachers. This doctrine has a solid biblical foundation and is still accepted today by numerous Christians in many denominations—though there are a variety of premillennialist

interpretations. During her years of ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White used her influence to reassert this doctrine among Adventists and to invite Adventists to be ready for Christ's advent.

Doctrines

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Observance of the seventh-day Sabbath

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A knowledge of the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath was first brought to Millerite Adventists during the early 1840s by Seventh Day Baptists. In early 1844 in Washington, New Hampshire, Rachel Oakes (later Preston), a Seventh Day Baptist, introduced the Sabbath to Adventists in her area. Far from being an innovation of the nineteenth century, the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest and worship has been observed by Christians since the beginning of Christianity and by Seventh Day Baptists since the seventeenth century. During 1844 and 1845, two ministers in the Washington, New Hampshire, area, Frederick Wheeler and Thomas Preble, accepted this doctrine and began to propagate their views. Thus it came to the attention of Joseph Bates, who, with James and Ellen White, would later become one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When she first heard of Bates's position on the Sabbath in 1845 or 1846, Ellen White's initial reaction was negative. "I did not feel its importance and thought that he erred in dwelling upon the fourth commandment more than upon the other nine."⁴ In August 1846, Bates published his first Sabbath tract, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*, and James and Ellen White acquired a copy. From the biblical evidence presented in this tract, they decided to accept this doctrine.⁵ In 1874, Ellen White recalled in a letter to John Loughborough, "I believed the truth upon the Sabbath question before I had seen anything in vision in reference to the Sabbath. It was months after I had commenced keeping the Sabbath before I was shown [in vision] its importance."⁶

A similar scenario took place regarding the time to begin the observance of the Sabbath, an issue that was not settled among Sabbatarian Adventists until November 1855. Four views of when the Sabbath begins coexisted among them during the late 1840s and early 1850s: (1) sunrise Saturday morning; (2) midnight Friday night ("legal time"); (3) 6 P.M. Friday ("equatorial time"), the

position favored by Bates; and (4) sunset on Friday, the Jewish and Seventh Day Baptist position. J. N. Andrews was commissioned to study out the matter from Scripture, and wrote a report for a November 1855 conference in Battle Creek. On the basis of biblical and historical evidence, Andrews concluded that the proper time to begin the Sabbath was sunset on Friday.⁷ Ultimately, the attendees at this conference accepted Andrews's study and conclusions.⁸ Ellen White, in subsequent years, continued to give strong support to the doctrine of the Sabbath and its theological and spiritual meaning. She also provided numerous counsels regarding Sabbath keeping. But it can hardly be said that Adventists got their distinctive belief regarding the Sabbath from Ellen White.

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Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary

One of the major beliefs of the Millerite Second Advent movement in the early 1840s was the belief that Jesus would return to the earth around 1843 or 1844. This was not an isolated conclusion. Many other biblical commentators before William Miller's time came to similar conclusions by studying the time prophecies of the book of Daniel, especially chapters 8 and 9. When Jesus did not return as predicted in the fall of 1844, a general disappointment followed and Millerites sought to understand their spiritual experience and the meaning of the prophecies of Daniel that had led them to believe that Christ would return that year. A few of them came to understand that the prophetic calculations they had done were accurate but that the event predicted was mistaken. A study of the Bible, extending over a period of months, first done by O. R. L. Crosier, Franklin B. Hahn, and Hiram Edson, led a small group of Millerite Adventists to conclude that the two phases of priestly ministry in the Old Testament sanctuary services were a type of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary after His ascension, and that Christ had begun a new phase of His ministry in October 1844 in preparation for His second coming. Crosier introduced this understanding in the *Day-Dawn* (Canandaigua, New York) during March 1845 and developed it more fully in an "Extra" in the *Day-Star* (Cincinnati, Ohio) of February 7, 1846.

— In a letter to Eli Curtis, April 24, 1847 (a year later), Ellen White confirmed the view presented by Crosier, “The Lord shew [sic] me in vision, more than one year ago, that Brother Crosier had the true light, on the cleansing of the sanctuary, etc. and that it was His will that Brother C. should write out the view which he gave us in the *Day-Star Extra*, February 7, 1846. I feel fully authorized by the Lord to recommend that Extra to every saint.”⁹ Her role, as demonstrated here, was largely to confirm the conclusions of these brethren, not to initiate them. In later years she repeatedly urged church members to read articles upon this subject written by the pioneers of the Advent movement.¹⁰ Although Ellen White received visions on the subject of the heavenly sanctuary between 1845 and 1851, she consistently referred church members to articles written by the pioneers explaining from Scripture the doctrine of the sanctuary. In these articles, the authors never used her visions and writings as the basis for their views.

Three angels’ messages of Revelation 14

The messages proclaimed symbolically by three angels in Revelation 14 form the basis of Adventist self-understanding and missionary consciousness. In the first message, an angel proclaims the everlasting gospel and the hour of God’s judgment to all nations (Rev. 14:6, 7). The second message proclaims the fall of Babylon (verse 8), while the third message warns against the mark of the beast (verses 9-11). References to these messages were made during the Millerite Second Advent movement. William Miller and his associates used the imagery of the first angel’s message to teach that the time of God’s judgment had arrived and that Christ would soon return. Charles Fitch seems to have been the first to preach on the second angel’s message, on July 26, 1843. This message referring to the fall of Babylon never really “caught on” among Millerite preachers, although many believers accepted it. Previously, Protestants had tended to identify Roman Catholicism with spiritual Babylon. Fitch broadened the category to include contemporary Protestants who had turned from the doctrine of an imminent Second Advent. Although the Millerite movement had been fairly well received by most Protestant denominations until then, in fact it had been an

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ecumenical movement; however, Fitch's message caused a rift and much antagonism. Joseph Bates was the first Sabbatarian Adventist minister to articulate and integrate all three angels' messages with the doctrines of the Sabbath and the heavenly ministry of Christ. In his pamphlets published between 1846 and 1848, he argued for the eschatological importance of the Sabbath and that the keeping of Sunday was a mark of the beast. [Revelation 14:12](#) concludes these three messages by pointing out that in the last days, as a result of the preaching of these three messages, God's remnant people will be identified as those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.

Adventists have understood these messages to be a divine commission to warn the world of the soon coming of Christ and to invite all people to observe all of God's commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath, and to follow the example of the life of Jesus and to rely on His mercy and grace for salvation. During the late 1840s, Ellen White wrote little on the three angels' messages; her role was limited to endorsing the presentations made by other speakers and writers with the exception of one vision on the seal of God she received in December 1848 that enriched Bates's understanding of the subject at that time. In later years she continued to affirm the value of the three angels' messages as key to Adventist identity and purpose. ¹¹

Conditional immortality and annihilation of the wicked

[113] Adventists believe in the intrinsic unity of human life and that all essential aspects that characterize human life (e.g., knowledge, emotions, will) have always existed within a material bodily existence; human life does not include inherent immortality. Immortality is only conferred by God on the day of the resurrection. Hence, the intermediary state between death and the resurrection is compared to a deep sleep, one that is deprived of all the cognitive attributes of bodily life. This view also embraces the annihilation of the wicked at the end of time and does not support the concept of an eternal hell.

This doctrine also has a long history, with supporters going all the way back to early Christianity. George Storrs, a Methodist minister who became a Millerite preacher in 1842, is believed to

have been the first in the Millerite Second Advent movement to advocate the unconscious state of human beings in death. Storrs's ideas influenced Ellen White's mother, Eunice Harmon, who shared them with her daughter, Ellen, who was about fifteen years old then. Ellen's initial reaction was one of strong disapproval; but after a careful study of the biblical evidence, she accepted it. ¹² Later, she became a strong advocate of Storrs's "soul-sleep" doctrine of conditional immortality, and she considered it to be one of the half dozen "pillar" doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. ¹³ Her role in promoting it, however, was largely in the nature of endorsing Storrs's views; she did not bring any major new ideas. ¹⁴

Ellen White and distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines

During her early ministry as the pioneers were hammering out the distinctive doctrines of what would become Seventh-day Adventism, she often did not fully understand what was being studied. In 1904, she recalled her experience: "During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life." ¹⁵ She went on to explain that sometimes when the brethren were at a standstill in their study, she would have a vision to confirm the understanding of some texts they had arrived at or to point out a mistake in an interpretation. It was only after the participants at these meetings had reached a dead end, so to speak, that her visions played an influential role, and that role was limited to guidance and confirmation, not to the formation or generation of new ideas or beliefs. This divine guidance was usually practical and did not alter the theological core of the doctrine.

The distinctive doctrines of Adventism form the heart of Adventist beliefs; they are what make us a distinctive group of Christians, but they are not all the doctrines we believe. Adventists share many doctrines with other Christians, including the Trinity, the authority of Scripture, creation *ex-nihilo*, the substitutionary atonement of the death of Christ, salvation by grace through faith in Christ, justification and sanctification by faith, the church and its ministry, believer's baptism by immersion, the Lord's Supper, and the new

earth as the inheritance of the redeemed. Ellen White affirmed all these doctrines in her writings.

Theological themes in Ellen White's writings

Ellen White never claimed to be a theologian, nor was she trained in biblical studies; but her writings present many theological themes and ideas, which expand on the biblical stories. Herbert Douglass has commented correctly that “the uniqueness of Ellen White’s contribution lies not in total originality of thought but in her synthesis of divinely revealed insights and the results of her own reading and observation” ¹⁶

As John Calvin’s theology is centered around the organizing principle of the sovereignty of God, so Ellen White’s theological themes integrate various strands of her thought into a unified network of concepts and provide an inter-pretative framework for not only single documents or books, but for entire sectors of her writings (such as health, education, family living). ¹⁷ George Knight has identified seven of those themes in her writings: the love of God; the great controversy between good and evil; Jesus, the cross, and salvation; the centrality of the Bible; the second coming of Jesus; the third angel’s message and Adventist mission; and practical Christianity and character development. ¹⁸

Illustrative of how Ellen White understood the theological articulation of Bible doctrines are the following three statements highlighting two major themes.

The great controversy

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human

experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found. ¹⁹

Salvation and atonement

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The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise of the Revelation, “They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4), the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme,—mans uplifting,—the power of God, “which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57. ²⁰

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption,—the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers. ²¹

Ellen White and her prophetic revelations are not the source of distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, nor did she control the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal understanding during her lifetime. Her role was one of correction, confirmation, and enrichment. Her visions brought unity and a focus on the teaching of Scripture. While her writings had prophetic authority, they always pointed to Scripture as the final authority for faith and practice.

Beyond this role, she provided an integrated theological framework that greatly enriched the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Bible and truth. This was linked to the movements of God in history as presented in a great controversy theme and other great theological themes. These themes were integrated with distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines to give focus to the message and mission of the church.

¹Adventists believe in the perpetual manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit until the second coming of Christ on the basis of the following biblical references: 1 Corinthians 12:9-11, 27, 28; Ephesians 4:8, 11-13; Romans 12:4-8; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

²The preamble reads: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word." Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook, 2013 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013), 7.

³Ellen G. White [EGW], "The Nature and Influence of the 'Testimonies,'" in *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 5:668, 669; see also *ibid.*, 1:327-329.

⁴EGW, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1915), 95.

⁵EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:75.

⁶EGW, Letter 2, 1874, in *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 8:238.

⁷J. N. Andrews, "Time for Commencing the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, December 4, 1855, 76-78.

⁸Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1985), 1:322-325; cf. EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:116.

⁹James White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, ME: n.p., May 20, 1847), 12.

¹⁰Cf. EGW, Letter 99, 1905, in *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), 26. In 1983, Paul A. Gordon, then associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, collected over four hundred articles on the sanctuary doctrine and related topics published between 1846 and 1905. The anthology he produced contained 1,009 pages. *Pioneer Articles on the Sanctuary, Daniel 8:14, the Judgment, 2300 Days, Year-day Principle, [and the] Atonement, 1846-1905* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1983).

¹¹Ellen White wrote in 1909, "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention. The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them." EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:19.

¹²*Ibid.*, 1:39, 40.

¹³EGW, Manuscript 13, 1889, in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 30, 31. In this manuscript, Ellen White highlighted that the core “landmark” doctrines of Adventism are the heavenly ministry of Christ, the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, the immutability of the commandments of God, with special emphasis on the Sabbath, and the nonimmortality of the soul.

¹⁴Ellen White’s views on conditional immortality and annihilationism are best described in *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 531-562.

¹⁵EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:207.

¹⁶Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 256.

¹⁷George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1996), 109.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 109-127. These themes are developed in some significant chapters of Ellen White’s books. The theme of the love of God is developed in the first chapter of *Steps to Christ*, “God’s Love for Man” (9-15), and in “God With Us” in *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 19-26. Four crucial chapters expound on the theme of the great controversy: “Why Was Sin Permitted?” in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1958), 33-43; “God With Us” and “It Is Finished” in *The Desire of Ages* (19-26; 758-764); and “The Origin of Evil” in *The Great Controversy*, 492-504. The theme of Jesus, the Cross, and salvation is well developed in a number of chapters, among them: “The Plan of Redemption” in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (63-70); “Gethsemane” and “It Is Finished” in *The Desire of Ages* (685-697; 758-764); “The Sufferings of Christ” in *Testimonies for the Church* (vol. 2, 200-215); and in “Ellen White Clarifies the Issues” in *EGW, Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1979), 15-28. The theme of the centrality of the Bible is well presented in “The Scriptures a Safeguard” in *The Great Controversy* (593-602). The second advent of Christ is described beautifully in “God’s People Delivered” in *The Great Controversy* (635-652). A large section of *The Great Controversy* explains Ellen White’s understanding of the three angels’ messages and their impact on Adventist identity and mission (317-460). Various aspects of practical Christianity and character development are found in many of Ellen White’s books, among them are *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1903), 225-271, and in the 1881 series of *Review and Herald* articles published in the little book, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington DC: Review and Herald®, 1965).

¹⁹EGW, *Education*, 190.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 125, 126.

²¹EGW, *Gospel Workers* (Washington DC: Review and Herald®, 1915), 315.

[116] **Chapter Nine - How Ellen White Did Her Writing**

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Denis Kaiser

Ellen White ranks among the most prolific American writers of all time. The sheer quantity of her literary corpus at the time of her death on July 16, 1915, speaks for itself. She bequeathed to the church twenty-six books, about two hundred pamphlets and tracts, over five thousand periodical articles, thirty-five thousand typewritten general manuscript and letter pages and two thousand handwritten letters, diaries, journals, and documents—totaling about one hundred thousand pages of material that she produced during her ministry from 1844 to 1915. In her writings, she addressed a wide spectrum of different subjects, ranging from such religious matters as salvation, Christology, and the battle between good and evil, along with biblical prophecy, children’s ministry, evangelistic methods, homiletics, the role of women in the church, spirituality, and theology to insights on such diverse topics as church-state relationships, education, ethics and morals, family, history, leadership, literature, marriage, medicine, mental hygiene, music, nutrition, philosophy, physiology, public speaking, and social relationships. Additional books and compilations have been produced and published posthumously so that there are more than 126 titles currently available in the English language. The desire to make her writings available to people in other languages has led to many translations, making her presumably one of the most translated author in the history of literature, and the most translated literary female and American author.

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Throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church there have been people who raised questions about the compatibility between Ellen White’s claim to divine inspiration and the extent of her use of literary sources and the influence of her literary assistants. Others wondered about the legitimacy of compilations, translations, revisions, adaptations, abridgements, and paraphrases,

or, in other words, the ramifications of changing words and phrases in an “inspired text.” Ellen White’s practice of literary borrowing and the critique of this practice by various individuals are discussed more thoroughly in other chapters. The present chapter addresses questions about Ellen White’s process of writing, the influence of her literary assistants on her literary productions, advantages and weaknesses of compilations, as well as the legitimacy of adaptations, translations, and paraphrases.

The writing process

Ellen White experienced prophetic visions and dreams, revealing past, present, and future events and developments. She was convinced that these messages came from God and thus had divine authority.² she exalted the Word of God and pointed readers to it as the authority in their personal Christian life. She wanted people to understand the principles of the Bible and apply them to their lives in a modern setting. She felt the responsibility to rebuke sin and emphasize obedience to the Bible. Yet she also wanted to provide comfort by leading people “to Jesus, to God’s love, and to the plan of salvation as the only hope for a lost world,” and thus “prepare a people for the final days of earth’s history.”³

To illustrate the writing process it will be helpful to look at three distinct aspects: the spiritual experience, the use of sources, and the employment of literary assistants. There were times when she felt overwhelmed and unable to describe and express the “subjects in the living power” presented to her in visions and dreams.⁴ While the Holy Spirit frequently revived the revealed scenes and subjects during the writing process, it was left to her to describe them in her own language as best as she could.⁵ At times she struggled to find the right words to express her thoughts and, in response to prayer, God brought them “clearly and distinctly” to her mind.⁶ The room was filled with a “holy, sacred presence” as she was waiting to see how the Holy Spirit would guide her thinking. Her mind and understanding were directed to “matters of intense interest and importance” with a “line of action . . . laid out” before her. Sometimes her attention was moved from the subject she was writing about to other matters, which “were imprinted upon” her “mind.”⁷

Ellen White also used other sources to describe and illustrate the scenes and messages given to her in visions and dreams. Being keenly aware of her literary and grammatical shortcomings, she borrowed words, phrases, and expressions from the works of other writers, using them as a literary resource.⁸ Sometimes these works also helped her to locate the time and place of certain scenes that she had seen in vision.⁹ Ellen White read widely, which is demonstrated by the wealth of materials found in her personal and office library.

A second group of source material was the bulk of letters, manuscripts, sermons, articles, and books she had written previously, especially after the use of typewriters were introduced in her office in the early 1880s. She often reused these materials both published and unpublished in different formats for articles and books.¹⁰ Thus it is possible to retrace numerous statements found in her books to her previous writings, allowing the verification of her own authorship of these statements.

Feeling her own grammatical and literary deficiencies, she also employed a number of literary assistants (as did Jeremiah, Paul, and Peter).¹¹ The tasks performed by these assistants may be divided into four categories: recording oral material in shorthand (stenography); simple copying by hand or typewriter (copying); correcting spelling and grammar as well as eliminating unnecessary repetitions and improving sentence structure (copyediting); and compiling materials for the writing of books (major editorial compilations).¹² However, not every assistant was involved to the same extent in the production of Ellen White's writings. Thus her literary assistants may be divided into two groups: copyists and trusted compilers. Copyists performed the tasks belonging to the first three categories, whereas trusted compilers were also allowed to perform the fourth task, namely taking sentences, paragraphs, or a section on the same topic and idea from one manuscript and integrating it into another manuscript. The introduction of new thoughts of their own or changing ideas was strictly prohibited, which illustrates Ellen White's understanding of inspiration working on the thoughts and ideas rather than on the exact words.¹³

During the early years, James White was Ellen White's principal literary helper. After his death, Ellen White's son, W. C. White, became her principal helper and literary assistant. Many

other assistants worked for Ellen White over the years. Among those who helped her were Mary Kelsey-White (W. C. White's first wife), Lucinda Abbey-Hall, Adelia Patten-Van Horn, Anna Driscoll-Loughborough, Addie Howe-Cogshall, Annie Hale-Royce, Emma Sturgess-Prescott, Mary Clough-Watson, Mrs. J. I. Ings, Mrs. B. L. Whitney, Eliza Burnham, Fannie Bolton, Marian Davis, C. C. Crisler, Minnie Hawkins-Crisler, Maggie Hare, Sarah Peck, and D. E. Robinson. [121]

Fannie Bolton became Ellen White's most controversial assistant. She was an extremely gifted writer who worked intermittently from 1888 to 1896. However, she was not satisfied with merely copying Ellen White's documents but instead desired to do her own original work. Bolton repeatedly acted out of harmony with Ellen White's clear guidelines against adding her own words or thoughts. Additionally, Bolton demanded recognition of her talents as a copyist and editor. In 1894, Ellen White was forced to terminate Bolton's employment.¹⁴

After she apologized and fellow workers spoke in support of her, Ellen White consented to give Bolton a new chance. However, by 1895, she again made unwarranted claims that led to a second dismissal.¹⁵ Prompted by a vision in March 1896, Ellen White made a final attempt to help Bolton; she received her into her home and gave her material to copy. Feeling unable to do the required work, Bolton soon left for England.¹⁶ Among her most significant false claims was that she wrote *Steps to Christ*, an allegation that has been frequently repeated by some of Ellen White's critics over the years.¹⁷ Yet comparing passages from *Steps to Christ* with materials from White's pen, published prior to 1888—when Bolton was first hired by Ellen White—clearly shows Ellen White's own authorship for at least those passages, thus negating Bolton's claim to have authored the book in toto.¹⁸ Bolton also reportedly asserted that she had written some of the testimonies to people and that Marian Davis had written most of *The Desire of Ages*.¹⁹ Davis responded to this wild assertion as follows:

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 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 From my own knowledge of the work, as well as from the statements of Sister White herself, I have the strongest possible ground for disbelieving that such a thing was done. ²⁰

For a few years Bolton continued to go through a cycle of falsifications and confessions, which was eventually concluded with a confession of her wrong attitude and approach in 1901. ²¹

[122] Marian Davis's involvement in the preparation of the book *The Desire of Ages* (1898) may nevertheless serve as an example of the work that only experienced workers were authorized to do. Davis's good memory and organized mind allowed her to remember where to find items that Ellen White had already written on specific topics. Thus Davis gathered letters, manuscripts, sermons, articles, and books that contained statements on many topics and on various aspects of Christ's life, pasting them into blank books. She made suggestions as to how to arrange and outline the material in the most reasonable manner based on a harmony of the Gospels. It should be noted that Davis did not introduce her own thoughts and words but exclusively used materials Ellen White had already written. Afterwards, Ellen White read these compiled materials or listened to them being read to her, which revived her memory of prophetic scenes. She then rewrote many passages—rearranging, omitting, and adding material—to have a smooth-flowing text. It was her goal to uplift Christ, His personality, His character, and His loveliness. She then reviewed the final manuscript before publication. ²²

Compilations

Ellen White in her will instructed her trustees to prepare compilations from her writings, and since her death in 1915 quite a number have been prepared. Technically speaking, compilations are books that consist of many brief quotations on a specific topic arranged in a reasonable order and grouped together in chapters by a compiler. Because these quotations are taken from their original literary context, compilations tend to jump abruptly from one statement to another. Compilations of Ellen White's writings were prepared for

different purposes and thus may be divided into at least three main categories.

Regular books

Most of Ellen White's regular books produced during her lifetime involved a compilation process, drawing from previously written material. These books had the advantage of her personal involvement in the production. She was able to provide context to the statements, add new material, and create a smooth-flowing text.²³ Her narrative like books, such as the Conflict of the Ages Series, fall into this category.²⁴ She authored other books on numerous topics by drawing from materials that she had written previously and then rewriting, rearranging, and expanding them.²⁵

Topical collections

The compilation of multiple brief statements on a specific topic detached from their literary and historical context can be identified as a topical collection. Over the years compilations of Ellen G. White's writings served three purposes. Initially they were helpful interim solutions to make available material on important subjects by Ellen White until she could write more fully herself on these topics. After her death, the trustees of her estate produced compilations from her previously unpublished material—without violating obligations of confidentiality. Since the 1990s, the White Estate has issued compilations primarily for the convenience of having her instruction on particular topics gathered into one place whether from published or unpublished sources.²⁶

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Reference collections

Some topical collections of Ellen White's writings are more encyclopedic in nature (reference-type collections), which were not designed to be read from front to back. They are valuable because they contain Ellen White's most important material on a specific topic and may thus be used as a reference work. The encyclopedic nature of these compilations has limitations because the quoted statements are removed from their literary and historical contexts,

making it more difficult for the reader to understand the complete meaning and the original purpose of a specific statement. However, all compilations produced by the Ellen G. White Estate contain references to the original sources, which allow the reader to examine a specific statement in its original literary and historical context.²⁷ Some of the topical collections during Ellen White's lifetime were done by her or under her direction.²⁸ However, some compilations were done by other individuals.²⁹ For example, in 1897, the physician David Paulson compiled and published the book *Healthful Living*, but it was allowed to go out of print after the publication of Ellen G. White's *The Ministry of Healing* in 1905, a masterpiece on issues of health and lifestyle that basically replaced the need for the former compilation.³⁰ The majority of the encyclopedic-type compilations were done after 1915.³¹

Devotional readings

Other compilations of Ellen White's writings contain brief devotional readings for each day to direct the thoughts of the reader to God and ignite communion with Him.³² All of these compilations were produced after her death.

Contextualized compilations

[124] Books containing chapter-length selections may be regarded as an intermediate type of compilations, halfway between the regular books and the topical collections, because they provide more literary and historical context than do purely topical collections.³³ While most of these kinds of compilations were produced after her death,³⁴ a few were published during Ellen White's own life-time, such as the nine volumes of the *Testimonies for the Church*.³⁵ Similarly, the book *Christian Education*, originally published in 1893, made available chapter-length selections of already published and previously unpublished materials on various aspects of education. In 1903, it was replaced by Ellen White's master-piece Education.³⁶

How the White Estate makes compilations

Over the years, the White Estate has produced many compilations. During the first decades after Ellen White's death, compilations were made on topics that Ellen White had desired to publish. One of these was a book on the Christian home. Thus her trustees prepared for publication *The Adventist Home* (1952) and *Child Guidance* (1954). Compilations are also made on topics requested by various departments of the General Conference or publishing houses.³⁷

To produce a representative compilation, as free as possible from any personal biases, the compiler(s) group together statements based on Ellen White's own emphasis. The collected material is then divided along the line of her emphases, placing them in a reasonable order. The number of statements on a given topic is often so large that the compilers must either limit the book to representative statements or provide all available statements on the topic. The compilers usually opt for completeness, which has sometimes resulted in a multivolume compilation. An example is the two volumes of *Mind, Character, and Personality*. The White Estate makes only essential grammatical adjustments and places any supplied words in brackets to distinguish them from the original text. Clarifying explanations are placed in a footnote or in the appendix, and a reference to the original source is provided. The final compilation is scrutinized by a reading committee to eliminate any misrepresentations of her thoughts, teachings, emphases, and intentions. Because it is the goal to make available Ellen White's counsel on a given topic in a comprehensive, representative, and unbiased manner, it has been the custom to give full credit to her by refraining from listing the names of those who participated in the compiling work.³⁸

Translations, adaptations, and paraphrases

When Jesus informed His disciples of their future mission of teaching all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20), He indirectly legitimized the *translation* of the gospel message into the languages of the respective audience. Shortly afterwards, the Holy Spirit equipped the disciples to preach the message in numerous foreign languages in order to

give foreigners the chance of understanding and accepting the gospel (Acts 1:8; 2:4-12). Seventh-day Adventists began very early to publish some of their important tracts and books in the languages of various immigrant groups that they encountered in North America.³⁹ They considered this work as an exercise of the gospel commission. As the denomination spread to other continents, it also commissioned the translation of Ellen G. White's writings into foreign languages.⁴⁰ She frequently urged the translation of Adventist publications in general and her own writings in particular into multiple foreign languages.⁴¹ To ensure the continuing influence of her writings after her death, she charged the original trustees of her estate to prepare new translations of her books and writings.⁴² All church-sponsored translations are sent to selected readers before they are published to improve accuracy. Sometimes there is a need to do retranslation because of the change in the translation language or because a need to improve the quality.

While translators generally intend to translate the original statements as literally as possible, sometimes the nature and development of languages make it necessary to prefer a thought translation to a strict literal translation. Thus the literal translation of a specific idiomatic expression into another language may render it meaningless, which necessitates the choice of an idiom that allows the reader to grasp the original idea. Similarly, the equivalent word in another language may carry negative connotations that are not present in the original English word, making the choice of a synonymous but less problematic term preferable. These aspects have bearing on one's view of divine inspiration. If, as Ellen G. White suggested, it is the person and the thoughts that are inspired rather than the exact words,⁴³ one may legitimately decide for a more "free" translation to allow for a better understanding of the meaning of the original statement. First, it should be noted that, unlike the original author, translators are not inspired and thus may make mistakes in their conversion of the message into another language. To really know what Ellen G. White intended to say, it is necessary to read the original English and its original context.

It is with a similar intent that *adaptations* are produced. As the Bible was translated into multiple languages to allow people in need of salvation to understand and accept the saving message, it is

necessary to adapt Ellen White's nineteenth-century way of speaking into a language that may be comprehended by people living in the twenty-first century. With time, language changes and thus her writings contain a number of archaic terms—words that have a more limited or even a broader meaning today and words whose meaning has changed entirely. For example, while the term *gay* carried the meaning of merry, jovial, fine, and so on, during Ellen White's time, its meaning has changed to refer to a homosexual lifestyle now. Similarly, today the word *intercourse* is used almost exclusively for sexual intercourse, whereas in the nineteenth century it denoted communication, commerce, and correspondence by letters, silent communication or exchange of looks and smiles, and so forth. Revisions and adaptations aim at reducing the likelihood of potential misunderstandings and offense to readers by such archaic or awkward expressions and sentence structures. They enable readers to understand what Ellen White was actually saying. [126]

However, beyond bridging this basic language barrier, adaptations may also help to attract a wider audience of readers, to present Ellen White using modern language and style to impress their minds more forcefully with the inspired message.⁴⁴ Due to her dynamic view of inspiration,⁴⁵ Ellen White felt comfortable with requesting revisions and adaptations of her writings during her own lifetime. The “updating” of the language in the *Testimonies for the Church* in 1883 and in *The Great Controversy* in 1911 is a historical precedent for language revisions. Another example is the children's book *Christ Our Saviour*, which James Edson White prepared in 1896 from materials intended for the soon-to-be-published work *The Desire of Ages*. Shortly afterwards, Ellen White corrected *Christ Our Saviour*. The book narrates certain phases of Jesus' life using vocabulary specifically suited for children.⁴⁶ To avoid confusion with the original works, the Ellen G. White Estate decided to give a new title to adapted editions of Ellen White's books and to add the word “adapted” on the cover and the title page. Modern examples for adaptations are, for example, the 1991 edition of *The Story of Redemption* (prepared for the hearing impaired) and the book *Steps to Jesus*, which are based on the bestseller *Steps to Christ*. *Steps to Jesus* was also published under the title *Knowing Him Better*, a

paperback edition specifically produced for evangelistic purposes that was well received by young people.

[127] *Paraphrases* differ from adaptations in the extent the text is modified. While adaptations attempt to update the language and/or provide a condensed edition of the same book, leaving most chapters intact and omitting chapters insignificant to the overall message of the book, paraphrases also condense sentences and paragraphs and render words and phrases in other words. Those producing the paraphrase nevertheless intend to stay faithful to the ideas, the content, and the principles set forth in the original work, without adding new thoughts foreign to it. Besides these editorial steps the editors of the book *A Call to Stand Apart* (2002), whose language was modernized and specifically geared toward contemporary young adults, prefaced each chapter by the testimony of a young adult who had experienced Ellen White's writings as a personal blessing.⁴⁷

The Ellen G. White Estate has also produced *abridged and condensed editions* of the Conflict of the Ages Series to make the most important material available in other languages where people have only a limited income. Thus an edition of *The Great Controversy* was prepared that was also translated into Danish, French, German, Japanese, and Swedish. An abridged edition of 419 pages was prepared for translation into Icelandic, Korean, Panayan, Russian, Tagalog, among others. Those preparing these adaptations and abridgements try to follow the historic guidelines laid down for the editorial work of Ellen White's writings. Paragraphs were generally left intact, and entire chapters were used. Great care was taken to avoid any modifications to Ellen White's thoughts and teachings.⁴⁸

Future changes to the English language may lead to further adaptations, paraphrases, or abridged/condensed editions, but they will never replace the original publications. The original nineteenth-century versions of Ellen White's writings will always remain the authoritative source text.⁴⁹

¹Denis Kaiser and Jerry Moon, "For Jesus and Scripture: The Life of Ellen G. White," in *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Jerry Moon and Denis Fortin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013), 18-95; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Woman of Vision* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 5; George E. Rice, "Spiritual Gifts" in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, *Commentary Reference Series*, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 636.

²Ellen G. White [EGW], *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 as Written by Herself, With a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and of Her Last Sickness* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1915), 433; EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:27, 43.

³George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1997), 19, 20. Cf. EGW, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1911), vii; EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 2:454, 455, 605; 4:246; 5:663, 665, 667; EGW, *Colporteur Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1953), 125; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

⁴EGW to O. A. Olsen, July 15, 1892 (Letter 40, 1892), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

⁵EGW, “Questions and Answers,” *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867, 260; EGW, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1888); EGW, *The Great Controversy* (1911), x.

⁶EGW to Bro. and Sr. G. A. Irwin, Saint Helena, CA, July 18, 1902 (Letter 127, 1902).

⁷EGW, “Friday, March 20, I arose early . . .,” Sydney, Australia, March 20, 1896 (Manuscript 12c, 1896).

⁸EGW, diary entry for January 10 and 11, 1873 (Manuscript 3, 1873), and EGW to W. W. Prescott, Middle Brighton, Australia, January 18, 1894 (Letter 67, 1894), both published in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:90; EGW to Uriah Smith, Healdsburg, CA, February 19, 1884 (Letter 11, 1884), published in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:96, 97.

⁹W C. White, “Great Controversy—New Edition: A Statement Made by W C. White Before the General Conference Council,” October 30, 1911, 4; W C. White, “How Ellen White’s Books Were Written, Addresses to Faculty and Students at the 1935 Advanced Bible School” (unpublished manuscript, Angwin, CA, June 18 and July 27, 1935), 12-14.

¹⁰Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 444.

¹¹See Jeremiah 36; Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12. Cf. EGW, diary entry for January 1, 1891 (Manuscript 24, 1891), published in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:313. Cf. W. C. White, “How Ellen White’s Books Were Written,” 18-23; Robert W. Olson, “Inspired Writers’ Literary Assistants” (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989).

¹²Roger W Coon, “EGW’s Use of Literary Assistants: The Prophet as a Writer” (rev. ed., April 13, 1995); Jerry Moon, “Ellen G. White’s Use of Literary Assistants” (lecture outline for GSEM 534—Issues in Ellen G. White Studies, 2004), 1; Norma J. Collins, “Compilations—What They Are and What They Are Not” (Shelf Document, Ellen G. White Estate, December 2001), 2.

¹³W C. White to G. A. Irwin, May 7, 1900; Marian A. Davis to G. A. Irwin, Cooranbong, Australia, April 23, 1900; cf. Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*:

An Answer to the Major Charges That Critics Have Brought Against Mrs. Ellen G. White (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1951), 477; Robert W. Olson, *101 Questions on the Sanctuary and Ellen White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 88.

¹⁴EGW to Fannie Bolton, February 6, 1894 (Letter 7, 1894), and EGW to W. C. White, February 6, 1894 (Letter 59, 1894); cf. Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years, 1891-1900* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1983), 4:241; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 479-482; Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 477-486; *The Fannie Bolton Story: A Collection of Source Documents*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990).

¹⁵EGW to Marian A. Davis, October 29, 1895 (Letter 102, 1895).

¹⁶EGW, Manuscript 12c, 1896; EGW to G. A. Irwin, April 23, 1900 (Letter 61, 1900); Fannie Bolton to EGW, May 14, 1896.

¹⁷Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 445, 481; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years, 1891-1900*, 4:250. Cf. [E. S. Ballenger, ed.], "Was Mrs. White a Plagiarist?" *Gathering Call*, September 1932, 20, 21. For the entire story, see *The Fannie Bolton Story: A Collection of Source Documents*.

¹⁸See W. C. White, "The Story of a Popular Book Steps to Christ" August 24, 1933 (White Document File 445); Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 481-485; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 452n12.

¹⁹G. A. Irwin to EGW, Battle Creek, MI, March 16, 1900; and G. A. Irwin to EGW, Battle Creek, MI, April 12, 1900.

²⁰Marian A. Davis to G. A. Irwin, Cooranbong, Australia, April 23, 1900; cf. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 476, 477; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 481.

²¹Fannie Bolton, "A Confession Concerning Testimony of Jesus Christ," c. 1901 (White Document File 445).

²²Collins, "Compilations," 3, 4; Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 30, 31; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 445; cf. Denis Kaiser, "Ellen G. White's Life of Christ: An Episode in the History of Early Adventist Translation Work," *Spes Christiana* 22-23 (2011-2012): 131, 140. See, e.g., EGW to John Harvey Kellogg, Granville, Australia, October 25, 1894 (Letter 46a, 1894); EGW to G. A. Irwin, Cooranbong, Australia, April 23, 1900 (Letter 61a, 1900); and EGW to Mary Foss, Saint Helena, CA, August 10, 1902 (Letter 133, 1902).

²³Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 31, 32; Collins, "Compilations," 6.

²⁴EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, vols. 1 and 3 (1858, 1864); EGW, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (1870, 1877, 1878, 1884); EGW, *Sketches From the Life of Paul* (1883); EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890); EGW, *Prophets and Kings* (1917); EGW, *The Desire of Ages* (1898); EGW, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911); EGW, *The Great Controversy* (1888); see also *The Great Controversy*, 1911 edition.

²⁵EGW, *Steps to Christ* (1892); EGW, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (1896); EGW, *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900); EGW, *Education* (1903); EGW, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905).

²⁶EGW, *Angels*, comp. Ken Wade and Debby Wade (1995); EGW, *Assurance*, comp. Ken Wade and Debby Wade (1995); EGW, *The Truth About Angels: A Behind-the-Scenes View of Supernatural Beings Involved in Human Life* (1996); EGW, *Prayer* (2002); EGW, *Heaven* (2003).

²⁷Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 31, 32; Collins, "Compilations," 6. The book *Mes-*
sages to Young People, comp. Missionary Volunteer Department, General Conference

of Seventh-day Adventists (1930), is an exception because it does not contain source references and presents a flowing text.

²⁸EGW, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (1890); EGW, *Gospel Workers* (1892, 1915); EGW, *Selections From the Testimonies Bearing on Sabbath School Work*, comp. Executive Committee of the International Sabbath School Association (1900); EGW, *Manual for Canvassers* (1902); EGW, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (1913).

²⁹EGW, *The Southern Work*, comp. James Edson White (1898).

³⁰EGW, *Instruction Relating to the Principles of Healthful Living*, comp. David Paulson (1897, 1898); EGW, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905). Initially Ellen White was concerned about Paulson's compilation as she did not want her views of health reform to be presented in such a fragmentary way as the book presented them. However, she consented to the publication of the book when leading brethren convinced her that there was an urgent need of such a book and that the selection of statements had been done very carefully. See W. C. White to W. L. Brisbin, October 10, 1911; Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 85-87; Merlin D. Burt, "Practical Hermeneutics: How to Correctly Study and Interpret Ellen White's Writings" (class outline for GSEM 534—Issues in Ellen G. White Studies, Andrews University, 2012), 103, 104.

³¹EGW, *Christian Service* (1925); EGW, *Testimony Studies on Diet and Foods*, comp. Harold M. Walton (1926); EGW, *Medical Ministry* (1932); EGW, *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education* (1933); EGW, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (1938); EGW, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (1938); EGW, *Counsels on Stewardship* (1940); EGW, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (1946); EGW, *Country Living: An Aid to Moral and Social Security* (1946); EGW, *Evangelism* (1946); EGW, *Temperance* (1949); EGW, *The Adventist Home* (1952); EGW, *Welfare Ministry: Instruction in Christian Neighborhood Service* (1952); EGW, *Colporteur Ministry* (1953); EGW, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (1953-1957); EGW, *Child Guidance* (1954); EGW, *Mind, Character, and Personality: Guidelines to Mental and Spiritual Health*, 2 vols. (1977); EGW, *Letters to Young Lovers* (1983); EGW, *Christian Leadership* (1985); EGW, *The Voice in Speech and Song* (1988); EGW, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (1989); EGW, *The Retirement Years* (1990); EGW, *Last Day Events: Facing Earth's Final Crisis* (1992); EGW, *Pastoral Ministry* (1995); EGW, *Daughters of God: Messages Especially for Women* (1998).

³²EGW, *Radiant Religion* (1946); EGW, *With God at Dawn* (1949); EGW, *My Life Today* (1952); EGW, *Sons and Daughters of God* (1955); EGW, *The Faith I Live By* (1958); EGW, *Our High Calling* (1961); EGW, *That I May Know Him* (1964); EGW, *In Heavenly Places* (1967); EGW, *Conflict and Courage* (1970); EGW, *God's Amazing Grace* (1973); EGW, *Maranatha: The Lord Is Coming* (1976); EGW, *This Day With God* (1979); EGW, *The Upward Look* (1982); EGW, *Reflecting Christ* (1985); EGW, *Lift Him Up* (1988); EGW, *Our Father Cares* (1991); EGW, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (1995); EGW, *Christ Triumphant: Devotional Meditations on the Great Controversy Story* (1999); EGW, *To Be Like Jesus* (2004); EGW, *From the Heart* (2010).

³³Knight, *Reading Ellen White*, 32.

³⁴EGW, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (1923); EGW, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (1923); EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (1958, 1980); EGW, *Testimonies to Southern Africa* (1977).

³⁵EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (1855-1909).

³⁶EGW, *Christian Education* (1893); EGW, *Education* (1903).

³⁷Ellen G. White Estate Board Minutes, September 10, 1944; Collins, "Compilations," 4-6; Merlin D. Burt, "How Ellen White Did Her Writing" (class outline for GSEM 534—Issues in Ellen G. White Studies, Andrews University, 2012), 114, 115.

³⁸Ellen G. White Estate Board Minutes, July 2, 1945; Collins, "Compilations," 5-7; Burt, "How Ellen White Did Her Writing," 116, 117.

³⁹Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "The Conference," *Review and Herald*, May 27, 1858, 13; P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 281, 282.

⁴⁰George I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty Second Annual Session," *Review and Herald*, November 20, 1883, 733; EGW, "Notes of Travel," in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basel: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 182; cf. Kaiser, "Ellen G. White's Life of Christ," 127-144.

⁴¹EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:204, 207; 6:474; 7:160, 169; 8:236; 9:26, 33, 34.

⁴²EGW to F. M. Wilcox, October 23, 1907 (Letter 371, 1907); EGW, "Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White," February 9, 1912 (Q&A 43-B-27), 3, 4.

⁴³George I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings," *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883, 741; EGW to Uriah Smith, February 19, 1884 (Letter 11, 1884), published in EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, 3:257, 258; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:19-21; 3:96, 97.

⁴⁴Kenneth H. Wood, "Ellen G. White's Books in Contemporary Language" (unpublished manuscript, February 22, 2000).

⁴⁵EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

⁴⁶EGW, *Christ Our Saviour*, adapt. James Edson White (1896); Marian A. Davis to James Edson White, December 22, 1895; Kaiser, "Ellen G. White's Life of Christ," 144; "The Treasury of the Spirit of Prophecy," *Adventist Review*, December 2, 1993, 9.

⁴⁷EGW, *A Call to Stand Apart: Challenging Young Adults to Make an Eternal Difference* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2002), 2, 3.

⁴⁸Wood, "Ellen G. White's Books in Contemporary Language"; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1969), 77. See EGW, *Steps to Jesus* (1981); EGW, *Knowing Him Better* (1982). For the adaptation of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series, see EGW, *The Beginning of the End*, *Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 1 (2007); EGW, *Royalty and Ruin*, *Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 2 (2008); EGW, *Humble Hero*, *Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 3 (2009); EGW, *Unlikely Leaders*, *Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 4 (2010); EGW, *Love Under Fire*, *Conflict of the Ages*, vol. 5 (2011). The book *True Education* (2000) is an adaptation of the 1903 book *Education*; the book *The Ministry of Health and Healing* (2004) of *The Ministry of Healing*, and the volume *Messiah: A Contemporary Adaptation of the Classic Work on Jesus' Life, Desire of Ages* (2002) of *The Desire of Ages*.

⁴⁹Burt, "Practical Hermeneutics," 101-103.

Chapter Ten - Ellen White Criticisms and D. M. Canright

Jud Lake

In the history of Seventh-day Adventism, no author has affirmed and condemned the prophetic ministry of Ellen White with greater intensity than Dudley Marvin Canright. Considered one of Mrs. White's able defenders, he eventually left Adventism and became her most outspoken critic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Any serious discussion on Ellen White issues will not be complete without reference to his experience and writings. This chapter will therefore give a brief biographical sketch of Canright's experience, show his significance to contemporary Ellen White criticisms, and then suggest several caveats in telling his story. ¹

Historical overview of D. M. Canright

D. M. Canright was converted in 1859, at the age of nineteen, to Seventh-day Adventism through the preaching of James White. On May 29, 1865, he was ordained and within a short time became one of the most forceful and successful preachers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From his prolific pen came numerous books and articles published in the *Review and Herald* and later in the *Signs of the Times* advocating and defending Adventist truth and Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

In 1873, however, after spending some extended time in Colorado with James and Ellen White, Canright and his wife, Lucretia, ran into conflict with the Whites. Ellen White, who had received a vision specifically about Canright several years prior to this experience, used the opportunity to counsel the young couple. She wrote candidly about their deficiency in "essential qualifications" and their tendency to be "pharisaical" ² She also included encouragement in the letter: "You may have no remarkable evidence at the time

that the face of your Redeemer is bending over you in compassion and love, but this is even so. You may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon you in love and pitying tenderness. God loves both of you and wants to save you with an abundant salvation.”³ Nevertheless, the young Canright felt the letter was “too severe” and some of it “not true.” He “quit preaching for a short time,” but “soon got mostly over this” and went back into ministry.⁴

Feeling much better toward Ellen White, in 1877 Canright penned one of his strongest affirmations of her prophetic ministry in a ten-part series of articles titled “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony With the Body,” published in the *Review and Herald*, March 15-June 14, 1877. The purpose of the series was to address those “brethren and sisters” who “murmur and complain, and find fault with various things in the work,” particularly the labors of “Bro. and Sr. White.” This series was Canright’s “plain talk” with these dissenting individuals.⁵ He gave special emphasis to Ellen White’s prophetic leadership within the Adventist movement and observed that “those who have rejected the testimonies have largely lost their zeal in the cause, lost their faith in the work, their piety and devotion, and have become cold, unfeeling, and dark in their minds.”⁶

In 1880, Canright became discouraged and took another leave of absence from the ministry. Upon hearing of his state of mind, Ellen White made an earnest appeal to him, penned on October 15, 1880. Again, she wrote pointedly: “Satan is full of exultant joy that you have stepped from beneath the banner of Jesus Christ, and stand under his banner.”⁷ Like the earlier letter, though, she added a message of grace: “God has chosen you for a great and solemn work. He has been seeking to discipline, to test, to prove you, to refine and ennoble you, that this sacred work may be done with a single eye to His glory which belongs wholly to God.”⁸ Nevertheless, Canright, according to his own words, “did not” receive the letter “at all well” and “felt hard toward Sr. White, and soon quit the work entirely.”⁹

During this second leave of absence from the ministry, Canright struggled with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and even “talked with ministers of other churches to see what they would say” He concluded they had no better solution.¹⁰ After several months of this kind of searching, he went back to preaching the Adventist message.

Again, in September of 1881, he published in the *Review and Herald* a strong affirmation of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine in the article “Danger of Giving Way to Discouragement and Doubts” “If the Bible does not plainly and abundantly teach the doctrines of the third angel’s message” he exclaimed to his readers, “then I despair of ever knowing what it does teach” This is a lesson, he declared, “I shall not need to learn again as long as I live”¹¹

But Canright’s struggles with Adventist doctrine and Ellen White’s prophetic ministry were not over. In the autumn of 1882, he left the Adventist ministry for the third time and farmed for two years. During this time he harbored doubts about Adventist teaching and rejected the testimonies of Ellen White. In September of 1884, Canright attended the northern Michigan camp meeting at the pleading of friends and counseled with his old friend, George I. Butler. Butler helped Canright see Ellen White’s strong counsels in a new light, and he experienced an awakening: “Light came into my mind, and for the first time in years I could truly say that I believed the testimonies. All my hard feelings toward Sr. White vanished in a moment, and I felt a tender love towards her” This statement reveals the key role Ellen White played in Canright’s experience of Adventism.¹²

It was during this return from his third leave of absence that Canright uttered his most significant statements of support for Ellen White and Adventism. In the October 7, 1884, *Review and Herald*, he told readers that “now I not only accept, but believe the testimonies to be from God. Knowing the opposition I have felt to them, this change in my feelings is more amazing to myself than it can be to others”¹³ Speaking to ministers about the Adventist message, he wrote: “It seems to me, dear brethren, that my whole soul is now bound up in this present truth I will never do this backing up anymore; and I believe that if I ever go back from this I am lost”¹⁴ Ellen White believed Canright’s words to be true: “How my heart rejoiced to see Bro. Canright all interest, heart and soul in the work, as he used to be years in the past! I could but exclaim, What hath the Lord wrought!”¹⁵

For the next two years Canright labored successfully in the Adventist ministry, preaching, teaching, and writing. In his best-remembered article during this period, “To Those in Doubting Castle,”

published in the February 10, 1885, *Review and Herald*, he affirmed that “no one who has ever felt the power of the Spirit of God upon his own heart can candidly read through the four volumes of ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ without being deeply convicted that the writer must live very near to God, and be thoroughly imbued with the same Spirit that inspired the Bible, and animated the apostles and prophets.”¹⁶ [136]

Things went fine for him until the General Conference of 1886, in which he experienced a debate over the law in Galatians that changed his relationship to Adventism and Ellen White for the rest of his life.¹⁷ In *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, he recalled:

In our General Conference that fall, a sharp division occurred between our leading men over the law in Galatians. One party held it was the ceremonial law, the other the moral law—a square contradiction. After a long and warm discussion the conference closed, each party more confident than before. There was so much disagreement over other points of doctrine, and a good deal of warm party feeling. This, with other things, brought up my old feelings of doubt, and decided me that it was time for me now to examine and think for myself, and not be led nor intimidated by men who could not agree among themselves.¹⁸

According to his own words, Canright “laid the matter before the leading men at Battle Creek, resigned all the positions” he held, and “asked to be dismissed from the church.” His request was “granted February 17, 1887,”¹⁹ at a special meeting called at Otsego, Michigan, his home church. G. I. Butler, who was present at this meeting, described Canright’s remarks as “very kind and conciliatory.”²⁰ Thus, Canright’s departure from Seventh-day Adventism in February of 1887 was marked by peace. Within a short period of time, however, this peaceful atmosphere disappeared. The word *apostasy* was used several times in the *Review and Herald* in reference to Canright’s departure, and he took offense at it. In addition, various individuals in the church were sending Canright letters, which were, according to Butler, “calculated to create an acrimonious spirit, imputing unworthy motives, and saying things of a personal nature which better by far [should] be left unsaid.”²¹ Consequently, a few short months after his peaceful departure from Seventh-day Adventism, Canright began to wage war on the church. While there has

been discussion as to who broke the truce first, it appears that both sides were at fault.

[137] For the next thirty-two years, until his death in 1919, Canright campaigned aggressively against Adventism, especially its prophetic messenger Ellen White. In 1888, Canright published the first edition of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, which went through fourteen editions by 1914, and it became his most important book against his former church.²² It contained extensive criticism of the history and teaching of Seventh-day Adventism. Although Canright devoted only one chapter to criticizing Ellen White's prophetic gift, critical remarks about her were interwoven throughout the book.²³

Over the years, Canright went on to publish other works against Adventist teachings, such as a ten-tract series, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell* (1889), and two books: *The Lord's Day From Neither Catholics Nor Pagans* (1915) and *The Complete Testimony of the Early Fathers* (1916).²⁴ The culmination of his thirty- two-year-long campaign against Ellen White was his 291-page book *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted*, published in 1919.²⁵ It was the forerunner of all future criticisms of Ellen White and occupied the attention of Adventist apologists for decades. The two books, *Seventh- day Adventism Renounced* and *Life of Mrs. E. G. White*, became his legacy.

Canright and contemporary Ellen White criticisms

D. M. Canright's influence on the critics of Seventh-day Adventism and Ellen White during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been enormous. In the decades following Canright's death, his books were kept in circulation and used by non-Adventist evangelicals to assail the teachings of Seventh-day Adventists. Anti-cult evangelical writers were clearly informed by D. M. Canright and included Adventism in their books on the cults.²⁶ Ellen White was a focal point of the criticisms, with Canright's *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* as the major source. By 1960, Walter Martin, cult expert and major player in the *Questions on Doctrine* story,²⁷ could write in his book *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* that "D. M. Canright laid the foundation for all future destructive criticism of Seventh-

day Adventism, and careful research has confirmed the impression that nearly all subsequent similar publications are little more than repetitions of the destructive areas of Canright's writings."²⁸

The 1970s saw Canright's influence felt in several academic corners of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²⁹ In 1976, for example, Ron Numbers published *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White, the most significant critical publication on Ellen White since Canright's Life of Mrs. E. G. White*. Although Numbers did not reflect the same attitude seen in Canright's writings, he reached similar conclusions.³⁰ In the early 1980s, Walter Rea published his noted *The White Lie*, trumpeting the charge of plagiarism in Ellen White's writings.³¹ Many in the church were caught off guard by Rea's book, but it was a recycling of a charge already advanced by Canright in the late 1880s.³²

The late 1990s changed everything when Ellen White criticisms went global on the Internet. By 1998, Dirk Anderson's Web site using Ellen White's name was circulating anti-Ellen White material, and Canright's *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* eventually became a part of the Web site. The Ellen G. White Estate now owns the domain name, and Dale Ratzlaff continued Anderson's site under a new name.³³ Today, both of Canright's books *Adventism Renounced* and *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* are accessible on the Internet for free download, but their reprinted hard copies are also available at online bookstores. Thus, in the early twenty-first century, Canright's writings are more accessible than ever before.³⁴

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Dudley M. Canright's departure from Seventh-day Adventism and his subsequent thirty-two-year campaign to discredit its prophetic messenger can be considered a critical turning point in the history of Ellen White criticisms for four reasons. (1) In the culmination of his work *Life of Mrs. E. G. White*, he recycled the criticisms of Ellen White's prophetic ministry from 1845 to the late 1880s. (2) He conceived new criticisms against her, such as the plagiarism and epilepsy charges. (3) Canright introduced almost all issues that would be raised against Ellen White in the future.³⁵ Consequently, most of the criticisms circulating on the Internet today are recycled from Canright's criticisms. Even when an occasional new criticism is posted, it still finds itself in the framework of his stratagem. (4) He provided a model that almost all future critics of Ellen White

would copy. From the non-Adventist evangelical critics of the early twentieth century to the former Adventist critics of today, most of them have copied the pattern of criticism he laid out in *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* and have considered this volume to be influential in their thinking. In this sense, therefore, Canright can be called the “father” of Ellen White criticisms.

In reflecting on Canright’s history, his on-and-off experience with Ellen White’s prophetic ministry, his struggles with Adventist doctrine, his final departure from the church, his thirty-two-year campaign against Adventism, and his significance to Ellen White studies, the issue of fairness comes to mind. Because he was one of us, one of the pioneers in Seventh-day Adventist Church history, we have a right to tell D. M. Canright’s story. But it is extremely important that we are fair and impartial in telling his story.³⁶ The typical Adventist response to Canright is to attack his character rather than refute his arguments. But it should be remembered that an attack on his personal weaknesses does not prove his arguments wrong any more than a defense of his personal strengths proves his arguments right. Fairness and objectivity toward Canright’s person is the best way forward. The following three caveats will, I believe, help us better tell his personal story.

[139] *First, we must not use the contradictions in his personal experience as proof that his arguments were wrong.* There was no doubt in the minds of those who worked closely with Canright while he was a Seventh-day Adventist, such as Ellen White and G. I. Butler, that he had character flaws that manifested themselves in his unstable experience with the Adventist ministry during the decade between 1873 and 1883.³⁷ This on-and-off experience with Adventism and Ellen White is a part of his story and cannot be ignored. But it should never be used to prove that his arguments were wrong. Canright’s arguments should be evaluated strictly on the quality of his premises and conclusions, and the way in which he handles the evidence for his claims. This is the only valid way to prove or disprove the accuracy of her argument. Such an attitude allows supporters of Ellen White to acknowledge the positive attributes in Canright’s life experience.

Second, we must not forget the positive contributions Canright made to the Adventist Church while he was a practicing Adventist

minister. This aspect of Canright studies has too often been neglected in the past and deserves more attention. Ellen White acknowledged Canright's intellectual gifts and believed he had "ability to present the truth to others."³⁸ During his twenty-two years as a Seventh-day Adventist minister, his prolific pen produced numerous pamphlets, tracts, books, and articles in the *Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times*, defending and advocating Adventist doctrines.³⁹ Canright's arguments in favor of Adventist beliefs have been so valued that Adventist apologists have often used them to refute the later Baptist Canright's arguments against Adventist doctrine.⁴⁰ One example of his "investigative mind," as Ellen White called it,⁴¹ was his 1871 book *History of the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul*, which showed his command of history and Scripture.

Canright's most significant and overlooked contribution to Seventh-day Adventism, however, was the biblical tithing system.⁴² When the concept of systematic benevolence was adapted by the church in 1859, it did not involve the "tenth" of all income. This took years to evolve, and it was Canright who, in 1876, clinched the argument from Malachi 3:8-11. In two *Review and Herald* articles (February 17 and March 2) he articulated with force and precision the concept that "God requires that a tithe, or one-tenth, of all the income of his people shall be given to support his servants in their labors." This "one-tenth" of "all our income" is "not ours; it belongs to God."⁴³ He explained with specificity the issues of what "one-tenth of all your income" means and how "the money is collected and what is done with it."⁴⁴

The clarity of his reasoning and biblical explanation was so convincing that he was invited to present his findings at the General Conference session held at the end of March. As a result, the session "unanimously adopted" two resolutions worded by Canright that called all church members "under ordinary circumstances, to devote one-tenth of all their income from whatever source, to the cause of God."⁴⁵ Thus, because of Canright's clear thinking and biblical reasoning on the subject of systematic benevolence, Seventh-day Adventists increasingly practiced biblical tithing from that time forward.⁴⁶

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Third, we must be careful in assessing Canright's relationship to Ellen White and Adventism after he left the church. There are essen-

tially two views on Canright's post-Adventist experience. The first view was expressed by Seventh-day Adventists who corresponded with Canright in his post-Adventist years and claimed he believed that he had made a great mistake in leaving Adventism and regretted the harm he had caused, but felt he had gone so far he couldn't return. The other view, represented by his associates in the Baptist ministry, church members, and family, held that he never regretted leaving Adventism and believed its doctrines were wrong and Ellen White was a false prophetess until the day he died.

These two sides in the Canright debate are expressed classically in two books: Norman F. Douty's *The Case of D. M. Canright*, published in 1964, and Carrie Johnson's *I Was Canright's Secretary*, published in 1971.⁴⁷ Douty wrote as a Baptist pastor critical of Adventism and sympathetic to Canright, whereas Johnson wrote as a Seventh-day Adventist who was critical of Canright. Consequently, those critical of Adventism and Ellen White tend to favor Douty's version, while those supportive of Adventism tend to favor Johnson's version.

Both of these biographies rely on testimonial evidence for their assertions and tend to be parochial in their research and conclusions. Research has shown that there are flaws in both of their presentations. To be sure, the real Canright lies somewhere between these two biographies. And the more accurately and fairly we portray the real Canright of history, the more credibility we bring to our defense of Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

¹See, e.g., D. M. Canright, "Reply," *Review and Herald Extra*, April 14, 1874, 3, where Canright responded to Miles Grant's charges against Ellen White (on Grant, see Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2010], 40, 41); the first two sections are based on chapters 3 and 4 in Lake with some added insights.

²The letter is published in Ellen G. White [EGW], *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 3:304, 321.

³*Ibid.*, 323.

⁴Dudley M. Canright, "To My Brethren, The S. D. Adventists" *Review and Herald*, October 7, 1884, 633.

⁵Dudley M. Canright, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony With the Body" *Review and Herald*, March 15, 1877, 84, 85; Canright, "Continued" *Review and Herald*, April 12, 1877, 116, 117; Canright, "Continued" *Review and Herald*, April 19, 1877, 124, 125; Canright, "Continued" *Review*

and Herald, April 26, 1877, 132; Canright, “Continued” Review and Herald, May 10, 1877, 148, 149; Canright, “Continued” Review and Herald, May 17, 1877, 156, 157; Canright, “Continued” Review and Herald, May 24, 1877, 165; Canright, “Continued” Review and Herald, May 31, 1877, 173; Canright, “Continued” Review and Herald, June 7, 1877, 181; Canright, “Continued,” Review and Herald, June, 14, 1877, 188, 189.

⁶Canright, Review and Herald, May 10, 1877, 148.

⁷This letter (Ellen White to D. M. Canright, Letter 1, 1880) is published in EGW, Selected Messages (Washington DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 2:162, 163.

⁸Ibid., 167.

⁹Canright, “To My Brethren,” 633.

¹⁰Dudley M. Canright, “Danger of Giving Way to Discouragement and Doubts” Review and Herald, September 13, 1881, 185.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Canright, “To My Brethren” 633.

¹³Ibid., 634

¹⁴Dudley M. Canright, “Items of Experience” Review and Herald, December 2, 1884, 764.

¹⁵EGW, “The Otsego Meeting” Review and Herald, December 2, 1884, 762.

¹⁶Dudley M. Canright, “To Those in Doubting Castle,” Review and Herald, February 10, 1885, 85.

¹⁷For details, see Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire*, 49-55.

¹⁸Dudley M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years: By a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith*, 14th ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 50, 51.

¹⁹Ibid., 51.

²⁰G. I. Butler, “Why This Extra Is Issued,” Review and Herald Extra, November 22, 1887, I.

²¹G. I. Butler, “A Few Words More Concerning Eld. Canright,” Review and Herald, March 22, 1887, 185. Canright wrote in *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* that “though I went out quietly and peaceably, . . . they immediately attributed to me all sorts of evil motives, base sins, and ambitious designs. . . . ‘Apostate’ was the epithet all applied to me” (55,56).

²²Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.

²³Ibid., 129-165.

²⁴Dudley M. Canright, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell*, tetract series (n.p., 1889); Dudley M. Canright, *The Lord’s Day From Neither Catholics Nor Pagans: An Answer to Seventh-day Adventism on This Subject*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1915); Dudley M. Canright, *The Complete Testimony of the Early Fathers: Proving the Universal Observance of Sunday in the First Centuries* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1916).

²⁵Dudley M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1919).

²⁶See Juhyeok Nam, “Reactions to the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences and Questions on Doctrine, 1955-1971” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2005), 15-21.

²⁷Nam's dissertation is the most thorough study to date on the background to the book, *Questions on Doctrine*; see also George Knight's "Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition," in *Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition*, Adventist Classic Library (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xiii-xxxvi.

²⁸Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 98.

²⁹Alberto R. Timm, "Issues on Ellen G. White and Her Role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (unpublished paper presented at the "Ellen White Conference," Battle Creek, MI, 2002), 3-6.

³⁰Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). It is important to note that Numbers's book transformed Ellen White from a person "largely hidden in the shadows of American religious history" to a "fixture in accounts of women and religion in America" (see Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008], xix-xxi, for documentation). Considered the "standard biography of Ellen White" (*ibid.*, xix), the influence of *Prophetess of Health* should not be underestimated. Although supporters of Ellen White's prophetic gift will not agree with the various accounts of her life and work based upon Numbers's book, the fact that she is receiving such attention in academic circles opens the door for believing scholars to join the discussion and contribute their research to the appraisal of her prophetic credentials.

³¹Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982).

³²Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire*, 57.

³³At the present time, Anderson's Web site continues with the domain name, <http://www.ellenwhiteexposed.com>. Additionally, he has added <http://www.nonegw.org> in his campaign against Ellen White. For discussion on Anderson and other contemporary critics of Ellen White, see Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire*, 78-84.

³⁴There are, of course, many more manifestations of Canright's influence in the flurry of anti-Ellen White writing from the 1980s up to the present. For more detail, see Timm, "Issues on Ellen G. White," 2-7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶*Defending the Seventh-day Adventist Church: William H. Branson, In Defense of the Faith: The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists, a Reply to Canright* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1933) and Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics: An Answer to the Major Charges That Critics Have Brought Against Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1951).

³⁷See, e.g., EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:304-329.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 3:309.

³⁹See, e.g., the following pamphlets written by Canright housed at the Center for Adventist Research: "Is the End Near?" Tent Tracts No. 2, n.d.; "The Sleep of the Dead," Tent Tracts, No. 4, n.d.; "The Sinner's Fate," Tent Tracts, No. 5, n.d.; "The Law of God," Tent Tracts, No. 6, n.d.; "Sunday Not the Sabbath," Tent Tracts, No. 9., n.d.; "The Christian Sabbath," Tent Tracts, No. 10., n.d.; "One Hundred Bible Facts Upon the Sabbath Questions," n.d. And two books, e.g., Dudley M. Canright, *The Ministration of Angels: And the Origin, History, and Destiny of Satan* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1867); and Dudley M. Canright, *History of the Doctrine of the*

Immortality of the Soul (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1871). For Canright's many articles, see Barry Burton, "Dudley M. Canright: Articles and News Items, SDA Publications, 1860-1887" CD-ROM, 2009.

⁴⁰See, e.g., "Reply to Eld. Canright's Attacks on S. D. Adventists," *Review and Herald Extra*, November 22, 1887, 6-8; and Branson, *In Defense of the Faith* (1933).

⁴¹EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 3:309.

⁴²For a concise history of Seventh-day Adventist systematic benevolence and tithing, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996 ed.), s.v. "systematic benevolence"; Brian E. Strayer, "Adventist Tithesaying—the Untold Story" *Spectrum* 17, no. 1 (1986): 39-52.

⁴³Dudley M. Canright, "Systematic Benevolence, or the Bible Plan of Supporting the Ministry" *Review and Herald*, February 17, 1876, 50.

⁴⁴Dudley M. Canright, "Systematic Benevolence, or the Bible Plan of Supporting the Ministry, Continued," *Review and Herald*, March 2, 1876, 66, 67.

⁴⁵Uriah Smith, "Special Session of the General Conference" *Review and Herald*, April 6, 1876, 108.

⁴⁶See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "systematic benevolence"; and George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*®, 2004), 79.

⁴⁷Norman F. Douty, *The Case of D. M. Canright: Seventh-day Adventist Charges Examined* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964); Carrie Johnson, *I Was Canright's Secretary* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*®, 1971).

[141] **Chapter Eleven - Ellen White and Sources: The**
[142] **Plagiarism Debate**

[143]
[144] *Tim Poirier*

[145] *Ellen White used the writings of others in her books, articles, letters, and manuscripts.* While that statement is undeniably true, what has remained disputed since the nineteenth century are her reasons for doing so, the candidness of her acknowledgments, and the implications of such usage for her claim to inspiration.

The first part of this chapter summarizes the plagiarism allegations and provides a brief history of responses to those allegations, with special emphasis on the discussion during Ellen White’s active ministry and that of her associates. The second part summarizes present understandings of Ellen White’s use of sources, including contrast and comparison with the historical discussion.

Historical summary

1887-1907

The genesis of the plagiarism charge has been credited to former Adventist minister D. M. Canright,¹ although there is evidence of earlier questioning of Ellen White’s use of sources.² The first known published criticism of her copy-ing is Canright’s article in the October 8, 1887, issue of the *Michigan Christian Advocate*:

[146] She often copies, without credit or sign of quotation, whole sentences and even paragraphs, almost word for word, from other authors. (Compare “Great Controversy,” page 96, with “History of the Reformation,” by D’Aubigne, page 41.) This she does page after page. Was D’Aubigne also inspired?³

The next year this brief accusation was expanded to include the specific charge of “plagiary” in Canright’s first edition of *Seventh-day Adventism Re-nounced*:

Indeed, her last book, “Great Controversy,” which they laud so highly as her greatest work, is merely a compilation from Andrew’s [sic] History of the Sabbath, History of the Waldenses by Wylie, Life of Miller by White, Thoughts on Revelation by Smith, and other books. I have compared many pages from all these and find that she has taken from these word for word and page after page. She gives no credit to these authors but claims it all as a revelation from God! She is a literary thief. Webster says: “Plagiary:-A thief in literature; one who purloins another’s writings and offers them to the public as their own.” Exactly what she does. ⁴

How did Ellen White’s contemporaries respond to these allegations? At public debates in Healdsburg, California, Elders W. M. Healey and J. N. Loughborough offered five lines of defense: (1) That Canright had overstated the amount of copying. This was supported by publishing White’s writings in parallel columns with her alleged sources, which demonstrated greater selectivity in her borrowing than Canright had claimed. (2) When writing on matters of historical record, “if each party told the truth in the case there must of necessity be similarity in the facts stated.” (3) The copying dealt with “*matters of fact*, and not in any sense a copying of *ideas or reasoning*.” (4) Believers have recognized copying among the Bible writers “without [their] being subject to the charge of being plagiarists.” (5) In contrast to White’s borrowing of “facts,” a plagiarist will quote “ideas and arguments” without giving any acknowledgment to the “real author” of what is claimed as one’s own. ⁵

1907-1933

From 1887, it was 20 years until the next public plagiarism charge—the period of the “Battle Creek controversy.” The earliest discussions of Ellen White’s use of sources up to and including this time appear to have been limited to her writings on history and health, specifically *The Great Controversy*, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, and the series *Health, or How to Live*.⁶ Two Battle Creek physicians—Charles E. Stewart and John Harvey Kellogg—reintroduced the plagiarism question in 1907.

Stewart outlined his “evidences of plagiarism” in a letter to Ellen White sent through W. C. White, May 9, 1907. ⁷ It consisted of

illustrations of copying found in *Sketches From the Life of Paul* and *The Great Controversy*, with the suggestion of similar copying in *The Desire of Ages*. In an expanded version printed later that year, Stewart reacted against “various explanations” that had been offered for the obvious similarities between Ellen White’s books and other authors. First, that it was the “fault of the proofreader” he found to be an insufficient argument because the proofreader’s duty is to “follow copy,” not insert quotation marks where none are found in the manuscript. Second, quotation marks could not even be “readily used” due to the fact that in many instances thoughts are paraphrased and not quoted verbatim. Third, Ellen White’s acknowledgment of her use of other authors in her preface to the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy* was merely the result of a protest by “a prominent member of the denomination” against “sending out literature in this manner.”⁸

He summarized by posing a question to Ellen White: “Is that special light you claim to have from God revealed to you, at least to some extent, through your reading the various commentaries and other books treating of religious subjects?”⁹

Kellogg, in his parting interview with Battle Creek church elders, also in 1907, made clear that he was that “prominent member of the denomination” who had protested to W. C. White concerning *The Great Controversy*’s use of Wiley’s *History of the Waldenses*. Apparently also the source of Stewart’s rebuttal to the “fault of the proofreader” defense, Kellogg opined that “it would not have been proper to put [these excerpts] in quotation marks when there were so many words and phrases changed; they were not quotations; they were borrowed. They were plagiarisms and not quotations. There is a difference between plagiarism and quotation.”¹⁰

What responses did Ellen White’s supporters offer to this round of criticisms? Because Kellogg’s interview was stenographically recorded but not publicly disseminated at the time, there is no record of any direct response to his comments. Stewart’s letter, however, was published anonymously a few months later, and led to discussions among the “Elmshaven” staff and certain General Conference leaders on how best to deal with the questions raised—which involved considerably more than the plagiarism issue. Among the plans suggested was a “full and frank statement” on the plagiarism

issue, “with a view to its publication in leaflet form”¹¹

A review of denominational publications in the years immediately following Stewart’s letter does not yield any article or leaflet on the plagiarism question. Responses seem to have been given verbally or through meetings with interested parties. A. G. Daniells summarized the five-pronged approach he took in publicly meeting the plagiarism allegation as follows: (1) A writer’s use of another’s thoughts and words does not necessarily make him or her a plagiarist “in either motive or spirit” (2) Given the voluminous writings of Ellen White, she had no need to “purloin” the writings of others. (3) The themes and subject matter of her books were unique; (4) Ellen White explained the reasons for her use of others’ writings in her preface to *The Great Controversy*. (5) Ellen White may have copied material from Conybeare and Howson’s *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* without inserting quotation marks that would have alerted the stenographer, the editor, or the publisher of her use of their work.

¹² W. C. White answered the question on Conybeare and Howson’s book faulting his (W. C. White’s) “lack of experience in the publishing work that such acknowledgment was not made”¹³

Three other events should be noted from this period. First, Ellen White’s new edition of *The Great Controversy*, published in 1911, allowed W. C. White to explain his mother’s use of historians and the role her assistants played in supplying correct references to what was quoted. W. C. White presented his explanation before church leaders in 1911, an explanation that Ellen White supported, saying, “I think he has presented the matter correctly and well”¹⁴

Second, Canright’s charge of plagiarism was revived in 1919 with his publication of *Life of Mrs. E. G. White*. The two or three paragraphs in *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* were expanded to an eighteen-page chapter, “A Great Plagiarist” the bulk of which reprinted Dr. Stewart’s 1907 letter as published in the “Blue Book”

Third, the Bible and History Teachers’ Council, following the 1919 Bible Conference, included a discussion of Ellen White’s use of sources, particularly as it related to the question of inerrancy and revisions in her writings. ¹⁵

1933-1970

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E. S. Ballenger's *Gathering Call* marked the next major public debate re-garding Ellen White's alleged plagiarism. He included exhibits from Stewart's letter, additional examples of copying, allegations of "stolen illustrations," and unfavorable reports from various unnamed individuals on how Ellen White did her writing.¹⁶ Among other incidents, Ballenger related that "just recently we received the best of evidence that Fannie Bolton wrote 'Steps to Christ' without any dictation or assistance from Mrs. White whatever. It was her product in toto [sic], but was published as Mrs. White's production." Miss Bolton had died six years earlier, making personal verification of such an allegation impossible.

Ballenger, as Canright before him, presented a barrage of allegations against Ellen White and the denomination in general, of which plagiarism was but one. Responses from the "Elmshaven" office relating to the plagiarism charges included: "The Evolution of 'Great Controversy'" (1932), "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White" (1933), "Was Mrs. E. G. White a Plagiarist?" (1936), and "Integrity of Mrs. White as an Author" (1936).

The cumulative lines of defense coming from these 1930s responses included these points:¹⁷ (1) Ellen White received revelations that formed the core of her writings. (2) God does not always give direct revelation as a substitute for common knowledge that may be gained by normal means. (3) Her usage of sources was "incidental" to the unique themes found in her writings. (4) Ellen White read and used "good and reliable historians" to provide convincing evidence for nonbelievers of the portrayal of events she had seen in vision or that were in harmony with views she wished to present. (5) Ellen White received divine instruction regarding the selection of "gems of truth" from her reading. (6) Seventh-day Adventist pioneers regarded truth as common property. (7) It is unfair to apply current standards of literary borrowing to writers in the 1880s. (8) Writers of the Bible used the language of other Bible writers without giving credit. (9) The quantity of quoted matter has been greatly exaggerated by critics, and the nature of it is descriptive, historical, or relating to prophetic and doctrinal exposition. (10) The charge

of “stolen illustrations” (artwork) is refuted by correspondence negotiating their purchase. (11) The charge that *Steps to Christ* had been written by Fannie Bolton “in toto” is refuted by proving the existence of earlier (pre- Bolton) Ellen White sources for its material. (12) Regarding *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, there had never been a lawsuit or threat of lawsuit or an effort to recall the book.

Plagiarism, of course, was but one of a series of accusations against Ellen White’s integrity. The church’s newly formed “Defense Literature Committee” recognized the need for answers to the full range of criticisms. F. D. Nichol, in 1951, published *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*. His stated object was to answer “all the charges against Mrs. White which are currently prominent, representative, and impressive sounding.”¹⁸ It included sixty-five pages on the plagiarism charge, roughly 10 percent of the book.¹⁹

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Nichol’s response essentially reiterated the points brought out in the 1930s documents, but he rigorously supported them with extensive documentation. He examined “what really constitutes plagiarism” from legal and practical viewpoints; the history of *Sketches From the Life of Paul* and *The Great Controversy*; whether Ellen White intended to deceive her readers; the extent of her borrowing; the threatened lawsuit allegation; and the question of how literary borrowing relates to inspiration.

Two examples of Nichol’s fuller presentation relate to charges surrounding *Sketches From the Life of Paul*. Nichol cited an advertisement for Conybeare and Howson’s book appearing in *Signs of the Times* four months before Ellen White’s book was published. Ellen White was quoted as highly recommending the book: “‘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.”²⁰ Nichol summarized that to draw any other conclusion but that Ellen White knew her readers would note parallels between the books “would be equivalent to saying that in publishing her work on Paul Mrs. White deliberately set out to expose herself as a literary thief and a prophetic fraud!”

Nichol devoted the largest percentage of his defense to a refutation of the persistent allegation that a lawsuit had been threatened against Ellen White for her alleged plagiarisms in *Sketches From the Life of Paul*. After tracking down and reviewing sources for the ru-

mor, he photographically reproduced a 1924 letter from the Thomas Y. Crowell Company, publishers of Conybeare and Howson's work, stating that they did not believe they had ever "raised any objection or made any claim" against Ellen White's *Sketches From the Life of Paul*—nor could they have had legal grounds to do so, as the book was not copyrighted.²¹ Wrote Nichol, "We believe the reader will conclude that the threatened lawsuit has been quashed."

1970-2012

Research into Ellen White's use of sources from the late 1960s to the 1980s moved the discussion beyond the mere documentation of copying to an analysis of the sources used, the class of material in which borrowing occurred, the nature of inspiration, and Ellen White's apparent denials of borrowing.

[151] William Peterson challenged the reliability of the Protestant historians Ellen White cited and the belief that her reading merely "filled in the gaps" of her visions;²² Donald McAdams's research further pressed the question of how much history was actually shown Ellen White in vision;²³ Ronald Numbers disputed Ellen White's originality and accuracy in her health writings;²⁴ and Walter Rea questioned Ellen White's originality in virtually all areas of her writing—discounting any need for a "divine source" for her writings.²⁵

Suddenly, F. D. Nichol and his predecessors' answers came up short. No one had previously questioned the biases of the historians Ellen White quoted, nor had the extent of her borrowing been understood to reach beyond *The Great Controversy*, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Desire of Ages*, with sparse examples in two or three other titles. Then, in 1981, evidence came from White Estate researchers that Ellen White had used sources on occasion when reporting the message of a vision.²⁶

The church responded to the findings of this new generation of questions through articles published in denominational papers, symposiums, workshops, and commissioned reports.²⁷ Their conclusions are summarized in the next section.

Retrospective summary and present understandings

Unlike modern allegations of plagiarism against a novelist or journalist, Ellen White's use of sources is inextricably linked to questions about the nature of inspiration and assumptions about how inspired writers ought to write. Ellen White's critics maintain that where an uninspired source is identified in her writings, it negates any divine influence in the message being communicated. The message has to be 100 percent original revelation or it is a mere human production. For Canright, that Ellen White copied historians, often rewrote what she had previously written, and used secretaries was enough to prove that she was not inspired. ²⁸

Ellen White's defenders did not deny that she had incorporated material from other authors in her writings. However, they did dispute the assumption that "inspired" also meant "original" W. C. White and D. E. Robinson emphasized the divine source of Ellen White's knowledge. They pointed to the original themes found in her books. While there had been countless histories written about the Christian church and the Reformation, they argued that one could not point to any other book like *The Great Controversy*, with its overarching view of the conflict between Christ and Satan and its outplay in future events. Ellen White used Adventist and non-Adventist authors to aid in telling *her story*.

Regarding the extent of Ellen White's borrowing, it is clear that until the 1970s her critics and supporters alike had underestimated both the amount and the classes of material involved. For the most part, Ellen White's borrowing in *The Great Controversy* and *Sketches From the Life of Paul* was confined to areas that could be defined as "descriptive," "historical," or relating to "prophetic and doctrinal exposition." ²⁹ More challenging for her defenders has been the question of why acknowledgments of this usage were not provided in her books—apart from *The Great Controversy*—and how to understand Ellen White's statements that appear to deny such borrowing. [152]

In the light of the many decades of ongoing discussion and research, we may summarize present understandings of Ellen White's use of sources as follows. ³⁰

The definitional and legal issues

Definitions of “plagiarism” vary. From the time of Canright, differing definitions of plagiarism and standards of literary ethics have been cited by both sides of the debate to provide support for their respective positions. One side defines plagiarism simply as “literary theft,” and a plagiarist as “one who purloins another’s writings and offers them to the public as his own.” The other side maintains that there is a distinction between “plagiarism” and “literary borrowing.” *The mere use of another’s language does not constitute plagiarism.* Plagiarism, they argue, is the deliberate passing off of another’s material as one’s own, with the implied *intention* of appearing to be the original author; in contrast, literary borrowing is using the ideas or words of another in *one’s own composition* to serve new and often improved literary purposes.³¹ It is linked to the legal doctrine of “fair use,” and involves entirely different motives than that of the plagiarist.³²

The literary standards of today are more stringent than those of Ellen White’s time. This is recognized by both critics and supporters. Not only are standards of attribution more demanding today, but they also vary from one genre of writing to another. Jerry Moon has illustrated how forms of acknowledgment vary regarding sermons, news accounts, popular writing, and academic works.³³ Critics have argued that, as a prophet, Ellen White should have risen above the common literary practices of her day. Supporters have countered that, if such were the case, we should similarly expect to find the Bible writers rising to today’s standards and acknowledging their unnamed sources.

Judged by contemporary legal standards, Ellen White was not a plagiarist. When one factors into the discussion both *intent* and *legal precedent* from court cases of Ellen White’s day, the case appears to be clearly in Ellen White’s favor. This was the conclusion following a professional review of Ellen White’s alleged plagiarisms by patent and trademark law attorney, Vincent L. Ramik. He researched more than one thousand cases in American literary law from 1790 to 1915 and noted several factors that critics of Ellen White’s writings have failed to take into account when accusing her of literary theft or deceit: (1) Her selections “stayed well within the legal boundaries

of ‘fair use.’” (2) “Ellen White used the writings of others; but in the way she used them, she made them uniquely her own” (3) Ellen White urged her readers to get copies of some of the very books she made use of—demonstrating that she did not conceal her use of literary sources, and had no intention to defraud or commercially displace any other author.³⁴

No lawsuit, or threat of a lawsuit, in connection with Ellen White’s Sketches From the Life of Paul was instituted. Conybeare and Howson’s work and many other works used by Ellen White were not copyrighted.

Ellen White’s use of literary sources

*Literary parallels have been documented not only in Ellen White’s writings on history and health but also in the areas of biblical narrative, end-time events, devotional themes, personal testimonies, reporting a vision, and even autobiographical accounts.*³⁵ The latter category is of significance in that it was obviously not a necessity for Ellen White to borrow another’s language to describe her own life experiences—yet she did so at times. Similarly, she is known to have borrowed descriptions of places she visited and saw with her natural eyes. This supports the argument for her use of another’s language because it better expressed or summarized the ideas and thoughts she wished to convey. “She admired the language in which other writers had presented to their readers the scenes which God had presented to her in vision”³⁶ There is also no doubt that her own feeling of literary inadequacy also influenced her use of sources.³⁷

Some sources relied upon by Ellen White included factual errors. This was recognized in Ellen White’s day, as evidenced by revisions she made in 1911 to her earlier edition of *The Great Controversy*. The fundamental issue is whether Ellen White claimed infallibility or inerrancy in her writings, or in material she drew from the works of other authors. In actuality, she and her associates allowed for the possibility of errors, corrected statements shown to be inaccurate, and expressed that her writings were not to be treated “as authority regarding the details of history or historical dates”³⁸

*Ellen White drew from at least one popular fictionalized account in her writing on the life of Christ.*³⁹ In the Ellen White material he

[154] studied, Fred Veltman noted the mention of an extrabiblical incident that may draw on J. Ingraham's work, *Prince of the House of David*. Veltman observed a resemblance to Ingraham's account but cautioned that "further study is required before one may speak with certainty of Ellen White's use of Ingraham here."⁴⁰

There is no credible evidence that Ellen White's literary assistants did the copying for her. This was one of the questions also answered by the Life of Christ Research Project, relating to *The Desire of Ages*.⁴¹ Parallels found in her original handwritten drafts demonstrate that Ellen White herself incorporated material from those sources.

Any discussion of Ellen White's use of sources is incomplete if it does not also examine how she used those sources. This involves not only a comparison between her adaptations and the source documents, but also her selectivity in the material she did not include from those sources.⁴² One study showed how Ellen White used the language of another author while making theological assertions sharply divergent from those of that author.⁴³ Particularly in the transitory and often contradictory literature presenting medical and health opinions, Ellen White demonstrated remarkable selectivity,⁴⁴ giving additional evidence that her borrowing was guided by her own purposes.

Ellen White's copying is less than alleged by her critics. Estimates that 80 or 90 percent of her material is copied from other authors are wildly exaggerated and unsupported by the facts. Currently documented parallels put a percentage estimate in the low single digits when compared to her total literary output.⁴⁵

The inspiration issue

For most Seventh-day Adventists, this is the central issue. Even if Ellen White is found to have been writing within the literary norms of her contemporaries, how does one relate her use of material from other authors to her claim of inspiration? Can an inspired writer include material from uninspired sources and still present an inspired message? For believers, the only legitimate way to determine an authoritative answer to this question is to examine the evidence from Scripture.

The biblical model indicates that inspired writers may incorporate material from other inspired and uninspired sources. Just as it cannot be denied that Ellen White used literary sources in her writings, so it cannot be denied that Bible writers also used the writings of others without giving credit. Originality has been shown not to be a test of inspiration. ⁴⁶

The rebuttal from Ellen White's opponents to this comparison is that the *quantity* of copying is higher in her writings than among the Bible writers. ⁴⁷ But the amount of borrowing is irrelevant to the question of whether inspired writers may legitimately use the language of other authors—including extrabiblical sources. ⁴⁸ Once it is recognized that inspiration is not negated by the use of pre-existing human sources, who is to say what percentage of an inspired messenger's language must be free from such dependency?

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..Ellen White's "I saw" parallels, though rare, are not essentially different from any other parallel. Some who are willing to grant that Ellen White could legitimately use sources in certain types of writing draw the line when it comes to her use of another's language in conveying information received through vision. How could it be that there are examples of parallels even when Ellen White reports words she has heard in vision? ⁴⁹

The presupposition of this criticism is that if Ellen White had truly received divine information, the words she used in reporting the vision would have been verbally dictated expressions. While some adhere to a mechanical-dictation view of inspiration in which the inspired writer acts as God's pen or recording secretary, Adventists have historically recognized from Scripture that inspiration does not function this way. ⁵⁰ God inspires His messenger with a message, and the writer conveys that message under the influence of the Holy Spirit with the best words available. If the message of inspiration is not verbally dictated in the one case, why should we demand that it be in the other? Rather, "thought" inspiration allows for the messenger to use language drawn from prior experiences and associations.

Looking again at the biblical model, scholars have noted parallels from extrabiblical sources in John the revelator's reports of scenes and dialogues from his visions. ⁵¹ The question arises whether Ellen White intended for us to understand her "reporting" of a vision

as a verbatim account of what she saw and heard. The answer is, sometimes Yes, sometimes No. She wrote in 1867, “The words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”⁵²

[156] Here Ellen White is saying that, except for the words of the angel, the content of the vision was not given to her in verbatim form. At other times, she makes it clear that she is reporting the gist of what she has heard in vision, and not the exact words. “I cannot write the exact words as He spoke them [in vision]. I will try my best to give you the import of them.”⁵³ If Ellen White is “trying her best” to capture the essence of a divine message, it would not be surprising for her to use another’s language if it conveyed well the thought she wished to communicate.

The ethical/moral issue

Accompanying the plagiarism charge has been the accusation that Ellen White was deceitful not only in copying from the works of others, but also in denying having done so when she was challenged by her critics. Even if it is conceded that her use of other authors did not legally constitute plagiarism, her practice and denials, it is alleged, constitute unethical behavior for one claiming to be inspired. Contemporary defenders of Ellen White’s integrity point to many of the same lines of reasoning as her earlier supporters offered.

*How could Ellen White be intending to deceive her readers or cover up her copying when she recommended primary source books she utilized to ministers and church members and these works were in wide circulation?*⁵⁴ Furthermore, her acknowledgment of sources in the introduction to *The Great Controversy*, while specific to that work, nonetheless refutes the allegation that she did not want her readers to know that she referenced other works in her writings.

Ellen White’s use of uncredited sources was not out of step with how other respected religious writers of her day, including Seventh-day Adventists, used others’ material. This has been recognized in various studies.⁵⁵ After reviewing more than five hundred works on the life of Christ, Fred Veltman wrote: “There were times when we were uncertain as to which literary source the DA [*The Desire of*

Ages] parallel was to be credited. The writers used by Ellen White often exhibited literary parallels among themselves equal to those found between the writings of Ellen White and these same writers.”⁵⁶

Pietistic writers of the nineteenth century made free use of each other's materials without giving credit.⁵⁷ In his introduction to his New Testament commentary, John Wesley wrote regarding his sources: “I resolved to name none, that nothing might divert the mind of the reader from the point in view, and from receiving what was spoken only according to its intrinsic value.”⁵⁸ George Callcot observed that while many nineteenth-century historians have been condemned by later historians for their manner of using sources, “historians usually felt flattered rather than insulted when their words were used by another [without attribution]. The period is remarkable for the lack of scholarly rivalry, and writers who borrowed from each other remained on the warmest terms.”⁵⁹

Ironically, D. M. Canright himself engaged in this practice in his own publications as a Seventh-day Adventist. A comparison of Moses Hull's 1863 book titled *The Bible From Heaven* and Canright's book by the same title, published in 1878, shows direct copying of major portions of chapters without any attribution or credits.⁶⁰ Less than ten years after engaging in this accepted practice, Canright was accusing Ellen White of plagiarism. Such examples illustrate that Ellen White wrote during a period when less stringent standards were both common and acceptable—especially among authors of pietistic or moralistic writings, a nineteenth-century genre particularly favored by Ellen White.

[157]

Ellen White instructed that proper credit be given in her revised Great Controversy. With changing practices in society regarding crediting literary sources, Ellen White also began to modify her own practice. She instructed: “Whenever any of my workers find quotations in my writings, I want those quotations to be exactly like the book they are taken from. Sometimes they have thought they might change a few words to make it a little better; but it must not be done; it is not fair. When we quote a thing, we must put it just as it is”⁶¹

Ellen White's apparent denials of her copying are specific and not general. In 1991, Robert Olson, then director of the Ellen G.

White Estate, examined each of ten “denials” or “non-admissions” that have been cited as evidence that Ellen White was not honest in regard to her use of sources.⁶² He showed that, when read in their context, she did not exclude the possibility that the language of others might be employed in presenting her messages. Her statements were directed toward specific accusations and were not “intended to describe all of her reading and writing habits”⁶³

Olson pointed out, however, that one of the “denials” is more difficult to understand than the others. In 1867, when asked what she knew of other health writings, Ellen White responded that she had not read “any works on health until I had written *Spiritual Gifts*, volumes 3 and 4, *Appeal to Mothers*, and had sketched out most of my six articles in the six numbers of *How to Live*.” These earliest of health writings had been published in 1864 and 1865. The specific naming of these works has invited scrutiny of these writings to discover any literary dependency. Her statement did not rule out the possibility of health sources in the *How to Live* articles as she said she had only “sketched” them out before consulting other works. But what about the two earlier works? To date, two passages in particular have drawn attention. Olson cited the clearest example:

John C. Gunn: “[Tobacco is] a poison of a most deceitful and malignant kind, that sends its exciting and paralyzing influence into every nerve of the body” (1857).

[158] Ellen White: “Tobacco is a poison of the most deceitful and malignant kind, having an exciting, then a paralyzing influence upon the nerves of the body” (1864).

Olson offered six possible explanations for the parallels, favoring the answer that, outside of reading books on health, Ellen White stated that she had conversed freely with others on the topics revealed to her in vision. “As Ellen White discussed health topics with those who were knowledgeable on them, she would naturally have become acquainted with the vocabulary and expressions used by the health reformers of her day.”⁶⁴

Olson recognized that there are aspects of this “denial” that we cannot answer with the information available to us. Interestingly, since his article was printed it has been found that Gunn did not originate the expressions that parallel Ellen White’s. He appears to have been borrowing from earlier temperance writers who wrote of

the poisons of tobacco (and alcohol) using the same phraseology—including one whose article had been reprinted in the *Review* several weeks before Ellen White’s work was published.⁶⁵ This discovery lends support to the possibility that Ellen White’s choice of language in this instance may reflect what had become relatively common parlance by anti-tobacco reformers regarding its destructive effects.⁶⁶ It also gives reason to withhold hasty pronouncements of dishonesty in Ellen White’s 1867 “denial.”

Ellen White viewed truth as of divine, not human, origin. Several authors have pointed to this concept as perhaps providing the key to understanding why Ellen White chose not to credit her literary sources as freely as we would expect today.⁶⁷ Her intention was to credit the source of her writings to the great Originator of truth—not the human instrument, whether herself or the authors she made use of.

Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles spoke as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost, and they plainly stated that they spoke not by their own power, nor in their own name. They desired that no credit might be ascribed to them, that no one might regard them as the originators of anything whereof they might glory. . . .

Christ is the Author of all truth. Every brilliant conception, every thought of wisdom, every capacity and talent of men, is the gift of Christ. He borrowed no new ideas from humanity; for he originated all.⁶⁸

Current perspectives on Ellen White’s use of sources still indicate a divide between opponents and supporters over whether her practice should rightly be termed “plagiarism.” This is due, in part, as to whether one imposes today’s literary standards on Ellen White’s writings or those of her own day.

Though she did not publicly explain her use of sources (apart from in *The Great Controversy*), neither was her use of others’ literary works a secret to church members of her generation who were familiar with the popular books of Andrews, Smith, Wylie, Hanna, Geike, and a host of other authors advertised and recommended in the pages of the *Review and Signs*. Victorian pietistic writing practices were a well-documented part of the literary milieu.

Additionally, when one looks at the biblical model of inspiration, one finds evidence that the Bible writers utilized preexisting sources,

without credit, to serve the purposes of their own composition. Being the first to say or write a truth, therefore, is not a prerequisite for being an inspired messenger, nor does dependence upon prior human sources necessarily eliminate divine superintendence in expressing those truths. Nineteenth-century pietistic writers also accepted this view. One such author was John Harris, whose book was published the same year that a nine-year-old Ellen Harmon nearly lost her life from a rock thrown by an angry schoolmate. He wrote:

Suppose, for example, an inspired prophet were now to appear in the church, to add a supplement to the canonical books,—what a Babel of opinions would he find existing on almost every theological subject!— and how highly probable it is that his ministry would consist, or seem to consist, in the mere selection and ratification of such of these opinions as accorded with the mind of God. Absolute originality would seem to be almost impossible. The inventive mind of man has already bodied forth speculative opinions in almost every conceivable form; forestalling and robbing the future of its fair proportion of novelties; and leaving little more, even to a divine messenger, than the office of taking some of these opinions, and impressing them with the seal of heaven. ⁶⁹

John Harris's work would later find a treasured place in Ellen White's library.

¹Ron Graybill, "D. M. Canright in Healdsburg, 1889: The Genesis of the Plagiarism Charge," *Insight*, October 21, 1980, 7-10.

²See Ellen G. White [EGW], "Questions and Answers," *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867; EGW and James White, *Life Sketches* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1880), 328, 329; J. H. Kellogg, "Interview," October 7, 1907, 34-36 (pagination from 1986 reprint, "The Kellogg File 1907" [Tempe, AZ: Omega Historical Research Society, 1986]), Document File 213, Ellen G. White Estate (EGWE), Silver Spring, MD.

³Cited in F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, D C: Review and Herald®, 1951), 417.

⁴D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (Kalamazoo, MI: Kalamazoo Publishing, 1888), 44.

⁵"False Charges Refuted" *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 13, 1889.

⁶As per Canright, Kellogg. In his 1907 interview, Kellogg speaks of *The Desire of Ages* and "other books" No earlier mention of borrowing in *The Desire of Ages* or other books (apart from *The Great Controversy* and *Health, or How to Live*) has been found.

⁷Stewart's introductory letter to W. C. White is dated May 8, 1907. The May 9 letter was published five months later, with some expansion, as "A Response to an Urgent Testimony From Mrs. Ellen G. White Concerning Contradictions, Inconsistencies, and

Other Errors in Her Writing” (Battle Creek, MI: Liberty Missionary Society, 1907)—commonly referred to as “the Blue Book” The publisher’s preface states that the author of the letter (unnamed in the booklet) was not responsible for its appearance in print.

⁸Stewart, “A Response”

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Kellogg, “Interview” 34; Ronald Numbers, author of *Prophetess of Health*, attributes his interest in Ellen White’s health reform sources to his accidental discovery of Kellogg’s personal copy of Larkin B. Coles’s *The Beauties and Deformities of Tobacco-Using* (Boston: Brown, Taggard and Chase, 1851), in which he had marked passages paralleling Ellen White’s writings. See Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), xv.

¹¹“Memoranda, Stewart Tract” 4 (Document File 213, EGWE).

¹²A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, June 24, 1907.

¹³W. C. White to M. N. Campbell, July 30, 1907. He pointed out that *Life of Paul* was the first Ellen White book to be issued after James White’s death, and that “the management of her business affairs was new to me” W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, “Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White” (Saint Helena, CA: “Elmshaven Office” 1933). Citations in this article follow the pagination of the June 4, 1981, *Adventist Review* reprint.

¹⁴W. C. White’s statement is reprinted in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1980), 3:433-440. Ellen White’s letter is reprinted on pages 123, 124.

¹⁵See the discussion on August 1, 1919, 1243-1254: <http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/RBC/RBC1919-08-01/index.djvu>.

¹⁶E. S. Ballenger, *The Gathering Call*, September 1932 and March/April 1933.

¹⁷All the summarizations and quotations that follow are taken from the four documents named above.

¹⁸Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 20.

¹⁹Ibid., 403-467.

²⁰Signs of the Times, February 22, 1883, quoted in Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 423.

²¹Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 455-457. Unbeknown to Nichol, and only recently coming to light, is the fact that F. E. Belden, a prominent critic of Ellen White and denominational leader since the Kellogg-Battle Creek controversy, had written the Crowell Company eleven years earlier, ostensibly seeking further ammunition on the plagiarism charge. Crowell’s reply: “We know nothing about the complaint to which you refer.” Thomas Y. Crowell Company to F. E. Belden, September 9, 1913 (Document File 389, EGWE).

²²William S. Peterson, “A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen G. White’s Account of the French Revolution,” *Spectrum* (Autumn 1970): 57-69.

²³Donald R. McAdams, “Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians” (unpublished paper, Keene, TX: Southwestern Adventist College, 1977).

²⁴Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*.

²⁵Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982). Rea’s publication became the apex for the modern plagiarism charge against Ellen White.

²⁶See Ron Graybill, "Did Mrs. White 'Borrow' in Reporting a Vision?" *Adventist Review*, April 2, 1981, 7; Ron Graybill, "Author Writes," *Adventist Review*, April 30, 1981, 2; and Ron Graybill, "The 'I Saw' Parallels in Ellen White's Writings," *Adventist Review*, July 29, 1982, 4-6.

²⁷Arthur L. White, *The Ellen G. White Writings* (1973); Raymond F. Cottrell and Walter F. Specht, "Literary Relationship Between The Desire of Ages, by Ellen G. White, and The Life of Christ, by William Hanna" (1975); E. G. White Estate, *Critique of "Prophetess of Health"* (1976); appendices A, B, C, in *EGW, Selected Messages*, bk. 3 (1980); Robert W. Olson, *One Hundred and One Questions* (1981); W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White," reprint insert in *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1981; special issue of *Adventist Review*, "Was Ellen G. White a Plagiarist?" (September 17, 1981); John J. Robertson, *The White Truth* (1981); Attorney Vincent L. Ramik, "The Ramik Report" (1981); Ron Graybill, "E. G. White's Literary Work: An Update" (1981); E. G. White Estate and Biblical Research Institute, *The Truth About the White Lie* (1982); special issue of *Ministry*, "Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?" (June 1982); Ron Graybill, Warren H. Johns, and Tim Poirier, "Henry Melvill and Ellen G. White: A Study in Literary and Theological Relationship" (1982); International Prophetic Guidance Workshop, sponsored by the E. G. White Estate (1982); George E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (1983); Fred Veltman, *Full Report of the Life of Christ Research Project* (1988); Roger W. Coon, "Issues and Answers: Ellen G. White and 'Plagiarism'" (1994); Don S. McMahon, *Acquired or Inspired?* (2005); Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (2005). This list does not include works that discuss the broader ministry of Ellen White or other apologetic works in which the literary borrowing question is not their particular focus, nor does it include works that were not published by Seventh-day Adventist publishing houses.

²⁸D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1919), 200, 205.

²⁹As in W. C. White and Robinson, "Brief Statements," 12.

³⁰The categories of issues, but not the summaries that follow, are adapted from Roger Coon's "Issues and Answers: Ellen G. White and Plagiarism," Ministerial Continuing Education program 7463 (1994).

³¹See, e.g., Jerry Moon, "Who Owns the Truth? Another Look at the Plagiarism Debate," *Ellen White and Current Issues* Symposium 1 (2005): 46-71. Moon writes, "Proper literary borrowing is like using apples grown by someone else to make pies that are my own" (47).

³²For recent discussions within Seventh-day Adventism, see articles by J. Stirling, J. Walters, and T. Joe Willey in *Adventist Today* (May/June 2007) and the three-part series by K. Morgan and D. Conklin in *Ministry* (August, October, December 2007).

³³Moon, "Who Owns the Truth?" 49.

³⁴"Memorandum of Law; Literary Property Rights, 1790-1915," August 14, 1981; reprinted at <http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/ramik.html>.

³⁵See, e.g., the exhibits cited by Warren H. Johns in "Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?" *Ministry* (June 1982); for examples of autobiographical borrowing, compare *Ellen White's Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1915), 17, 165, 166,

with her husband James's accounts in *Signs of the Times*, January 6, 1876, 4, and EGW and J. White's *Life Sketches* (1880 ed.), 325.

³⁶W. C. White to L. E. Froom, January 8, 1928, reprinted in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:460; Manuscript 29, 1887, diary entry of May 15, 1887, cited in *Adventist Review*, April 2, 1981, 7. See also Ron Graybill, "A Letter to Elizabeth: Ellen White's 1880 Trip to California," *Adventist Heritage* (Summer 1990): 13:25-35.

³⁷Letter 67, 1894, quoted in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:90.

³⁸See, e.g., McAdams, "Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians"; R. Graybill, "Historical Difficulties in The Great Controversy" (Ellen G. White Estate, 1978, 1982); W.C. White to E. E. Eastman, November 4, 1912, reprinted in EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:445-450; W. C. White and Robinson, "Brief Statements," 6.

³⁹See Veltman's *Life of Christ Research Project*, 179-181. In Ingraham's work, a fictionalized eyewitness to events in Christ's life reports scenes and details in the form of letters written to another.

⁴⁰Veltman, *Life of Christ Research Project*, 185.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 911.

⁴²Veltman, among others, points out this need. *Ibid.*, 937.

⁴³D. Neff, "Ellen White's Theological and Literary Indebtedness to Calvin Stowe" (unpublished paper, Document File 389-c, EGWE, 1979).

⁴⁴This is argued in D. McMahon, *Acquired or Inspired? Exploring the Origins of the Adventist Lifestyle* (Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Co., 2005). For a recent detailed analysis of Ellen White's selective use of sources in *The Desire of Ages*, see E. Marcella Anderson King and Kevin L. Morgan, *More Than Words* (n.p.: Honor Him Publishers, 2009).

⁴⁵"Ellen White's Literary Sources: How Much Borrowing Is There?" [www.whiteestate.org /issues/parallel.html](http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/parallel.html).

⁴⁶G. Rice proposed that the "Lucan model" of inspiration, in contrast to the "prophetic model" provides biblical support for this position. See *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1983). See also D. Johnson, "The Sources of Inspired Writings" *Adventist Review*, December 30, 1982, 4, 5; and T. Crosby, "Does Inspired Mean Original?" *Ministry*, February 1986, 4-7. Jud Lake describes how "the nature of inspiration is a major underlying issue in the debate on Ellen White" *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2010), 90-131.

⁴⁷Rea, *The White Lie*, 139.

⁴⁸Jude 9, 14, 15, being a notable example.

⁴⁹Rea, *The White Lie*, 53, 54.

⁵⁰See General Conference session action of November 16, 1883: "We believe the light given of God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed" *Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883, 741. See EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:15-22, for Ellen White's understanding.

⁵¹See, e.g., comparisons cited by Crosby, "Does Inspired Mean Original?" 4-7.

⁵²EGW, *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867, 260.

⁵³EGW, Letter 8, 1888, quoted in *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989), 160; emphasis supplied.

See EGW, *Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1923), 94, for another example.

⁵⁴ For Ellen White's recommendations, see *Signs of the Times*, February 22, 1883, 96, and *Review and Herald*, December 26, 1882, 789. For the wide circulation of key books she used, see Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 413-415.

⁵⁵ W C. White and Robinson, "Brief Statements," 7; Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 405-407; R. Cottrell, "The Literary Relationship Between The Desire of Ages, by Ellen G. White and The Life of Christ, by William Hanna," 1979, 6.

⁵⁶ Veltman, *Life of Christ Research Project*, 952. More recent research has further documented this free borrowing among authors used by Ellen White. See D. Conklin and K. Morgan, "Plagiarism: A Historical and Cultural Survey," *Ministry*, August, October, December 2007; D. Conklin and J. Moon, "A Method for Analyzing Alleged Plagiarism in Nineteenth-Century Literature Using Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*, Chapter 77, as a Case Study" (forthcoming).

⁵⁷ See Merlin D. Burt, "GSEM534, Issues in Ellen G. White Studies," class outline 10, 2013 (Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI).

⁵⁸ John Wesley, *The New Testament With Explanatory Notes* (Wakefield, England: William Nicholson and Sons, 1872), first published in 1755.

⁵⁹ George H. Callcott, *History of the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 136.

⁶⁰ Moses Hull, *The Bible From Heaven; Or a Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1863); D. M. Canright, *The Bible From Heaven: A Summary of Plain Arguments for the Bible and Christianity* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1863).

⁶¹ EGW to Mary Steward, July 31, 1910 (Document File 83b, EGWE, Silver Spring, MD); cited in Arthur L. White, *Ellen W. White: The Later Elmhaven Years, 1905-1915* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*®, 1982), 6:311.

⁶² R. Olson, "Ellen White's Denials," *Ministry*, February 1991, 15-18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ The phrase, a "poison, and of the most deceitful and malignant kind," actually traces to a description of the effects of alcohol found in the 6th American Temperance Society report of 1833. This was picked up by Rev. B. I. Lane and applied to tobacco in his *The Mysteries of Tobacco* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1851), 93, 94; and subsequently used by Gunn, who linked it with a phrase apparently borrowed from Larkin B. Coles: "sending its exciting and paralyzing influence into every nerve of the body," in *The Beauties and Deformities of Tobacco-Using*, 22. Coles's essay was reprinted in the *Review and Herald* of May 24, 1864, 205, 206, three months before Ellen White's article entitled "Health" was published in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4. (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1864). See *Review and Herald*, August 23, 1864, 104. The link between Gunn, Lane, and Coles was first identified by Kevin Morgan (email to T. Poirier, June 16, 2006).

⁶⁶ The second strongest example of a parallel in these earliest health writings consists of a passage in *Appeal to Mothers*, where several destructive effects of "self-abuse" are enumerated in the same sequential order as by an earlier author (J. C. Jackson), suggesting acquaintance with the source.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Veltman, *Life of Christ Research Project*, 172, 173; Moon, “Who Owns the Truth?” citing R. Coon.

⁶⁸ EGW, *Review and Herald*, January 7, 1890, 1. Also, “Let the gems of divine light be reset in the framework of the gospel. Let nothing be lost of the precious light that comes from the throne of God. It has been misapplied, and cast aside as worthless; but it is heaven-sent, and each gem is to become the property of God’s people and find its true position in the framework of truth. Precious jewels of light are to be collected, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit they are to be fitted into the gospel system” *Ibid.*, October 23, 1894, 657.

⁶⁹ John Harris, *The Great Teacher* (Amherst, MA: J. S. and C. Adams, 1836), xxxiii, xxxiv; although Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists did not view her writings as a part of the Bible canon, this statement resonates well with Ellen White’s view on inspiration and literary borrowing.

Chapter Twelve - Understanding Ellen White and the “Shut Door”

Merlin D. Burt

Over the years the legitimacy of Ellen White’s visions has been repeatedly challenged because of her perceived support for shut-door views.¹ The term “shut door” was used by Millerite Adventists to describe the end of human probation just before the second coming of Jesus.

Three essential aspects to understanding Ellen White’s view on this topic are (1) the progression of shut-door thinking from 1844 to 1852 for those who became Seventh-day Adventists; (2) how Ellen White’s visions interacted with and influenced Sabbatarian Adventist understanding of the shut door; and (3) some implications concerning divine or special revelation in regard to Ellen White’s visions and the shut door.

Shut-door understanding progressed through five stages: (1) Millerite disappointment view, (2) Bridegroom view, (3) sanctuary view, (4) sealing message view, and (5) theological integration.

The theological meaning of the shut door progressively changed through these stages, from a simple belief that probation had closed for the world, to an open-door view based on the Most Holy Place ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, requiring an extensive and distinctive evangelistic mission to the world.

Millerite disappointment view (October 1844 to about January 1845)

After the October 22, 1844, disappointment, the majority of Millerites concluded that the date was incorrect, while a minority remained committed to its significance. All of the principal founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including Ellen White, belonged to the minority group that became known as shut-door Adventists.

This name was based on William Miller’s understanding of the [Matthew 25:1-13](#) parable of the Bridegroom.²

Millerites generally believed that probation would close for the world just before the second coming of Jesus. In October, soon after Miller accepted the autumn 1844 date for the fulfillment of the 2,300 days, he concluded that probation had already closed.³ Until early in 1845 he continued to believe that “God in His providence has shut the door; we can only stir one another up to be patient”⁴ The text “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” is a clear reference to the close of probation ([Rev. 22:11](#)).⁵ Miller’s position launched the shut-door movement and gave the theological baseline for the view.

Ellen White’s experience

Ellen White, like other Millerite Adventists, took her initial cue on the shut door from William Miller. She did not originate the view. After the autumn 1844 disappointment, and previous to her first vision, she, like Miller, believed that probation had closed for the world. She recollected: “For a time after the disappointment in 1844, I did hold, in common with the advent body, that the door of mercy was then forever closed to the world. This position was taken before my first vision was given me”⁶ Related to this statement is another: “With my Brethren and Sisters after the time passed in 1844 I did believe no more sinners could be converted. But I never had a vision that no more sinners could be converted.”⁷

At some point after the Disappointment, but before her first vision in December, she adopted the Millerite majority position that the October 1844 date was wrong. Ellen White recounted in 1847: “At the time I had the vision of the midnight cry I had given it up in the past and thought it future, as also most of the band had”⁸ It was her first vision in December 1844 that caused Ellen White to renew her faith in God’s leading of the October 1844 movement.

[168] **The Bridegroom view (January 1845 to about January 1847)**

Though Bridegroom Adventists inherited William Miller's original position on the shut door, they significantly modified it. By adding post-1844 details to the [Matthew 25](#) parable of the Bridegroom and ten virgins, they explained why Jesus had not come in 1844. Many argued that though their general work for the world was finished, probation was not closed for everyone.

Joseph Turner and Apollos Hale, two prominent Millerites, established a modified shutdoor view for Bridegroom Adventists in their January 1845 *Advent Mirror*. Though they agreed with Miller that "sinners" who had "rejected the truth" could no longer be converted, the *Advent Mirror* did not teach that the "door of mercy" was closed for everyone. It specifically allowed that some individuals could be saved, even from outside the Millerite movement—if they had not spurned the light of the Advent message and were still "subjects of His [God's] mercy."⁹ In other words, those who were rebellious against God could not be converted, but those who were walking in the light they had received could still be saved. This shut-door view largely defined Bridegroom Adventism during 1845 and 1846.

Bridegroom Adventist theology was drawn from the parable of the ten virgins in [Matthew 25](#). Turner and Hale made the parable symbolic and even typological of their 1844 experience, and believed that on or about October 22, 1844, Jesus had gone into a heavenly wedding. *The Advent Mirror* divided the marriage into two steps: the actual marriage and the marriage supper. The marriage, it was argued, occurred in heaven and preceded the literal Second Coming. Turner and Hale presented the coming of the Son of man to the Ancient of Days in [Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14](#) as describing events connected with a heavenly marriage. The Ancient of Days—God the Father—sat in judgment and gave to the Son of man—Jesus—"dominion, glory and a kingdom." Christ was made King as He received the New Jerusalem at the marriage. Then, as King, Jesus went from the wedding to the "marriage supper," which occurred when He gathered His saints at the Second Coming. The *Advent Mirror* placed post-Disappointment Advent believers in the "guest-chamber" waiting for the marriage supper. The guest-chamber concept came from another parable, found in [Matthew 22:1-14](#). The "guests,"

or the faithful ones on earth, were waiting for Jesus to come literally to the earth from the heavenly wedding. They further argued that the “guests,” or virgins, had responded to the call leading up to the tenth day of the seventh month on October 22, 1844, “Behold the bridegroom cometh.” They had trimmed their lamps and had gone figuratively to meet the Bridegroom.¹⁰

Those foolish virgins who were not ready were shut out. “While they [the foolish virgins] went to buy [oil], the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10). The guests, or Advent believers, were waiting only for the “final examination of the King.” Their work was to look to Jesus and patiently wait His return. With emphasis, the *Advent Mirror* concluded: “*The judgment is here!*” Interestingly, the paper drew no specific conclusions about just what the judgment was or how it pertained to Advent believers who were waiting in the “guest-chamber”¹¹ Bridegroom Adventist theology was transitional and did not represent a fully thought out biblical hermeneutic. The metaphors of the parable closely matched Millerite Adventist experience. [169]

By the summer of 1845 conflict developed among Bridegroom Adventists over whether the significance of October 22, 1844 (or the “tenth day of the seventh month”), centered on that day alone or on a period of time beginning on that date. O. R. L. Crosier, Emily Clemons, and others began to argue for an extended final atonement period in the heavenly sanctuary, while Samuel Snow, who had championed the fall 1884 Midnight Cry proclamation, aggressively argued for a single-day atonement. He believed that Jesus completed His work as High Priest in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary on that day, “the tenth day of the seventh month.” Having laid aside His priestly robes, He put on His kingly robes and began to reign. Thus for Snow there was a final shut door, and probation was entirely closed for the world after the tenth day of the seventh month in 1844.¹²

Snow’s one-day atonement position was essentially the same as he had presented in August 1844 through his influential *True Midnight Cry*.¹³ Crosier’s and Clemons’s extended atonement view remained more flexible, theologically allowing for individual conversions.¹⁴ Ellen Harmon (later White) was solidly in this second

camp and actually was among the first to articulate important aspects of that position. Those who later became Seventh-day Adventists followed Crosier's view.

Ellen White's contribution

[170] The written account of Ellen White's visions, the experience of those closest to her, and her own recollections suggest that she did not readopt her initial prevision view that probation had closed for everyone. She declared in 1874: "I never have stated or written that the world was doomed or damned. I never have under any circumstances used this language to anyone however sinful. I have ever had messages of reproof for those who used these harsh expressions"¹⁵

This statement is, at least to a degree, in line with that of the *Advent Mirror*, which allowed for the salvation of individuals who had not rejected truth. A second contextual evidence that Ellen Harmon believed that certain people could still be saved is found in the earliest contemporary reference to her visions—the Israel Dammon trial in Maine, as recorded in an area newspaper. At the trial, Adventist witnesses who had recently heard Ellen Harmon explain her visions unanimously testified that individuals could still be saved, even from the "fallen" churches.¹⁶ (Hereafter, Ellen Harmon will be referred to as Ellen White.¹⁷)

In writing out her first vision, Ellen White used the expression "the wicked world which God had rejected," although she did not elaborate on its meaning.¹⁸ The *Advent Mirror* and William Miller had written of "the wicked world" as those who had rejected the Advent truth.¹⁹ Ellen White's own interpretation of the vision, when called upon to explain it in 1883, was that "no reference is made [in the vision] to those who had not seen the light and therefore were not guilty of its rejection."²⁰ Though her perspective on the shut door was not yet completely developed, she applied a biblical principle that a person is responsible for the light they receive through the working of the Holy Spirit. Ellen White's experience with the developing shut-door teaching may be compared to the manner in which Bible writers had misconceptions that were corrected over time (see below).

Ellen White’s position on the shut door was influenced and modified by her second major vision, which she received in Exeter, Maine, in February 1845. Known as the Bridegroom vision, it presented a very different idea from that of Samuel Snow and Joseph Turner in the *Jubilee Standard*.²¹ As noted above, Snow would argue that Jesus had ended His work as High Priest in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary on one day, October 22, 1844. For Snow, Jesus was reigning as King and was no longer a mediator.²²

In contrast, Ellen White wrote of her vision: “There I beheld Jesus, as he was before the Father a great High Priest”²³ Even her statements about those who remained “bowed before the throne” in the Holy Place, where she figuratively saw Satan taking God’s place, suggest hope. She wrote: “Satan’s object was to keep them deceived and to draw back and deceive God’s children.”²⁴ The fact that Satan was working so hard implied that there was hope for those who were deceived. She did not specifically define who the “deceived” ones were. Thus in February 1845 Ellen White was suggesting a post-1844 continuing atonement or intercession, which theologically diverged from the restrictive or one-day atonement idea that probation had closed. Her views were more comparable to those presented by Crosier.

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The Bridegroom vision also seems to have anchored for Ellen White the idea that those who had willfully rejected light could close their own probation. This “shut door” was limited to those who resisted the Holy Spirit and remained indifferent to Jesus’ move into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly sanctuary.

Ellen White’s time of trouble vision, during the fall of 1845, further confirmed that human probation had not closed. In October 1845, James White was teaching that Jesus would come at the end of the one-year period following the end of the 2,300 days. While in Carver, Massachusetts, Ellen White was shown that Jesus could not come yet because the time of trouble had not begun.²⁵ She also clarified that God’s people still needed to be sealed. She wrote: “Just before we entered it [the time of trouble], we all received the seal of the living God.”²⁶

Thus, Ellen White’s visions during 1845 theologically led away from the shut-door view. Her view of spiritual accountability for

light received cannot be understood as promoting or confirming a universal shut door for salvation.

The sanctuary view: January 1847 to fall 1848

Toward the middle of 1846, the only remaining Adventists who still held to the prophetic significance of 1844 followed Crosier's view of the extended atonement. Very quickly, under the influence of Joseph Bates, most adopted the seventh-day Sabbath, thus, by this time, the movement would more appropriately be termed Sabbatarian Adventist.

Beginning in January 1847, Bates linked the Sabbath to the heavenly sanctuary through studying [Revelation 11:19](#) and [14:12](#). This had particular relevance to the Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant containing the law of God is revealed. Central to the law of God was the Sabbath, which deserved special attention because it had been neglected and points to worship of God as Creator and therefore has end-time importance. ²⁷ The Sabbath, therefore, became "present truth" with eschatological significance.

During 1847 the shut door began to be defined in terms of the heavenly sanctuary, and specifically the door between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place. The Bridegroom view, based on a symbolic interpretation of the parable of the ten virgins in [Matthew 25](#), became a secondary argument, thus allowing for the developing sanctuary understanding to become dominant. This necessarily gave new emphasis to Jesus' continued work as a high priest, resulting in an increasing discontinuity between the earlier idea of a shut door for

[172] "sinners" and the growing realization of the need for an evangelistic proclamation of the Sabbath.

Ellen White's contribution

In early spring 1847, more than six months after she and James White began to keep the Sabbath, Ellen White received her first vision on the Sabbath. In her Sabbath halo vision of April 7, 1847, at the home of Stockbridge Howland, she saw Jesus ministering in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. But her vision added evangelistic dimensions even beyond what Bates had presented re-

garding the eschatological importance of the Sabbath. She saw Jesus open the ark in the Most Holy Place and remove the Ten Commandments. She observed that the fourth commandment “shone above them all” and had a “halo of glory” all around it.²⁸ She then saw that “God had children, who do not see and keep the Sabbath. They had not rejected the light on it” Then God’s people “went forth” and “proclaimed the Sabbath more fully.”²⁹

This evangelistic call further prepared the way for an understanding of the sealing message and the final collapse of the “probation closed for sinners” view. The Sabbath halo vision so impressed Bates that he published it in a broadside.³⁰ It is probable that this vision helped him orient his views on the sealing message and the need to proclaim it throughout the world.

The sealing message and the open door: 1849 through 1852

It was the theology of the sealing message that opened to Sabbatarian Adventists the need for a broader mission to the world, and finally removed the earlier restrictive idea regarding the shut door. During 1849 the focus shifted from the shut door of the Holy Place to the open door of the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. The linkage of the Sabbath to the ark in the Most Holy Place during 1847 and 1848 gave rise in 1849 to the understanding of the Sabbath as the seal of God. By 1852, Sabbatarian Adventists began to consider the need to evangelize even “sinners” on “Present Truth,” based on Revelation 7 and the sealing of the 144,000. Again Joseph Bates led the way into these important new theological concepts.

For Bates, the idea of 144,000 sealed people at the end of time seemed almost unimaginable in light of the “little flock” of Sabbatarian Adventists who numbered a few hundred at most. Connecting the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 to the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7, Bates described two classes of people who comprised the “living saints.” They were those who already knew and kept the Sabbatarian Advent message and sincere ones who still needed to learn the message.³¹

Bates expanded his understanding of the sealing message beyond “advent believers.” He believed that the sealing message needed to go to the whole world, in a manner similar to the Millerite message [173]

of 1843 and 1844.³² He even believed that the 144,000 would include slaves in the Southern states who were “living present truth.”³³ They were living up to the light they had received and were God’s children.

The sealing message combined with the evangelistic proclamation of the Sabbath gave a strong impetus to shift away from the shut-door position. The biblical theology of Sabbatarian Adventists had removed the possibility of a universal shut door.

Ellen White’s contribution

Ellen White’s January 31, 1849, broadside titled *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God* and her March 24, 1849, vision of the open door in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary placed renewed emphasis on the importance of outreach and the availability of grace to sinners while Jesus remained in the Second Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary.³⁴ This illustrates an important point. Ellen White’s visions did not originate the doctrines of the sanctuary and the Sabbath, or their integration as an end-time message. These truths came from a careful study of Scripture. However, the visions did enrich Adventist understanding and applied it practically to personal experience and the mission of the movement.

Theological integration

By 1848 and 1849, the term “shut door” had moved from its original meaning in 1844 (that probation had closed) to an evangelistic term representing “Present Truth”—as it related to the sealing message and a final proclamation to the world. During the Sabbath Conferences of 1848, James White could triumphantly report: “The brethren are strong on the Sabbath and shut door.”³⁵ What he meant by shut door was very different from the earlier views of Miller or even of the *Advent Mirror*. For Sabbatarian Adventists, the shut door had become a general term referring to the shift in Jesus’ ministry from the Holy to the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

In 1851 James White defined three categories of people that could be converted—erring brethren, children, and “hidden souls”

³⁶ By 1852 the remaining theological tension between the shut door and the sealing message dissolved. He observed that the number of “advent brethren” in the State of New York had grown from “about a score” to “near one thousand.” ³⁷ White and others believed that [174] new conversions were occurring because Jesus was before the mercy seat of the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. After quoting [Revelation 3:7, 8](#), James White wrote:

This OPEN DOOR we teach, and invite those who have an ear to hear, to come to it and find salvation through Jesus Christ. There is an exceeding glory in the view that Jesus has OPENED THE DOOR into the holiest of all, or has passed within the second vail [sic], and now stands before the Ark containing the ten commandments. “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament.” Rev. xi, 19. If it be said that we are of the OPEN DOOR and seventh day Sabbath theory, we shall not object; for this is our faith. ³⁸

Thus for those Millerites who became Bridegroom Adventists, then Sabbatarian Adventists, and who would eventually become Seventh-day Adventists, the term “shut door” moved from meaning that probation had closed in the autumn of 1844 to an open-door evangelistic mission to take the gospel to the world in the context of the Sabbath and the work of Jesus in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

Just as Adventist experience in understanding the shut door grew over time, so the understanding of the seal of God also has been enriched by continued growth through Bible study. A better understanding of the seal of God and the Sabbath clarifies that believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit ([Eph. 4:30](#)). The Sabbath is an external manifestation of the love and loyalty that those, sealed by the Holy Spirit, have for God. The Sabbath also points us to an experience of faith in Jesus as we rest from our works in His finished work ([Heb. 4:9, 10](#)).

Ellen White’s contribution

As Ellen White looked back over her experience leading up to her first vision and then the visions she received in the following months and years, she realized that the visions steadily helped move the

“little flock” of early Bridegroom Adventists and then Sabbatarian Adventists toward a more open view. Her visions theologically moved them away from the Millerite shut-door view to a worldwide evangelistic proclamation of the gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages.

[175] An additional point needs to be considered. Ellen White continued to believe that a certain group, those who had rejected the full light of the Midnight Cry when it was proclaimed before 1844, had closed their own probation. In 1883, she wrote: “I was shown in vision, and I still believe, that there was a shut door in 1844. All who saw the light of the first and second angels’ messages and rejected that light were left in darkness.”³⁹ She compared the 1844 experience with that of Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, and those who crucified Jesus. These each resulted in a limited close of probation.⁴⁰ She did, however, maintain a very open view of God’s ability to save anyone who responded to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Misconception and growing understanding

A common misconception regarding the gift of prophecy is the belief that prophetic revelation does not allow for correction or growth in understanding on the part of the messenger.⁴¹ The earliest critics did not understand that while God is careful to make sure that His messenger communicates His intended revelation, He does not eliminate the process of growth in their personal understanding and application. Looking at the biblical model we find that the prophets and apostles did not always have immediate and perfect understanding, and on occasion even misunderstood aspects of what they were shown. Examples include Daniel’s misunderstanding of Daniel 8 and God’s explanation given years later in Daniel 9, the apostles’ misunderstanding of the plan of God to evangelize the gentiles, and Paul’s countering of the evil of slavery while not removing it entirely. It is helpful to realize that God does not immediately correct every misconception a prophet has before using him or her to convey special revelation.

Ellen White’s experience was similar to that of the Bible prophets. She wrote of her visions: “Often representations are given me which at first I do not understand, but after a time they are

made plain by a repeated presentation of those things that I did not at first comprehend, and in ways that make their meaning clear and unmistakable”⁴² Her personal preconceptions or possibly mistaken inferences relating to the shut-door teaching do not invalidate her visions, particularly because it was those early visions that provided a theological orientation resulting in a worldwide evangelistic gospel proclamation. Examples of these types of misconception, however, are rare in Ellen White’s experience.

For those who became Sabbatarian Adventists, and later Seventh-day Adventists, the shut-door idea went through successive stages that progressively changed the theological meaning. It progressed from a strict “close of probation” view to the “open door” to the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

Ellen White’s visions and prophetic influence throughout these years theologically led away from the shut-door view. God used her visions to urge an evangelistic Sabbath proclamation of the gospel that helped launch the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Some have wondered why it took so long to correct the misconceptions of the shut-door view. James White answered this question:

Some of this [sic] people did believe in the shut door, in common with the Adventists generally, soon after the passing of time. Some of us held fast this position longer than those did who gave up their Advent experience, and drew back in the direction of perdition. And God be thanked that we did hold fast to that position till the matter was explained by light from the heavenly sanctuary.⁴³

From Scripture we understand that special revelation and inspiration do not automatically confer perfect understanding to inspired messengers. However, the Holy Spirit makes sure that His intended message is transmitted in a trustworthy and accurate manner. Additionally, God makes sure that His intended result is accomplished. As illustrated by the experience of prophets and apostles in the Bible, this may require repetition and expansion of messages over a period of time through visions and dreams. Thus Scripture provides instructive models on how we should expect the prophetic gift to function in the experience of Ellen White.

¹1. This chapter is condensed and modified from Merlin D. Burt, "The 'Shut Door' and Ellen White's Visions," in *The Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts With Annotations: 1845-1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2014), 41-61; Historical challenges of Ellen White on the shut door include: B. F. Snook and Wm. H. Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God* (Cedar Rapids, IA: Cedar Valley Times, 1866); H. E. Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (Marion, IA: Published at the "Hope of Israel" Office, 1870); Williams Sheldon, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict With the Bible* (Buchanan, MI: W. A. C. P. Association, 1867); Miles Grant, *The True Sabbath: Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions* (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874); A. C. Long, *Comparison of the Early Writings of Mrs. White With Later Publications* (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate, 1883); D. M. Can-right, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years: By a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith* (Kalamazoo, MI: Kalamazoo Publishing, 1888); D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1919); E. S. Ballenger, *Facts About Seventh-day Adventists* (Riverside, CA: E. S. Ballenger, c. 1949); Dale Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996).

²William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843: Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Troy, NY: Kemble & Hooper, 1836), 97, 98.

³William Miller, "Brother Miller's Letter, on the Seventh Month," *Midnight Cry*, October 12, 1844, 122; William Miller, "Letter from Wm. Miller," *Advent Herald*, November 27, 1844, 127.

⁴William Miller, "Letter from Bro. Miller," *Advent Herald*, December 11, 1844, 142; William Miller, "Letter from Mr. Miller," *Advent Herald*, February 12, 1845, 2, 3.

⁵William Miller, *Miller's Works: Views on the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, Selected From Manuscripts of William Miller With a Memoir of His Life*, ed. J. V. Himes (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1841), 1:253.

⁶Ellen G. White [EGW], Manuscript 4 (c. 1883); EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:63.

⁷EGW to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, Letter 2, 1874; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 1:74.

⁸EGW to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1847, Letter 3, 1847; see also James White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, ME: n.p., May 30, 1847), 22.

⁹A. Hale and J. Turner, "Has Not the Savior Come as the Bridegroom?" *Advent Mirror*, January 1845, 3, 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 1, 2.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1, 3.

¹²Samuel Snow, "Behold He Cometh!!" *Day-Star*, April 22, 1845, 41; quoted from *Jubilee Standard*.

¹³Samuel S. Snow, "Behold, the Bridegroom Cometh; Go Ye Out to Meet Him," *True Midnight Cry*, August 22, 1844; for an evaluation of the Bridegroom Adventist struggle

over a one-day versus extended atonement, see Merlin D. Burt, “The Extended Atonement View in the Day-Dawn and the Emergence of Sabbatarian Adventism,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Fall 2006): 331-339.

¹⁴O. R. L. Crosier and F. B. Hahn, *Day-Dawn*, published on last page of *Ontario Messenger*, March 26, 1845, republished in Merlin D. Burt, “The Day-Dawn of Canandaigua, New York: Reprint of a Significant Millerite Adventist Journal,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Fall 2006): 317-330; O. R. L. Crosier, “From Bro. Crosier,” *Hope of Israel*, April 17, 1845, 4; Emily C. Clemons, “Letter From Sister Clemons,” *Day-Star*, April 15, 1845, 35.

¹⁵EGW, Letter 2, 1874.

¹⁶“Trial of Elder I. Dammon: Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer” *Piscataquis Farmer*, March 7, 1845.

¹⁷Ellen Harmon married James White on August 30, 1846.

¹⁸Ellen G. Harmon, “Letter From Sister Harmon” *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 31, 32; EGW to Joseph Bates, Letter 3, 1847 (July 13). Her first vision was reprinted using the same “wicked world” expression in the broadside, *To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad*, April 6, 1846, and J. White, *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 14.

¹⁹A. Hale and J. Turner, “Has Not the Savior Come as the Bridegroom?” *The Advent Mirror*, January 1845, 3, 4; William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843: Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1842), 188.

²⁰EGW, Manuscript 4 (c. 1883).

²¹Samuel S. Snow, “Letter From Br. Snow” *Voice of Truth*, April 16, 1845, 20.

²²See Burt, “Historical Background” 114-117.

²³Ellen G. Harmon, “Letter From Sister Harmon” *Day-Star*, March 14, 1846, 7 (written February 15, 1846).

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*; James White, “Watchman, What of the Night” *Day-Star*, September 20, 1845, 26; James White, *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 22.

²⁶Ellen G. Harmon, “Letter From Sister Harmon,” *Day-Star*, March 14, 1846, 7.

²⁷Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign From the Beginning to the Entering Into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandments*, 2nd ed. (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), iii, iv.

²⁸EGW, “Dear Bro. Bates” broadside, *A Vision*, April 7, 1847, 1.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God: A Hundred Forty-Four Thousand, of the Servants of God Being Sealed in 1849* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1849), 61, 62.

³²*Ibid.*, 34.

³³Joseph Bates, *Vindication of the Seventh-day Sabbath, and the Commandments of God: With a Further History of God’s Peculiar People, From 1847 to 1848* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1848), 93.

³⁴EGW, *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God*, broadside, January 31, 1849.

³⁵James White to “My Dear Brother and Sister Hastings,” August 26, 1848.

³⁶[James White], “Conversions . . .,” *Review and Herald*, April 7, 1851, 64.

³⁷[James White], “The Work of the Lord,” *Review and Herald*, May 6, 1852, 4, 5.

³⁸[James White], “Call at the Harbinger Office,” *Review and Herald*, February 17, 1852, 95.

³⁹EGW, Manuscript 4 (c. 1883).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Sheldon, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White*, 3, 4; Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 3ff.

⁴²EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:56; see also EGW, Letter 86, 1906 (March 8).

⁴³James White, *Life Incidents in Connection With the Great Second Advent Movement, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation 14* (Battle Creek, MI: *Review and Herald*®, 1868), 207.

Chapter Thirteen - Ellen White and Science

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Jerry Moon and Tim Standish¹

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Ellen White displayed a positive attitude toward the study of science and encouraged believers “to gain a knowledge of the sciences.”² She was unsparing, however, in her denunciation of those who “exalt nature above nature’s God, . . . the Author of all true science.”³ While supporting science, she rejected placing science in opposition to the Bible. Her condemnation was particularly focused on geology where it contradicted the biblical record:

Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works.

Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation. . . . Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for.⁴

Ellen White also criticized nineteenth-century medicine. A commonly prescribed laxative was calomel or chloride of mercury. Calomel produced immediate and violent bowel movements, but the inevitable side effect was mercury poisoning. Tartrate of antimony, also a “lethal poison,” was given to induce vomiting. For patients who were debilitated, doctors prescribed “tonics” such as arsenic, strychnine, quinine, or opium.⁵ Ellen White denounced most of these by name, correctly pointing out that “preparations of mercury and calomel taken into the system ever retain their poisonous strength as long as there is a particle of it left in the system.”⁶

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Instead, she encouraged a healthy lifestyle and the use of harmless remedies. “Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness [temperance], rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—

these are the true remedies”⁷ Most of her health teachings enjoy broader scientific support now than they did when first written. For example, she denounced tobacco as a “malignant” poison.⁸ She recommended whole grains as nutritionally preferable to refined flour, vegetable oils as healthier to eat than animal fats, and a balanced, varied, vegetarian diet as preferable to a diet including flesh food. A few statements, however, have been questioned from the perspective of twenty-first-century science.

This chapter addresses thirteen statements by Ellen White that some believe are in direct or partial conflict with current understandings in the natural sciences. These statements can be divided into three categories: (1) Four considered to be sound advice at the time, and would still be considered sound under the same circumstances. (2) Three for which there is full, partial, or tentative scientific support. (3) Six that are either unclear as to their original meaning or remain at least partially inconsistent with current scientific opinion.

Sound advice at the time, but less obviously useful today

The first Ellen White statements to be considered must be interpreted within the historical context in which they were written. The need for this principle is also clearly evident in the Bible. The apostles Paul and Peter make reference to circumstances that related to issues present in Asia Minor that may not be directly applicable to a twenty-first-century world (though the principles remain true). Examples include counsel for women to cover their heads in church (1 Cor. 11:5) and the call for Christians to greet each other with a “holy kiss” or the “kiss of love” (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 5:14).

The first three of the four statements in this section were compiled by Ellen White while she was editor of a monthly column in the *Health Reformer* during 1871. In these articles she drew material from her personal experiences and observations, and from other publications of the day, to illustrate and support the health principles she was teaching. Some of these early statements are a combination of accurate instruction based on visions with explanations gleaned from contemporary publications, which she gave with the instruction because the explanations provided additional reasons and motivation to follow it. The fourth statement on the dangers of

eating cheese, unlike the other examples, was frequently repeated through the years. These all contain advice that must be interpreted in light of the historical context.

Statement 1: Dangerous wigs

“Fashion loads the heads of women with artificial braids and pads, which do not add to their beauty, but give an unnatural shape to the head Artificial hair and pads covering the base of the brain, heat and excite the spinal nerves producing congestion” in the brain, loss of natural hair, and even insanity. ⁹ Wigs in 1871 were constructed of heavy materials—natural hair, cotton, sea grass, wool, Spanish moss, jute, and so on. When they bound the head too tightly, according to a physician cited in the article, they confined heat in the head, trapped perspiration, and hindered blood circulation to the brain. This physician advised against wearing “switches, or jutes, or chignons, because they breed pestiferous vermin, whose life is fed by their drain on the small blood-vessels of the scalp” ¹⁰ The physician believed that the tight-fitting, heat-confining construction of the wig was a greater hazard to health than the possibility of insects. ¹¹ Another hazard was human hair harvested from plague victims in China, then manufactured into hairpieces. ¹² Whatever the level of precision in the physician’s reports that Ellen White quoted, her instruction to avoid such wigs appears to have been good advice. ¹³

Statement 2: Toxic cosmetics

“Many are ignorantly injuring their health and endangering their life by using cosmetics. They are robbing the cheeks of the glow of health, and then to supply the deficiency use cosmetics. When they become heated in the dance the poison is absorbed by the pores of the skin, and is thrown into [sic] the blood. Many lives have been sacrificed by this means alone.” ¹⁴ In support of her warning against toxic cosmetics, White again quotes a physician who describes the contemporary women’s fashion of painting the face with enamel or lacquer to give skin the appearance of “fine porcelain” The physician is quoted to say, “The seeds of death or paralysis” are “hidden in

every pot and jar of those mixtures,” causing severe illness, sudden paralysis, or even death.¹⁵ Symptoms described here are consistent with lead poisoning from lead-based cosmetics commonly used in the day.¹⁶

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Statement 3: Wasp-waist corsets

“Some women have naturally small waists. But rather than regard such forms as beautiful, they should be viewed as defective. These wasp waists may have been transmitted to them from their mothers, as the result of their indulgence in the sinful practice of tight-lacing, and in consequence of imperfect breathing.”¹⁷ A few lines later she quotes from a contemporary periodical, *The Household*: ” ‘But my waist is naturally slender,’ says one woman. She means that she has inherited small lungs. Her ancestors, more or less of them, compressed their lungs in the same way that we do, and it has become in her case a congenital deformity.”¹⁸

Ellen White’s unsparing denunciation of the nineteenth-century fashion of “tight-lacing” the female abdomen appears reasonable, but the attribution of this to genetic transmission of acquired characteristics—inconsistent with current science—is not from her pen, but is a quotation from a contemporary periodical. Ellen White’s own expression stops short of full assertion. “These wasp waists may have been transmitted to them from their mothers.”¹⁹ The word “may” indicates reservation about the reliability of the quoted source, distancing her from endorsement of its explanation.

Statement 4: Dangers of eating cheese

“Cheese should never be introduced into the stomach,” wrote Ellen White in 1868 to a couple with specific health conditions aggravated by their “too rich” diet.²⁰ In 1881, however, she distinguished between the group of “tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol,” which were to be “discarded” as “sinful indulgences,” and the less objectionable “meat, eggs, butter, [and] cheese,” which were not to be entirely prohibited or treated as a “test” of character.²¹ Her last published reference to cheese, in 1905, maintained that “it is wholly unfit for food.”²² Presumably these references to “cheese” referred

to common yellow cheese, because a family who ate at Elmshaven after 1900 reported that she often served cottage or cream cheese at her table, but never yellow cheese,²³ although White admitted eating yellow cheese occasionally in earlier years.²⁴

Ellen White's characterization of sharp or aged yellow cheese as "unfit for food" was true in the nineteenth century. Legitimate concerns, including unhygienic dairy conditions, lack of pasteurization, and hazardous methods of aging cheese, have been largely alleviated in developed countries. If she were living today, with improved processing, sanitation, and preservation, she might be more moderate in her condemnation. However, other issues may have continuing relevance. Cheese is often high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Tyramine compounds that accumulate in cheese during aging can trigger hypertension and possibly other effects.²⁵ In view of widespread heart disease, obesity, hypertension, and continuing decline in bovine health, the healthfulness of cheese in the quantities often used remains open to question.

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Explanations fully or partially supported by current science

There are many statements by Ellen White that are misunderstood due to changes in the English language since the nineteenth century. A careful reading of what she actually wrote with enough linguistic, geographical, or situational context frequently resolves misunderstandings.

Statement 5: Dangers of disease from miasma

If we would have our homes the abiding place of health and happiness, we must place them above *the miasma and fog of the lowlands*. Dispense with heavy curtains, open the windows and the blinds, allow no vines, however beautiful, to shade the windows, and permit no trees to stand so near the house as to shut out the sunshine. . . . Shade trees and shrubbery close and dense around a house make it unhealthful, for they prevent the free circulation of air and shut out the rays of the sun. In consequence, a dampness gathers in the house, especially in wet seasons.²⁶

The commonsense reading of this counsel simply indicates that high, dry ground, with ample circulation of pure air, affords a healthier environment for a home than poorly drained or swampy surroundings. Some have ridiculed this statement as attributing illness to mere bad odors. In northern climates with short summers and severe winters (such as Michigan and the New England states where Ellen White spent much of her life), the chill of cold weather is intensified by persistent dampness, which in turn fosters growth of mold and bacteria. These factors are either explicit or implied in White's several statements on this topic.²⁷ The "lowlands" or swampy areas with stagnant water near houses describe conditions under which mosquitoes proliferate, which in her day carried malaria.²⁸

Statement 6: Leprosy from eating pork

[185] "The eating of pork has produced scrofula, leprosy, and cancerous humors."²⁹ "God did not prohibit the Hebrews from eating swine's flesh merely to show His authority, but because . . . it would fill the system with scrofula [a form of tuberculosis], and especially in that warm climate produced leprosy, and disease of various kinds. Its influence upon the system in that climate was far more injurious than in a colder climate"³⁰

There are three issues here: the identity of biblical leprosy, whether eating pork contributes to its spread, and the effect of climate (not a unique idea in her day). There is evidence ([Lev. 13, 14](#)) that biblical leprosy included a broader range of ailments than is included in the modern use of the term (e.g., the whole range scale diseases and even mold, mildew, or fungus on a house or clothing). Modern Hansen's disease (leprosy) is the same as one of the diseases that came under the biblical heading of leprosy.³¹ There are no published human-based clinical studies that eating pork causes Hansen's disease, but there is a study in which mice fed a pork diet showed greater predisposition to leprosy than those on a pork-free diet.³² There is also evidence that Hansen's disease can be contracted by eating certain types of meat.³³ Thus, links between diet and leprosy have been shown in humans, and between pork eating and leprosy in mice, suggesting that White's statements may be reasonable even with a limited modern definition of leprosy.

Furthermore, Ellen White's statement is fully consistent with the broader biblical definition of leprosy.

Consumption of pig's flesh is hardly healthy and is associated with other diseases such as trichinosis and other parasitic diseases as well as cardiovascular diseases related to its fat content—whether or not there is a link between pork eating and Hansen's disease. Ellen White's advice to avoid pig's flesh for health reasons appears sound. The effect of climate is reasonable in that pathogens and parasites normally proliferate much more quickly in a warmer environment.

Statement 7: Great difference in age of marriage partners

A cause of generational decline is marriages between men and women “whose ages widely differ.” Marriages between “old men” and “young wives” result in men living longer, while the wife's life may be shortened by the burden of caring for an aging husband.³⁴ Conversely, when young men marry older women, their children may be born with physical and mental weaknesses.³⁵ This is abundantly documented today. As a woman's age at childbearing increases, the likelihood of birth defects, particularly Down syndrome, also increases.³⁶ Remarkably, White also implies detrimental effects to children of older men who father children by younger women.³⁷ Only long after she wrote was it scientifically established that older fathers also increase the risk of birth defects and autism.³⁸ On this topic, White's instruction appears to have been in advance of the scientific knowledge of her day.

Her statements about spouses of widely differing ages do not suggest that such marriages are always ill-advised. She specifically approved of several such marriages, suggesting that other factors can outweigh the issue of age differences.³⁹ For example, W. C. White was forty when he married Ethel May Lacey, twenty- one. She bore him five children, the youngest when she was forty and he was fifty-nine.⁴⁰

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Statements that remain obscure or unconfirmed

The six statements in this section address issues that relate to geology, life sciences, and astronomy. An important biblical principle

for this section is the purpose of divine revelation. Was the revelation intended to provide new breakthroughs in scientific understanding? Or was it to provide practical help in matters of faith, health, and divine guidance?

Interpreters of Ellen White's writings have long distinguished between precepts or principles and the explanation or rationale given. Don McMahon, a physician, compared Ellen White's statements on health with modern medical science and demonstrated that the accuracy of her counsel, relative to others of her time, regarding "what" people should do to improve their health was accurate to the point of statistical impossibility. This miraculous accuracy, however, did not always extend to the "why," the scientific rationale behind the counsel. She would therefore at times use the scientific understanding of her day as a point of reference, and because of this the accuracy of her explanations was comparable to those of her contemporaries—which she and her readers understood.⁴¹ For example, guiding a person to better health by avoiding tobacco was the goal rather than miraculously advancing human scientific understanding. Over time, science advanced to the point where it now provides an understanding of this guidance.

Ellen White's use of sometimes seemingly inaccurate contemporary rationales for divine truth fits the biblical pattern for prophetic explanations for divine commands. These do not appear to be the focus of the divine revelation but rather a common point of understanding for her time. Biblical examples would include God's command to burn or destroy items that might look like they had leprosy, such as a house, leather, wool, and so on, with spots ([Lev. 13:51, 52; 14:44-57](#)). God worked within their structure of understanding.

[187] God designated many things as "unclean" in order, among other things, to protect His people from actual dangers to health including such things as clean and unclean meats, anything found dead, including water sources or ground that touches a carcass, and persons with contagious illness or involuntary bodily discharges ([Lev. 5:2; 11; 13; 15](#)). He even called for the washing of hands, body, clothing, and other objects contaminated by the discharge ([Lev. 15](#)). God did not provide a scientific basis for His commands but established guidelines within their understanding that resulted in sanitary prac-

tices that protected them from disease. God provided the “what” or the health-improving action without a scientifically defensible “why.”

Statement 8: Causes of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions

Ellen White wrote in 1864 that “immense forests,” “buried in the earth” have since “become coal” and oil. When the subterranean coal and oil “ignite, . . . [r]ocks are intensely heated, limestone is burned, and iron ore melted. Water and fire under the surface of the earth meet. The action of water upon the limestone adds fury to the intense heat, and causes earthquakes, volcanoes and fiery issues.”⁴² The context of this remark is an aside about the after effects of the Flood ([Gen. 6-8](#)). The complex post-Flood developments are not clearly understood. Although no current theories of volcanism support the geological mechanisms she describes, there is support for several of her assertions. For instance, O. Stutzer’s *Geology of Coal* agrees that “subterranean fires in coal beds” have been “ignited through spontaneous combustion, resulting in the melting of nearby rocks that are classed as pseudo volcanic deposits” Stutzer documents several historical examples, including “a burning mountain,” an outcrop that “lasted over 150 years,” and that “the heat from one burning coal bed was used for heating greenhouses in that area from 1837 to 1868”⁴³ More recently, an entire volume of *Reviews in Engineering Geology* was dedicated to the relatively common global phenomenon of coal fires.⁴⁴

Statement 9: Height of antediluvians and giant fossils

Adam is said to have been more than twice the height of modern men.⁴⁵ The parallel passage in *Patriarchs and Prophets* makes the more moderate claim that Adam’s height was “much greater” than that of men who now inhabit the earth.⁴⁶ A supporting passage says that “geologists claim” to have found “bones of men and animals, as well as instruments of warfare, petrified trees, et cetera, much larger than any that now exist,” from which these geologists infer the existence of “a race of beings vastly superior in size to any men now living.”⁴⁷ Whether or not there exists valid fossil evidence for

“a race of beings vastly superior in size” to humans today is still a subject of debate and cannot be categorically validated or invalidated. However, it is worth noting that in this particular statement Ellen White points readers not to inspiration, but to the claims of geologists of the time.

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Statement 10: Amalgamation of man and beast

In *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, published in 1864, Ellen White referred to the “amalgamation of man and beast.” “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood, it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere.” Further, “the confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men”⁴⁸ These statements were retained in the edition of 1870,⁴⁹ but omitted in 1890 when the same materials were revised for *Patriarchs and Prophets*.⁵⁰

The grammatical construction of these statements, their context, and Ellen White’s other uses of the term amalgamation allow several possible interpretations. *Amalgamation* of man with beast implies (1) bestiality, a crime for which the Bible required the death of both the human and the animal involved ([Lev. 20:15, 16](#)), or could also refer to (2) genetic combination of human and animal genomes to create chimeras. However, contemporary publications also used the term *amalgamation* to refer to sexual relations between different human races resulting in offspring.⁵¹ (3) F. D. Nichol⁵² (following the lead of George McCready Price) argued for an alternative grammatical reading, “amalgamation of man[,] and [amalgamation of] beast,” referring on the human level to mingling of races of men, specifically, the pre-Flood intermarriage of the righteous descendants of Seth with the “ungodly race of Cain,”⁵³ and on the animal level, to (4) the pre Flood production of “confused species” of animals “which God did not create” and which did not survive the Flood, as well as to the post-Flood proliferation of “almost endless varieties of species.”⁵⁴ White’s other uses of *amalgamation* include (5) the emergence

of thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18); she wrote, “Every noxious herb is of his [Satan’s] sowing, and by his [Satan’s] ingenious methods of amalgamation [malicious genetic engineering of plants] he has corrupted the earth with tares.”⁵⁵ Finally, (6) she uses amalgamation in a moral sense to denote the moral declension of the righteous by association with the wicked. “By union with the world, the character of God’s people becomes tarnished, and through amalgamation with the corrupt, the fine gold becomes dim.”⁵⁶

The most disturbing aspect of the amalgamation statements is their potentially racial implications. Two years after the first publication of the amalgamation statements, Adventist defectors B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff published a pamphlet accusing Ellen White of racism on the basis of the amalgamation statements.⁵⁷

“These visions teach that the Negro race is *not human*.”⁵⁸ Snook and Brinkerhoff’s second allegation was that “she [Ellen White] told it to her husband, and he made it known to Eld. [sic] Ingraham, and he divulged the secret to the writer, that Sister White had seen that God never made the *Darkey*.”⁵⁹ The second allegation is simply “hearsay” and does not fit the context of her many direct statements in support of different ethnicities and particularly those of African descent.

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In 1851, thirteen years *before* she penned the amalgamation statements, she contrasted the “pious slave” who would “rise in triumph and victory and shake off the chains that bound him,” to the “wicked master” who stood under the judgment of God.⁶⁰ In 1858 she passionately defended the full humanity of Africans in bondage: “The tears of the pious bond-men and bond-women, of fathers, mothers and children, brothers and sisters, are all bottled up in heaven. Agony, *human agony*, is carried from place to place, and bought and sold.” With hot indignation she denounced “professed christians” [sic] who “hold their fellow-men in slavery” and “cruelly oppress from day to day their *fellow-men*.”⁶¹

In 1859, she charged Adventists to disregard the Fugitive Slave Law, requiring runaway slaves in nonslave states to be returned to their masters, “whatever the consequences.”⁶² She solemnly charged Adventists to remove from church membership any of their number who clung to proslavery views.⁶³ “The black man’s name is written in the book of life beside the white man’s. All are one in Christ.

Birth, station, nationality, or color cannot elevate or degrade men.”

⁶⁴ The hundreds of pages of antislavery writing give strong evidence that, whatever she meant by the two brief enigmatic amalgamation statements, her belief in the full spiritual, moral, and intellectual equality of the Black race with all other humans is beyond question.

One common understanding of the term “amalgamation” in nineteenth-century America was interracial marriage or other sexual coupling between Europeans and Africans. ⁶⁵ Some have wondered if she viewed racial intermarriage as the sin so grievous that it brought on the Flood. ⁶⁶ This interpretation is unsupportable on several grounds. First, she was clear on the full humanity of different ethnicities. Second, she did not oppose interracial marriage on moral or theological grounds. ⁶⁷ She counseled against interracial marriage on the grounds of the social difficulties it caused in a nineteenth-century postslavery society. ⁶⁸

[190] Because of the brevity and inherent ambiguity of the amalgamation statements, and the fact that Ellen White never publicly clarified her meaning, several of the interpretations given could be viable. From the perspective of current science, none of these interpretations is unreasonable. Human-animal genetic chimeras are routinely made today in molecular biology labs. ⁶⁹ More controversial are chimeras made up of cells from human and animal embryos. ⁷⁰ Depraved behavior clearly separates people from God and mars the image of God in man.

Ironically, the problem with Ellen White’s amalgamation statements from a scientific perspective is not that they may not be true, but that there are so many ways they could be true that it is difficult to figure out exactly what she may have meant. From a historical and linguistic perspective, Nichol’s interpretation may be most defensible.

Statement 11: Choosing a wet nurse

Consistent with modern thinking, Ellen White recommended that mothers breast-feed in preference to bottle feeding⁷¹ She urged that mothers nurse their own children and not give them over to a “stranger” for the sake of “fashion” and ballroom “pleasure.” As a part of her argument she warned that a wet nurse “imparts her temper

and her temperament to the nursing child. The child's life is linked to hers. If the hireling is a coarse type of woman, passionate, and unreasonable; if she is not careful in her morals, the nursling will be, in all probability, of the same, or a similar type. The same coarse quality of blood, coursing in the veins of the hireling nurse, is in that of the child."⁷²

The main idea here is that mothers should nurse their own children whenever possible. She adds a popular scientific idea of her day that the quality of the wet nurse's milk is affected by her temperament and character. She uses this nineteenth-century idea to strengthen her main point that mothers should nurse their own children. Future scientific study may yet show that there is a link between a woman's milk and the psychological development of her child.

Statement 12: "Solitary vice"

Ellen White used the Victorian euphemisms "solitary vice" or "secret vice," but the precise intent of her terminology is not known. She did not use the term *masturbation*, which has a precise definition. Some believe these euphemisms refer to excessive or addictive masturbation in association with lustful thoughts. Whatever the precise definition, Ellen White repeatedly warned against this practice, describing in detail the *potential* consequences to mental, physical, and moral health.⁷³ What she wrote was in general agreement with medical and societal authorities in her day, but is mostly rejected by authorities today.

Some of her language indicates a repetitive, habitual "practice."⁷⁴ If she meant compulsive masturbation, then some of her descriptions of its physical effects resemble what contemporary specialists say about sexual addiction. According to therapist Robert Weiss, for example, frequent masturbation stimulates various chemical reactions in the body, "resulting in the over production of sex hormones and neurotransmitters." This situation creates a "big change of body chemistry"⁷⁵ Psychologist William M. Struthers, author of *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*, states, "Masturbation is playing with neurochemical fire" because it "affects one emotionally and neurologically" Citing several scientific studies, Struthers demonstrates that men who masturbate compul-

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sively “suffer from depression, memory problems, lack of focus, concentration problems, fatigue, back pain, decreased erections, premature ejaculation, and pelvic or testicular pain” ⁷⁶ Perhaps research is only beginning to discover the impact of compulsive masturbation on the physical being.

On the relation of masturbation to mental health, some clinical research concluded that the link is primarily psychological, without altogether dismissing the possibility of a physical link between masturbation and insanity. ⁷⁷ Psychological factors include fear, guilt, shame, remorse, and loss of self-respect. In the nineteenth-century worldview of an eternally burning hellfire, all of these were potent prods to insanity. In the far more secular world of today, these negative emotions are still factors in a variety of common psychosomatic ailments. C. C. Pfeiffer wrote, “We hate to say it, but in a zinc-deficient adolescent, sexual excitement and excessive masturbation might precipitate insanity.” ⁷⁸ D. F. Hor-robin agreed: “It is even possible, given the importance of zinc for the brain, that 19th-century moralists were correct when they said that repeated masturbation could make one mad [insane]!” ⁷⁹

Regarding the effect of masturbation on *moral and spiritual development*, the claim of Jesus Christ that lustful thoughts constitute a violation of the seventh commandment (Matt. 5:28) surely has implications for the practice of masturbation.

The point Ellen White is most ridiculed for is her statements about the potential effects of masturbation on *physical health*. In considering this, even if White’s *explanations* of the physical effects of masturbation could be shown to be overdrawn or linked to nineteenth-century ideas, the basic *instruction* remains valid: For Christians who are striving for holiness, masturbation represents a self-centered indulgence that falls short of God’s ideal, and as such is morally and spiritually detrimental. ⁸⁰

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Statement 13: The planets vision

This final example comes from a vision that was reported by others, but not directly from the pen of Ellen White. It illustrates the possibility that, in some cases, to prophetically reveal the “whole truth” about scientific matters could actually hinder one purpose

of prophecy, to increase faith without coercing it. In November 1846 in Topsham, Maine, Ellen White had a vision on the “opening heavens.” One witness was Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain, navigator, and amateur astronomer who believed Ellen White’s visions were merely a product of her poor health or excitable temperament. This vision changed his mind, because she described several planets. *Neither during this vision nor at any subsequent time, did she herself identify which planets she had seen.* But her description while in vision was sufficiently accurate for Bates to identify the planets, and to express his astonishment that the number of moons she ascribed to each planet represented exactly the latest discoveries of the British astronomer William Parsons, or Lord Rosse as he was called. Because the vision correlated with Bates’s understanding of astronomy, which was previously unknown to Ellen White, Bates became a believer in the supernatural origin of her visions. ⁸¹

With increasingly powerful telescopes, the number of moons known to orbit each of those planets has greatly increased, so an astronomer today would not come to the same conclusion as Bates did at the time. In any case, had the vision revealed today’s understanding, Bates would not have recognized its accuracy.

We must consider the historical context or background and the purpose of the prophetic revelation, which may not require scientific accuracy. In fact, sometimes accuracy is detrimental, as demonstrated by Ellen White’s planets vision. God does reveal scientific information when it is necessary for foundational faith, identity, or life and health purposes. For example, the seven-day Creation account establishes the entire foundation of biblical truth that defines God as Creator; His character; His relationship to us and our relationship to Him; our God-given identity; and the nature of righteousness and sin. The same would apply to the biblical account of the Flood, which is based on God’s response to human rebellion in actual history and His plan to save all who can be saved.

We must always remember that the understanding of science is constantly changing as new discoveries are made. Whether something Ellen White wrote is confirmed by current scientific evidence can change over time. Scientific understanding over the years has dramatically changed and frequently now affirms “what” is best as God revealed it to her. Even in cases where an *explanation* given

[193] might retrospectively seem dated, the instructions are valid and readers who follow them in a correct manner are benefited.

¹The content of this chapter is generally indebted to Roger W. Coon and, in particular sections, Jud Lake and Michael Campbell.

²Ellen G. White [EGW], *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 2:301.

³EGW, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1923), 328, 329.

⁴EGW, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press®, 1903), 128, 129.

⁵William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 45-55, 194, 261-266.

⁶EGW, *Spiritual Gifts: Important Facts of Faith, Laws of Health, and Testimonies* Nos. 1-10 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1864), 4:139

⁷EGW, *The Ministry of Healing* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1905), 127.

⁸EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:128.

⁹EGW, *Health Reformer*, October 1, 1871.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²“The False Hair Industry” *The Watchman*, August 1910, 503, 504.

¹³Earlier that year the *Health Reformer* reported an incident of a woman who wore a jute wig and experienced burrowing parasites in her scalp, citing the *Marshall Statesman* and the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican* (*Health Reformer*, January 1, 1871).

¹⁴EGW, *Health Reformer*, October 1, 1871.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Note a recent description of acute lead poisoning: “Neurological signs of acute poisoning typically are: paraesthesiae, pain, muscle weakness, encephalopathy (rare) with headache, convulsions, delirium, and coma.” J. M. S. Pearce, “Burton’s Line in Lead Poisoning” *European Neurology* 57, no. 2 (2007): 119. See also L. L. Brunton, D. Blumenthal, I. Buxton, and K. L. Parker, eds., “Principles of Toxicology,” in *Goodman and Gilman’s Manual of Pharmacology and Therapeutics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 1131. Cosmetics were still causing lead poisoning in 1925, according to C. A. Joseph, Lawrence T. Fairhall, and Paul Reznikoff, “Lead Poisoning,” *Medicine* 4, nos. 1-2 (1925): 4-8. For a description of palsy resulting from lead poisoning, see J. J. Du Mortier, “Lead Poisoning,” *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 2, no. 2 (December 1929): 149. Cf. Thomas Oliver, *Lead Poisoning: From the Industrial, Medical, and Social Points of View* (New York: Paul B. Hoeber, 1914), 113, 114; Rebecca C. Garcia and Wayne R. Snodgrass, “Lead Toxicity and Chelation Therapy,” *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy* 64 (January 2007): 49; J. Nriagu, *Lead and Lead Poisoning in Antiquity* (New York: John Wiley, 1983), 23-26.

¹⁷EGW, *Health Reformer*, November 1, 1871; emphasis supplied.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*; emphasis supplied.

²⁰EGW, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 2:68.

²¹EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1980), 3:287.

²²EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 302.

²³Grace Jacques with Patricia B. Mutch, “Dinner at Elmshaven,” ed. Sylvia Fagal (Berrien Springs, MI: Center for Adventist Research, 2002), 3, 13, 14, 17, 19.

²⁴EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, 15:246, originally written in 1873; *ibid.*, 11:136, originally written in 1876; *ibid.*, 5:406, originally written in 1888.

²⁵The impact of tyramine on blood pressure is widely recognized; particularly when it interacts with certain antidepressant drugs causing a hypertensive crisis commonly known as the “cheese effect” E.g., see Giris Jacob et al., “Tyramine-Induced Vasodilation Mediated by Dopamine Contamination: A Paradox Resolved,” *Hypertension* 46, no. 2 (August 2005): 355-359; Chad M. Vandenberg, Lawrence F. Blob, Eva M. Kemper, and Albert J. Azzaro, “Tyramine Pharmacokinetics and Reduced Bioavailability With Food,” *Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 43 (2003): 604-609.

²⁶EGW, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1952), 149; cf. EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 274, 275; EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:144; emphasis supplied.

²⁷E.g., see EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 274, 275; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:463, 464.

²⁸EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:144; *ibid.*, 3:243; EGW, *Health Reformer*, August 1, 1872.

²⁹EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:146; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:417.

³⁰EGW, *Health: How to Live* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1865), 58; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:417.

³¹See Roy Gane, “Leviticus, Numbers,” *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 234-237, 248-255; Roland K. Harrison, “Leper; Leprosy,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:104, 105

³²R. L. Foster et al., “Effect of Diet on Growth of M. Lepre in Mouse Footpads” (Leprosy Research Foundation, Loma Linda, CA), *Indian Journal of Leprosy* 61, no. 3 (July 1989): 360-366; see also R. L. Foster et al., “Nutrition in Leprosy: A Review,” *International Journal of Leprosy* 56, no. 1 (1988): 66-68.

³³See B. M. Clark et al., “Case-control Study of Armadillo Contact and Hansen’s Disease,” *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 78, no. 6 (June 2008): 962-967; Richard Truman, “Armadillos as a Source of Infection for Leprosy,” *Southern Medical Journal* 101, no. 6 (June 2008): 581, 582; S. Bruce et al., “Armadillo Exposure and Hansen’s Disease: An Epidemiologic Survey in Southern Texas,” 2 parts, *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 43, no. 1 (2000): 1:223-228.

³⁴EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:423, 424.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 423, reprinted from EGW, *Health: How to Live* (1865), No. 2, 29.

³⁶Lisa A. Croen et al., “Maternal and Paternal Age Risk of Autism Spectrum Disorders,” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 161, no. 4 (2007): 334-340.

³⁷EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:423.

³⁸Paul D. Thacker, “Biological Clock Ticks for Men, Too: Genetic Defects Linked to Sperm of Older Fathers,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 291 (2004):

1683-1685; cf. *New England Journal of Medicine* 347, no. 18 (October 2002): 1449-1451; Jenny Hope, "Birth Defect Risk 'Rises With Age of the Father,'" *London Daily Mail*, July 21, 2005, accessed February 8, 2006, www.ndss.org/content.cfm?fuseaction=NwsEvt.Article&art; M. B. Lauritsen, C. B. Pedersen, and P. B. Mortensen, "Effects of Familial Risk Factors and Place of Birth on the Risk of Autism: A Nationwide Register-based Study," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46, no. 9 (2005): 963-971.

³⁹EGW, *The Retirement Years* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1990), 114-120.

⁴⁰Ellen G. White Encyclopedia, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013), s.v. "White, Francis Edward Forga (1913-1992)."

⁴¹Don McMahon, "The Nature of Inspiration in the Health Writings of Ellen White," "Ellen White and Current Issues" Symposium, April 7, 2008, 5-37.

⁴²EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:79, 80.

⁴³O. Stutzer, *Geology of Coal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 309, 310; cf. E. E. Thurlow, "Western Coal" *Mining Engineering* 26 (1974): 30-33; and G. S. Rogers, "Baked Shale and Slag Formed by the Burning of Coal Beds" *U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper*, 108-A (1918); all cited in Warren Johns, "Ellen G. White and Subterranean Fires, Part 2" *Ministry*, October 1977, 19-21.

⁴⁴Glenn B. Stracher, ed., *Geology of Coal Fires: Case Studies From Around the World*, *Reviews in Engineering Geology*, vol. 18 (Boulder, CO: Geological Society of America, 2007).

⁴⁵EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:34.

⁴⁶EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1958), 45.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 112; EGW, *Education*, 129.

⁴⁸EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:63, 75.

⁴⁹EGW, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing/Review and Herald®, 1870-1884), 1:69, 78.

⁵⁰EGW, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 81, 82; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 3:452.

⁵¹E.g., consider the following in a letter to the prominent scientist Louis Agassiz: "Will not the general practical amalgamation fostered by slavery become more general after its abolition? If so, will not the proportion of mulattoes become greater and that of the pure blacks less?" Letter from Dr. S. G. Howe to Louis Agassiz, Portsmouth, August 3, 1863, in *Louis Agassiz: His Life and Correspondence*, ed. Elizabeth Cary Agassiz (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885).

⁵²See EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:53, 54, 60-64; cf. F. D. Nichol, "Amalgamation of Man and Beast," in *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1951); available online at <http://www.WhiteEstate.org/books/egwhc/EGWHCc20.html#c20>.

⁵³EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:60.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁵EGW, Manuscript 65, 1899; "Ellen G. White Comments" Gen. 3:18, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1953), 1:1086; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:288; EGW, Manuscript Releases, 16:247 (undated); Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 306-322.

⁵⁶EGW, *Review and Herald*, August 23, 1892, par. 3.

⁵⁷B. F. Snook and Wm. H. Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White Not of God* (Cedar Rapids: Cedar Valley Times Book and Job Print, 1866), 9. The Snook and Brinkerhoff pamphlet was apparently released early in 1866 as Uriah Smith began a series responding to it in the June 12, 1866, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

⁵⁸Snook and Brinkerhoff, "They Teach Doctrines Contrary to the Bible, Absurd, Inconsistent and Contradictory," in *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White Not of God*, 9; emphasis in original.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

⁶⁰EGW, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851), 17; reprinted in EGW, *Early Writings* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1882), 35.

⁶¹EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1:191; emphasis supplied. See EGW, *Early Writings*, 275, 276.

⁶²EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:201, 202.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 1:360.

⁶⁴EGW, Manuscript 6, 1891; EGW, *Selected Messages*, 2:342; EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7:223.

⁶⁵See, e.g., in addition to the already cited letter to Louis Agassiz, John Campbell, *Negro- Mania: Being an Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* (Philadelphia: Campbell and Power, 1851), 11. Note that this work argues against the humanity of African slaves, whereas Howe's letter seems to assume their humanity, so "amalgamation" was not necessarily a pejorative term.

⁶⁶There is a rich literature espousing this view around the time Ellen White wrote. See, e.g., Ariel [Buckner H. Payne], *The Negro: What Is His Ethnological Status?* 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: The Proprietor, 1867), 31.

⁶⁷EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 383.

⁶⁸EGW, *Selected Messages* (1896), 2:343, 344.

⁶⁹For a spectacular example, see Aideen O'Doherty et al., "An Aneuploid Mouse Strain Carrying Human Chromosome 21 With Down Syndrome Phenotypes," *Science* 309, no. 5743 (2005): 2033-2037.

⁷⁰Phillip Karpwicz, Cynthia B. Choen, Derek J. Van der Kooy, "Developing Human-Non- Human Chimeras in Human Stem Cell Research: Ethical Issues and Boundries," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 15, no. 2 (2005): 107-34; Erika Chueck, "Biologists Seek Consensus on Guidelines for Stem-Cell Research," *Nature* 431, no. 7011 (2004): 885; and Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's statement on its decision regarding hybrid embryos. September 5, 2007.

⁷¹EGW, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1938), 227.

⁷²EGW, *Health Reformer*, September 1, 1871.

⁷³EGW, *An Appeal to Mothers: The Great Cause of the Physical, Mental, and Moral Ruin of Many of the Children of Our Time* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1864), 62; EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:347, 361, 391, 392, 402-410, 469, 470, 481; *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:97; *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:78, 91; EGW, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1954), 444, 445, 457, 458.

⁷⁴EGW, *Appeal to Mothers*, 18.

⁷⁵Robert Weiss, "Understanding Compulsive Masturbation," *Sexual Recovery*, <http://www.sexualrecovery.com/resources/articles/understanding-compulsive-masturbation.php>.

⁷⁶William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 169, 172; see also Patrick J. Carnes, "Cybersex, Courtship, and Escalating Arousal: Factors in Addictive Sexual Desire" *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 8, no. 1 (2001): 45-78; Al Cooper et al., "Online Sexual Activity: An Examination of Potentially Problematic Behaviors" *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 11, no. 3 (2004): 129-43; and G. Holstege et al., "Brain Activation During Human Male Ejaculation" *Journal of Neuroscience* 23, no. 27 (October 2003): 9185-9193.

⁷⁷E. H. Hare, "Masturbatory Insanity: The History of an Idea" *Journal of Mental Science* 108 (January 1962): 2, review of W. Malamud and G. Palmer, "The Role Played by Masturbation in the Causation of Mental Disturbances" *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 76 (1932): 220.

⁷⁸C. C. Pfeiffer, *Zinc and Other Micro-Nutrients* (New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1978), 45.

⁷⁹D. F. Horrobin, ed., *Zinc* (Saint Albans, VT: Vitabooks, 1981), 8.

⁸⁰D. R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 222, 223.

⁸¹Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1985), 1:113, 114.

Chapter Fourteen - Ellen White and Vegetarianism [194]

[195]

Theodore Levterov [196]

[197]

Seventh-day Adventists are known for their promotion of health-
ful living and a vegetarian diet. Although not all Adventists are
practicing vegetarians, the denomination, in general, has upheld
the vegetarian lifestyle as a better option for enhanced health and
longevity. Several recent studies have shown that Seventh-day Ad-
ventists are significantly healthier and live on average seven to ten
years longer than does the general population. ¹ [198]
[199]

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the movement, has
played a crucial role in the formation of distinctive Adventist lifestyle
practices. Her major health visions in the early 1860s became a
turning point in the Seventh-day Adventist attitude toward healthful
living, including the promotion of vegetarianism. This chapter will
give a brief overview of the history of Ellen White’s acceptance and
practice of a vegetarian diet, and explores her perspectives.

**A “great meat eater”: The years leading up to the 1863 health
vision**

Ellen White did not address the subject of vegetarianism prior to
her major vision on health in 1863. According to her own record,
she did not possess great health in her teenage and young adult years
during the 1840s and 1850s. Thus being “weak and feeble” and
“subject to frequent fainting spells,” she saw meat as a necessary
article of food for her health. ² Writing of her experience, she stated:
I have thought for years that I was dependent upon a meat diet for
strength. . . . It has been very difficult for me to go from one
meal to another without suffering from faintness at the stomach, and
dizziness of the head. . . . Eating meat removed for the time these
faint feelings. I therefore decided that meat was indispensable in my
case. ³ [200]

In 1901, she reflected again how meat was “her principle article of diet” during those early years of her life.⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that Ellen White described herself as being a “great meat eater”⁵

Her first visions addressing issues of health and healthful living during the 1840s and 1850s did not deal with questions of meat eating. In 1848, for example, she was shown the injurious effects of tobacco, tea, and coffee and advised believers to give them up.⁶ On February 12, 1854, she reported receiving another vision that dealt in part with issues of bodily cleanliness, temperance, control of appetites, and the harmful effects of the use of “rich food” (or spices).⁷

It seems that Ellen White’s only reference to meat eating prior to her major 1863 vision on health was her rebuke of the Haskell family for agitating the question of abstinence from eating pork among Sabbatarian believers in the late 1850s. She wrote:

I saw that your views concerning swine’s flesh would prove no injury if you have them to yourselves; but in your judgment and opinion you have made this question a test, and your actions have plainly shown your faith in this matter. If God requires His people to abstain from swine’s flesh, He will convict them on the matter. . . . If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine’s flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His *church* their duty.⁸

Note that Ellen White neither condoned nor condemned the eating of pork at that time. She was, however, against Haskell’s belief to make abstinence from pork a test of church fellowship based on the testimony of “two or three.” Another who must be included among the “two or three” would be Joseph Bates, who became a vegetarian before the 1844 disappointment. It should also be noted that there was a robust health reform movement in America that was advocating vegetarianism before Ellen White’s visions.

James White, in line with his wife’s position, also defended the eating of “swine flesh,” believing that it was not condemned in the New Testament.⁹ Furthermore, he noted that Sabbatarians had much greater work to do than to deal with such questions (of meat eating) that would “only distract the flock of God, and lead the minds of the

brethren from the importance of the present work of God among the remnant”¹⁰

In the early 1860s, however, Ellen White’s position on meat eating would change. After her vision in 1863, she understood the importance of diet and began to promote vegetarianism. Though not the first to advocate vegetarian-ism, she helped Seventh-day Adventists to see the importance of health and to become advocates of healthful living and a vegetarian diet.

A promoter of vegetarianism: 1863 to 1893

Ellen White received her first major vision on health on June 6, 1863, at the home of Aaron Hilliard in Otsego, Michigan. Although the vision contained specific instructions concerning the health habits of James and Ellen White in particular, there were a number of general core principles related to healthful living, including diet and meat consumption. Among those were the harmful effects of pork eating and the benefit of vegetarianism.¹¹ Thus she wrote that “in order to preserve health, temperance in all things is necessary. . . . The eating of pork has produced scrofula, leprosy and cancerous humors. Pork-eating is still causing the most intense suffering to the human race.”¹² Concerning meat in general she noted that “there are but a few animals that are free from disease. . . . They are killed, and prepared for the market, and people eat freely of this poisonous animal food. Much disease is caused in this manner. . . . Many die of disease caused wholly by meat-eating, yet the world does not seem to be the wiser.”¹³

On December 25, 1865, in Rochester, New York, Ellen White received an additional major vision on health. This time she was shown that health reform had to become an essential part of the Seventh-day Adventist mission. She wrote: “The health reform, I was shown, is a part of the third angel’s message and is just as closely connected with it as are the arm and hand with the human body. I saw that we as a people must make an advance move in this great work.”¹⁴ She also urged Seventh-day Adventists to establish their own health institution in order to help people live better and healthier lives. As a result, Seventh-day Adventists would build

medical institutions, publish health literature, and become promoters of healthful living, including vegetarianism. ¹⁵

In general, Ellen White followed a vegetarian diet after her vision in 1863. One year later, she noted that since the Lord presented to her “the subject of meat eating in relation to health,” she left “the use of meat.” As she acknowledged:

[202] For a while it was rather difficult to bring my appetite to bread, for which formerly, I have had but little relish. But by persevering, I have been able to do this. I have lived for nearly one year without meat. . . . Yet my health has never been better than for the past six months. My former faint and dizzy feelings have left me. My appetite is satisfied. My food is eaten with a greater relish than ever before. I have no trouble with dropsy or heart disease. I have within eight months lost twenty-five pounds of flesh. I am better without it. I have more strength than I have realized for years. ¹⁶

In 1869 she wrote to Edson, her son, that she (and James White) were “strict” in their diet to follow “the light” that God had given them and advised him to follow the same path. “We have advised you not to eat butter and meat,” she wrote. “*We have not had it on our table.* I should hope you would feel that we had advised you for your good and not to deprive you of these things because of any notions of our own.” ¹⁷

During the same year, speaking at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, Ellen White again reported that since she had received “the health reform message” she had not changed her course “a particle.” As she put it:

I have not taken one step back since the light from heaven upon this subject [diet] first shone upon my pathway. I broke away from everything at once,—from meat and butter, and from three meals,—and that while engaged in exhaustive brain labor, writing from early morning till sundown I was a great meat eater. But when faint, I placed my arms across my stomach and said: “I will not taste a morsel. I will eat simple food, or I will not eat at all.” Bread was distasteful to me. I could seldom eat a piece as large as a dollar [coin]. Some things in the reform I could get along with very well, but when I came to the bread I was especially set against it. When I made these changes I had a special battle to fight. The first two or three meals, I could not eat. I said to my stomach: “You may

wait until you can eat bread.” In a little while I could eat bread, and graham bread, too. This I could not eat before; but now it tastes good, and I have had no loss of appetite. ¹⁸

Evidently, Ellen White’s decision to follow a meatless diet was not without personal struggles. However, as she attested many years later, following the health principles revealed to her in 1863 was a “great blessing” and she was enjoying “better health” at the age of seventy-six (in 1904) than during her youthful years. ¹⁹

Although her habitual practice was to avoid eating meat, there were times when she used meat. ²⁰ First, Ellen White sometimes departed from her usual meatless diet while traveling. Being a major leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, she and James White traveled quite extensively. Traveling in the nineteenth century, however, was not as convenient and comfortable as today. Under such circumstances, as Roger Coon rightly observes, “it was difficult, and sometimes impossible, to follow a strictly vegetarian diet.” ²¹

[203]

Related to the traveling issues was the Whites’ dependence on the “hospi-tality” of fellow believers. Since the majority of them were poor, it was difficult for many to discard meat entirely. Plus, fruits and vegetables were available only in season. ²² In 1878, for example, Ellen White described how they had spent Christmas with a poor family while in Denison, Texas. “We had a quar-ter of venison cooked and stuffing,” she wrote. “It was as tender as chicken. We all enjoyed it very much. There is plenty of venison in [the] market. I have not seen in years so much poverty as I have seen since I have come to Texas. Brother Moore has had poor health and he has nothing—not a cent to get provisions with. We must help that family or they must suffer for the very necessities of life” ²³ In another letter from 1895, while living in Australia, Ellen White described again that many Adventist families were prevented from having a meatless diet because of poverty and difficult conditions. She noted:

I have been passing through an experience in this country [Australia] that is similar to the experience that I had in new fields in America. I have seen families whose circumstances would not permit them to furnish their table with healthful food. Unbelieving neighbors have sent them in portions of meat from animals recently killed. They have made soup of the meat, and supplied their large

families of children with meals of bread and soup. It was not my duty, nor did I think it was the duty of any one else to lecture them upon the evils of meat-eating.

I feel sincere pity for families who have newly come to the faith, and who are so pressed with poverty that they know not from whence their next meal is coming. It is not my duty to discourse to them on healthful eating. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silent.
²⁴

Clearly, Ellen White was well aware of the difference between the ideal diet and the real circumstances of believers. In situational circumstances she believed that God wanted us “to have common sense” and to “reason from common sense.”²⁵ And Ellen White seemed to have followed this principle in all her counsels, including vegetarianism.

[204] Another time when Ellen departed from a vegetarian diet was during a transition to a new cook. According to W. C. White, most new cooks who joined the White family did not know how to prepare vegetarian dishes. During those times, Willie wrote, “our table showed some compromise between the standard which sister White was aiming at and the knowledge and experience and standard of the new cook.”²⁶ Not surprisingly, in 1892 Ellen White wrote from Australia to the General Conference president O. A. Olsen that she would pay a “higher price for a cook than for any other part of my work. Were I to act over the preparation in coming to this place, I would say, Give me an experienced cook who has some inventive powers to prepare simple dishes healthfully, and that will not disgust the appetite. I am in earnest in this matter.”²⁷

Ellen White also seemed to have used meat (or spoke sympathetically of others who used it) for remedial purposes. In 1874, for example, she noted that James White bought some meat for May Walling, her grandniece, because she was sick.²⁸ According to Arthur White’s recollection, Ellen White was also once advised to eat a soup of oysters for her upset stomach.²⁹ We must note, of course, that the Seventh-day Adventist position on clean and unclean meats grew with time and oysters were not initially understood to be unclean.³⁰ In 1881, John H. Kellogg also advised Ellen White, who was suffering from “severe attacks of headache and nervous

prostration,” among other things, to eat “a little fresh meat, or game of any kind.” ³¹

Remarkably, Ellen White seemed to have had a very balanced position on the use of meat for medical purposes. On one side, she advised people to be cautious concerning the therapeutic use of meat because of diseases found in animals. ³² On the other, she spoke against the total abandonment of meat for certain medical cases. In her publication on “health” in the *Youth Instructor*, for instance, she encouraged the eating of “fruit and vegetables and bread.” At the same time, however, she also recognized that those who had “feeble digestive organs” could use meat when they could not “eat vegetables, fruit, or porridge.” ³³ In 1895, she wrote to Dr. John H. Kellogg that while he had to encourage a vegetarian diet for better health, he was to make no such demands from people suffering from terminal diseases. Such people, Ellen White advised, were not to be “burdened with the question as to whether they should leave meat eating or not. Be careful to make no stringent resolutions in regard to this matter.” ³⁴ She made the same point to Dr. and Mrs. Kress and their patients in 1905, noting that people dying of consumption (tuberculosis) and asking for chicken broth “should have it.” At the same time, however, her advice was not to be used as an “excuse for others to think [that] their case required the same diet.” ³⁵ Thus Ellen White’s approach to meat eating in cases of sickness varied on a case-by-case basis. [205]

There were also times when Ellen White used meat in emergency situations. In 1873, for example, the Whites were in the mountains of Colorado when their wagon broke down. While waiting for the repaired parts to be brought back, their food supplies began to run low. As Ellen White reported in her diary, Willie and their companion “brother Glover” did some hunting and fishing and for the following few days they ate some fish and meat in order to survive. ³⁶

In addition, there might have been times, at least according to some of Ellen White’s critics, when she might have eaten meat when it had not been absolutely necessary to do so. ³⁷ Even if these accounts are correct, Ellen White never hid the fact that she had used meat occasionally after her 1863 vision. After all, as we have noted, she was a “great meat eater” and at times she struggled to abandon

meat completely. Moreover, she never considered eating meat a sin. Writing to Adventist colporteurs, for example, she advised “every Sabbath keeping [sic] canvasser to avoid meat eating, *not because it is regarded as sin to eat meat, but because it is not healthful*”³⁸

Thus Ellen White, in the period after her major visions on health in the 1860s, accepted and spoke of vegetarianism as the ideal diet for health. She also, in general, practiced vegetarianism, although at times she continued to eat meat. This, however, would change in the beginning of the 1890s.

Becoming a strict vegetarian: 1894-1915

In January 1894, Ellen White came to a major transition in her dietary life-style as she made a decision to become a strict vegetarian. According to her own recollection, while she was attending the Brighton camp meeting, near Melbourne, Australia, she was approached by a Catholic woman who prompted her to think about the cruelty toward animals killed for meat. Ellen White described the event later: “But when the selfishness of taking the lives of animals to gratify a perverted taste was presented to me by a Catholic woman, kneeling at my feet, I felt ashamed and distressed. I saw it in a new light, and I said, I will no longer patronize the butchers. *I will not have the flesh of corpses on my table*”³⁹

[206] Interestingly, while Ellen White spoke mostly of the health benefits of vegetarianism, she made a personal decision to become a strict vegetarian because of ethical concerns—the cruelty against animals. It was not the first time that Ellen White spoke of animal cruelty in relation to vegetarianism. In 1864, for example, when she wrote out the health principles of her first major vision on health, she noted that “some animals are inhumanly treated while being brought to the slaughter. They are literally tortured, and after they have endured many hours of extreme suffering, are butchered.”⁴⁰ Later in 1905, in her classic work on health, *The Ministry of Healing*, Ellen White combined the two arguments together.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it seems that most of the time her emphasis was on the healthy benefits of a vegetarian lifestyle rather than on ethical concerns.

It seems that Ellen White kept her pledge not to use meat after the Brighton camp meeting in 1894. A year later, she wrote that “since

the camp-meeting at Brighton [January, 1894] I have absolutely banished meat from my table. It is an understood thing that whether I am at home or abroad, nothing of this kind is to be used in my family, or come upon my table”⁴² In 1896, she noted again that while before she had permitted meat to be served at her house occasionally, after the Brighton camp meeting, she did not allow that to happen. “All who come to my table are welcome,” she wrote, “but I place before them no meat. Grains, vegetables, and fresh and canned fruit constitute our table fare.”⁴³ In 1908, she affirmed again that it had been “many years since I have had meat on my table at home.”⁴⁴

Intriguingly, while Ellen White seemed to have given up meat eating, she continued to occasionally consume fish (at least for a time) after her 1894 experience. In a letter to A. O. Tait, written in 1895, for instance, she noted that while her family did not eat any meat, they had some fish from time to time.⁴⁵ On another occasion, she asked her son to get some fish for the workmen on their orchard in Australia.⁴⁶ In 1896, in a letter to her niece, Mrs. Mary Watson, she again wrote: “Two years ago I came to the conclusion that there was danger in using the flesh of dead animals, and since then I have not used meat at all. It is never placed on my table. *I use fish when I can get it.* We can get beautiful fish from the salt water lake near here.”⁴⁷ Thus while Ellen White did not eat meat, she continued to use fish as part of her vegetarian diet. Even today, some people don’t consider fish “meat.”

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Ellen White would become more and more “afraid” of eating even fish because of pollution and contamination of the waters. Eventually she stopped consuming fish as well.⁴⁸

As Ellen White practiced vegetarianism and saw the health benefits of it, she became more and more forceful in her call to church members for being more faithful in health reform and vegetarian diet. In a letter to the Maxon family, for example, in 1896, Ellen White wrote: “You have told me what advantage a meat diet is to you I must tell you what a non-flesh diet has done for me.” She then described in some detail her health challenges during her earlier years. Then she concluded: “I have written this to give you some idea of how we live. I never enjoyed better health than I do at the present time, and never did more writing.”⁴⁹ In *The Ministry of*

Healing, she wrote again that “flesh [food] was never the best food. In all cases educate the conscience, enlist the will, supply good, wholesome food, and the change will be readily made, and the demand for flesh will soon cease. Is it not time that all should aim to dispense with flesh foods?” ⁵⁰

Ellen White’s excitement over the benefits of vegetarianism seemed to culminate in 1908, when she suggested in a private letter to A. G. Daniells, the General Conference president, for Adventists to sign an “anti-meat” pledge. ⁵¹ After a followup discussion, however, it was agreed that a broad education among members on the importance of health reform and diet would be more profitable instead of signing “anti-meat” pledges. ⁵² Ellen White’s testimony, entitled “Faithfulness in Health Reform,” that was read to the delegates at the General Conference in Washington, D.C., on May 31, 1909, was a result of that decision. Part of the testimony described the benefits of vegetarian diet over flesh foods. ⁵³ Thus Ellen White became more forceful in her appeals for a stricter vegetarian lifestyle after she herself became a stricter vegetarian and experienced its benefits.

Ellen White and a vegan diet

One additional aspect of Ellen White’s approach to vegetarianism that needs to be briefly considered is her use of dairy products and eggs. Ellen White’s principal health concern for animal products was disease. This was true of meat, and it was also true of dairy products. Two statements make this clear. “The time may come when it will not be safe to use milk. But if the cows are healthy and the milk thoroughly cooked, there is no necessity of creating a time of trouble beforehand.” ⁵⁴ “If milk is used, it should be thoroughly sterilized; with this precaution, there is less danger of contracting diseases from its use.” ⁵⁵ In her own experience she followed this practice and as far as can be determined, never discarded the use of dairy products. She wrote in 1908 of her practice. “We eat no meat or butter [she used cream instead], and use very little milk in cooking” ⁵⁶ D. H. Kress, an Adventist physician, strongly promoted a strict vegan diet. He had personally avoided all meat, dairy, and eggs for an extended period of time. In 1901, he developed some

serious health problems and received a letter from Ellen White with the following counsel:

When you see that you are becoming weak physically, it is essential for you to make changes, and at once. Put into your diet something you have left out. It is your duty to do this. Get eggs from healthy fowls. Use these eggs cooked or raw. Drop them uncooked [208] into the best unfermented wine you can find. This will supply that which is necessary to your system.⁵⁷

Though her statements on a vegan diet are mostly tentative, she did write more definitely about the future and the use of dairy products. “The light given me is that it will not be very long before we shall have to give up any animal food. Even milk will have to be discarded. Disease is accumulating rapidly.”⁵⁸ The determination of when this time has arrived seems to be left to the individual and should not be mandated. It is important to recognize that Ellen White should not be used to definitively argue for a vegan diet.

Major perspectives on Ellen White and vegetarianism

In conclusion, there are several perspectives to be noted on the question of Ellen White and vegetarianism. First, Ellen White affirmed that vegetarianism was the best and the ideal diet for humans. Her appeal for a vegetarian life-style was based primarily on two arguments: (1) health benefits; and (2) ethical concerns, particularly the cruelty toward animals.⁵⁹ Although she at times used meat even after her 1863 vision, she had always affirmed that a vegetarian diet led to better health and a better quality of life. Her own life was also a testimony to that fact, as she often acknowledged. Interestingly, after her decision to abstain from meat eating entirely in 1894, Ellen White became even more forceful in her appeal to believers to live according to the ideal biblical health principles that included a vegetarian diet. Even so, she did not consider meat eating a sin.

A second perspective was Ellen White’s own experience and practice of vegetarianism. Evidently, her understanding on the issue developed with time. As we have noted, even after her 1863 major vision on health, she continued to consume meat occasionally, though she generally abstained from placing meat on her own table. At times, she fought personal battles over her appetite and meat

craving. She, however, did not consider such events as a denial of the general health principles that she followed. After all, Ellen White viewed health as a principle, while she considered vegetarianism as an application whose practices could vary according to contextual situations. It was this distinction that led Ellen White to refuse, even in later years, to make vegetarianism a “test of fellowship.”⁶⁰

[209] Based on her own experience, Ellen White advocated patience with people who were trying to advance in health reform and diet. “We should be very cautious not to advance too fast,” she warned, “lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reform we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. . . . We must lead the people along patiently and gradually, remembering the hole of the pit whence we were digged.”⁶¹

A third perspective was Ellen White’s advice against “extremes” in vegetarianism. While she believed that a vegetarian diet was best, she also acknowledged that there were times when it was not possible. Therefore, she always recommended a principle-based and “common sense” approach to vegetarianism. One of her best counsels reads:

There is real common sense in dietetic reform. The subject should be studied broadly and deeply, and no one should criticize others because their practice is not, in all things, in harmony with his own. It is impossible to make an unvarying rule to regulate every one’s habits, and no one should think himself a criterion for all. Not all can eat the same things. Foods that are palatable and wholesome to one person may be distasteful, and even harmful, to another.⁶²

Thus Ellen White’s positions on vegetarianism may helpfully serve Seventh-day Adventists, and even those who are not, as they continue to promote and encourage a vegetarian diet as the best and the most healthful lifestyle option for people today. Moreover, the relation of vegetarianism to health and ethical concerns, the understanding that health reform is a growing experience, being sensitive and patient with people who are trying to change, and avoiding “extremes” in diet are useful lessons to remember as the denomination continues to advocate vegetarianism in the twenty-first century.

¹See, e.g., Gary E. Frasier, *Diet, Life Expectancy, and Chronic Disease: Studies of Seventh-day Adventists and Other Vegetarians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Dan Buettner, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008), 123-165.

²See Ellen G. White [EGW], *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 9:158.

³EGW, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1864), 4:153.

⁴EGW to Brethren and Sister, July 15, 1901, Letter 83, 1901 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate).

⁵EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:371.

⁶James White, "Western Tour: Kansas Camp-Meeting," *Review and Herald*, November 8, 1870, 165. See also EGW to Brother Barnes, December 14, 1851, Letter 5, 1851.

⁷EGW, "Reproof for Adultery and Neglect of Children," Manuscript 1, 1854.

⁸EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:206, 207.

⁹See James White, "Swine Flesh," *Review and Herald*, May 23, 1854, 140. James White's position was based on his misinterpretation of Acts 10.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:120-151. For a list of the health principles of Ellen White's 1863 vision see also: Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 283, 284.

¹²EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:146.

¹³*Ibid.*, 146, 147.

¹⁴EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:486.

¹⁵For general information on the development of the Seventh-day Adventist health message, see Richard W Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2000), 100-113; Doris E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1965).

¹⁶EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:153, 154.

¹⁷EGW to J. Edson White, May 25, 1869, Letter 5, 1869; emphasis supplied.

¹⁸EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:371, 372.

¹⁹See EGW, "Lessons From the Third Chapter of Revelation," Manuscript 50, 1904.

²⁰I am indebted to Roger Coon for most of this information. See Roger Coon, *Ellen White and Vegetarianism: Did She Practice What She Preached?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1986).

²¹*Ibid.*, 11.

²²*Ibid.*, 12, 13.

²³EGW to Dear Family at Battle Creek, December 26, 1878, Letter 63, 1878.

²⁴EGW to O. A. Tait, June 6, 1895, Letter 76, 1895.

²⁵EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1980), 3:217.

²⁶Cited by Arthur L. White in a letter to Anna Frazier, December 18, 1935 (White Document File-144-e, Heritage Research Center [HRC], Loma Linda University [LLU], Loma Linda, CA).

²⁷EGW to Brother Olsen, January 1892, Letter 19c, 1892.

²⁸EGW to Clarence, February 15, 1874, Letter 12, 1874.

²⁹Arthur White, "The Dietary Witness of the E. G. White Household" (unpublished paper, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI).

³⁰For a discussion on the issue of clean and unclean meats among early Seventh-day Adventists, see Ron Graybill, "The Development of Adventist Thinking on Clean and Unclean Meats" (White Document File, 144-e, HRC, LLU).

³¹J. H. Kellogg to EGW, September 17, 1881.

³²See, e.g., EGW and James White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing, 1890), 118.

³³EGW, "Words to Students: Health" *Youth's Instructor*, May 31, 1894, 174.

³⁴EGW to John H. Kellogg, July 10, 1896, Letter 54, 1896.

³⁵EGW to Brother and Sister Kress, July 11, 1905, Letter 213, 1905.

³⁶EGW, "Diary: September 1 to 30, 1873" Manuscript 11, 1873.

³⁷These matters are discussed in more detail in: *A Critique of Prophetess of Health* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1976), 78-81. The booklet was a response to Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Note also that most of the critical arguments against Ellen White's dietary practices have been based on letters by John H. Kellogg after his leaving of the Adventist Church in 1907 and becoming somewhat critical of her prophetic claims. Kellogg's records, therefore, may be one-sided and may not give the full and the most truthful picture of Ellen White. For a brief overview of the Kellogg crisis, see Richard Schwarz, "The Kellogg Schism: The Hidden Issues" *Spectrum* (Autumn 1972): 23-39.

³⁸Ellen G. White, "Counsels to Our Colporteurs Regarding Carefulness in Diet," Manuscript 15, 1889; emphasis supplied.

³⁹EGW to Dr. and Mrs. Maxon, August 30, 1896, Letter 73a, 1896; emphasis supplied.

⁴⁰EGW, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4:147, 148.

⁴¹EGW, *The Ministry of Healing* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1905), 311-317,

⁴²EGW to O. A. Tait, June 6, 1895, Letter 76, 1895.

⁴³EGW to Dr. and Mrs. Maxon, August 30, 1896, Letter 73a, 1896.

⁴⁴EGW to J. Edson White, February 5, 1908, Letter 50, 1908.

⁴⁵EGW to O. A. Tait, June 6, 1895, Letter 76, 1895.

⁴⁶EGW to Willie White, August 6, 1895, Letter 149, 1895.

⁴⁷EGW to Mary [Clough] Watson, July 9, 1896, Letter 128, 1896; emphasis supplied.

⁴⁸See, e.g., EGW to O. A. Tait, June 6, 1895, Letter 76, 1895; EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 314, 315.

⁴⁹EGW to Dr. and Mrs. Maxon, August 30, 1896, Letter 73a, 1896.

⁵⁰EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 313, 317.

⁵¹EGW to A. G. Daniells, March 29, 1908, Letter 162, 1908. Ellen White wrote the letter in March, but she did not mail it until May 1908. This letter was never published for general use either by Ellen White or by the White Estate Trustees. Note also that Ellen White never wrote any "anti-meat" pledge but only suggested it as an idea. For more information on the topic, see White Document File-509, HRC, LLU.

⁵²See W. C. White to Conference Presidents and Leaders in Our Medical Missionary De-partment, “The Anti-Meat Pledge,” June 6, 1929 (White Document File-509, HRC, LLU).

⁵³See EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:153—166.

⁵⁴EGW to Bro. and Sr. Farnsworth, May 29, 1901, Letter 39, 1901.

⁵⁵EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 302.

⁵⁶EGW to J. H. Kellogg, April 17, 1899, Letter 73, 1899.

⁵⁷EGW to D. H. Kress, May 29, 1901, Letter 37, 1901.

⁵⁸EGW, “The Avondale Health Retreat,” *Union Conference Record (Australasian)*, July 26, 1899, 5.

⁵⁹See EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 311-317, where she combines the two arguments together.

⁶⁰EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:159.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 3:20, 21.

⁶²EGW, *The Ministry of Healing*, 319, 320.

[210] **Chapter Fifteen - The History and Work of the**
[211] **Ellen G. White Estate**

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[213] *James R. Nix*

Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people.¹

The four Ellen G. White wills

By 1907, when she made this prediction, Ellen White already had commissioned at least three wills in her effort to preserve and promote her writings following her death. And there would still be one more before the final 1912 will that was probated shortly after her death on July 16, 1915.² Although each succeeding will between 1891 and 1912 further refined Mrs. White's plans, one fact is clearly evident in each of them: Ellen White expected her writings to be of continuing service to the church following her death.

Before leaving for Australia in 1891, Ellen White drafted a no longer extant will about which very little is known. In it, she is reported to have left the major responsibilities to her son, William C. (Willie) White.³ Around 1898, Ellen White had a dream that caused her to think that she probably would not live until the Lord's return, an impression that doubtless kept her drafting wills until achieving one that was to her satisfaction.⁴

[214] On October 6, 1901, a year after returning to America from Australia, Ellen White signed a new will, drawn up by her friend, Nellie H. Druillard, an Adventist businesswoman.⁵ It was prepared without the knowledge of either of Ellen White's two sons. Her literary and property rights were to go to her sons, Edson and W. C. White. Edson also would receive his mother's library, while

Willie would get \$5,000 to help educate his children. Half of all future royalties from the sale of her books was to be used to translate, publish, and distribute her books, as well as to support various church mission, social, and education projects. She named her two sons as executors. The first hint of a trustee concept is found in an attached note suggesting that her literary assets be held in trust by her two sons and Elder S. N. Haskell as a “perpetual trust” for the uses detailed in her will.

Obviously not yet satisfied, Ellen White signed a revised will on August 14, 1906. For some reason, according to a handwritten note on it, the will was not acceptable to the General Conference officers. This time her literary estate was to be maintained by a committee of five persons, elected by the General Conference. Also, four specified individuals were to receive \$500 each. Her personal property would be divided between her two sons. Initially, half of the assets from her literary estate were to go to liquidate her indebtedness, 30 percent was to be divided between her two sons, and 20 percent was to be used to translate and publish her books. After her debts were liquidated, the 50 percent specified for debt liquidation was to be used for improving her books. Her son W. C. White was named sole executor of the estate. Why this will was not acceptable to the General Conference officers is unknown.

In 1909, Ellen White prepared yet another revision. In this unsigned draft will, W. C. White again was named sole executor. The same four individuals were each still to receive \$500, and both Willie and his brother were bequeathed certain specified items. Her literary estate itself was to be entrusted to a committee of five, including W. C. White; the president and secretary of the General Conference; and two others to be named by the General Conference in session. From her literary estate, 70 percent of the profits were designated to liquidate her indebtedness, after which the money would go to improve her books as well as to support the general missionary work of the church. The remaining 30 percent would be divided between her two sons. Neither this will nor the 1906 version previously described included any of the specific social or education projects specified in the 1901 will.

On February 9, 1912, Ellen White signed the will that was filed [215] at the time of her death. San Francisco attorney, Theodore A. Bell,

prepared it for \$25.85.⁶ Ellen White apparently never met with the attorney but rather conveyed her wishes to him through W. C. White. Besides stipulating Ellen White's instructions for the handling of her estate following her death—including her literary estate—the attorney also included a provision whereby if the trusts were ever terminated, the remaining assets would revert directly to W. C. White or his heirs.⁷

Although very interested in the disposition of Ellen White's literary estate, it appears that General Conference president A. G. Daniells had no input whatsoever in the will that was finally signed.⁸ W. C. White and Charles H. Jones, manager of the Pacific Press, were named executors of her estate.⁹

Contained in the probated will were many of the same provisions as in the previous ones. Five named individuals were each to receive \$500. Ellen White's son Edson was to receive \$3,000. The rights to several of her books, including *Education*, were willed to Ellen White's other son, Willie, as were her rights to two of Edson's books that she had received in exchange for money that she had loaned her elder son. W. C. White also was to receive his mother's personal library as well as all manuscripts, letters, diaries, and other writings not left to her five literary estate trustees. Her personal property was to be divided between her two sons.

The trusteeship established in her will specified five individuals by name: W. C. White, her son; Clarence C. Crisler, her secretary; Charles H. Jones, manager of the Pacific Press; Francis M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*; and Arthur G. Daniells, president of the General Conference. To them were left all her rights to the copyrights and bookplates for most of her twenty-four books then in print. In addition, they were given her general manuscript file and the indexes for it, plus her office library and furniture.

Although "self-perpetuating" is not actually mentioned in the will, provision was made for filling any future vacancies among her trustees, or their successors, by a majority of the remaining trustees. Should the surviving trustees ever not agree upon someone to fill a vacancy, the executive committee of the General Conference was to appoint the new trustee.

Royalty income was to be divided by the trustees as follows: (1) 20 percent of the net proceeds was to be divided equally between

each of her sons; (2) 5 percent was to be used as an education trust for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, or other worthy individuals. The balance was to be used to pay her debts. If there was any remaining income, it was to be used to improve the publication of her books then in print, produce additional translations, print new compilations from her manuscript file, assist with the general missionary work of the denomination, and support mission schools operated by the “Negro Department” of the General Conference, as well as to support mission schools for illiterate Whites in the southern states of the United States. [216]

Estate debt resolution

Following Ellen White’s death, the probate court appointed three appraisers to value her estate. They estimated its worth at \$65,721.87¹⁰ against an indebtedness of \$87,250.00,”¹¹ leaving an overall deficit balance of \$21,528.13. Throughout her lifetime, Ellen White had donated heavily to support the work of the church, sometimes borrowing money on which she paid interest—at least once as high as 7 percent—in order to have funds to donate to church projects.¹² Additionally, money was borrowed to pay for preparing and printing the several books published during the last fifteen years of her life,¹³ not to mention the ongoing preparation of other book manuscripts that were in various stages of readiness at the time of her death.¹⁴ Ellen White also had lent money to both of her surviving sons.¹⁵

In fairness to Ellen White, she died with no idea that her estate was insolvent. According to the financial records maintained by her accountant, her net worth was considerably more than her indebtedness.¹⁶ The difference between her net value as shown on the accountant’s books and the value of the estate arrived at by the court appraisers was due to the way the two totals were figured. The court appraisers based their appraisal upon what they thought things would sell for in an immediate court-appointed sale, whereas the accountant figured Ellen White’s net worth at the value that the book manuscripts, printing plates, and so on, had originally actually cost to produce. Neither figured the potential future value of the royalty income generated from the sale of Ellen White’s books. A

few weeks prior to Ellen White's death, several of her future trustees met at Elmshaven, and compared her net worth to her obligations. They were satisfied that the estate could cover all her debts.¹⁷

[217] Because Ellen White's estate did not have sufficient readily available assets to cover her indebtedness, in accordance with California law the court required that an estate sale be conducted.¹⁸ On October 2, 1916, the General Conference paid \$87,250.00¹⁹ to acquire the entire estate, including Elmshaven.²⁰ Legally, Ellen White's estate ceased to exist, though church leaders seem to have viewed the purchase more as a loan to the estate than as an actual purchase of it.²¹ Prior to that sale, the court would have received a copy of the terms of the agreement that had been worked out between the executors of the estate and the General Conference²² planning to honor some provisions of Ellen White's will, though not all of them.²³ One provision that was honored was the trust arrangement whereby the five trustees named by Ellen White²⁴ received her general unpublished letter and manuscript file. Eventually, the trustees repaid at 4 percent interest the estate's entire indebtedness to the General Conference. This was from royalties earned on the sale of Ellen White's books.²⁵ The repayment arrangement was in harmony with the intent of Ellen White's original will.²⁶ Honored also was the provision leaving her personal effects to her sons.²⁷

Responsibilities of the White Estate

A summary of the responsibilities relating to Ellen White's literary estate that her trustees still perform, based upon provisions in her will, is as follows: (1) Protect the copyrights to her writings, plus care for and improve the overall appearance of her books in the English language; (2) prepare and promote the translation and publication of her books in languages other than English; and (3) provide for the physical custody of her files and literary manuscripts, including all general file materials and indexes not provided for elsewhere in her will, as well as prepare for publication new compilations gleaned from her unpublished writings.²⁸

In more recent years, several additional assignments have come to the White Estate. They include (1) acquainting Seventh-day Adventists with Ellen White and her writings; (2) operating White

Estate branch offices, plus oversee the operation of the Ellen G. White Seventh-day Adventist research centers located in all of the world divisions; and (3) in 1996, the General Conference Executive Committee voted to ask the White Estate to be responsible for promoting and preserving the heritage of the denomination on behalf of the General Conference.²⁹

History of access to unpublished materials

For twenty-two years following Ellen White's death, her unpublished letters and manuscripts continued to be preserved in the fireproof vault attached to the back of the office building behind her Elmshaven home.³⁰

Initially, the majority of the White trustees, as well as the officers of the General Conference, were opposed to the publication of any Ellen White materials not printed during her lifetime.³¹ They felt that only Ellen White could properly publish, or make available for research, her unpublished materials. Both Clarence Crisler and W. C. White, the two trustees who had worked most closely with Ellen White during her lifetime, urged the judicious use of some previously unpublished materials in future compilations. The two men correctly pointed out that Ellen White's will specifically authorized the "printing of compilations from [her] manuscripts,"³² but they were overruled.³³ It was not until *Medical Ministry* was published in 1932 that an official Ellen White compilation came out containing any previously unpublished Ellen White materials.³⁴

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During the lifetime of the five original trustees, several significant things occurred. A number of Ellen White's books were translated and published in languages other than English. Several new compilations in English came out. A simple letter identification code for each book was developed, making possible the first *Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, published in 1926. The loan from the General Conference was repaid by the 1930s.³⁵ The trustees incorporated in 1933, ensuring the legal status of the White Estate. The office of the estate was transferred to the General Conference building in Takoma Park, Maryland, in 1938.

Throughout its history, the White Estate has sought a balance between those wishing access to everything Ellen White wrote and

those who thought that the existence of the estate was pointless. As recently as the 1960s, the last General Conference officer retired who reportedly did not think the White Estate was even needed.³⁶ The last General Conference department head who reportedly held a similar view retired in the early 1980s. Also, as recently as the late 1970s, two descendants of a former General Conference official threatened to sue the White Estate if it ever released any of the letters Ellen White wrote to their grandfather.³⁷ In short, throughout its history, the White Estate has of necessity been careful in terms of how it has handled the inspired counsels housed in its vaults. The White Estate trustees and staff have tried to make available any additional counsel that added understanding to what Ellen White published during her lifetime, but not embarrass anyone named in that counsel or their family. With the passing of time, the White Estate is able to do things today that would have been imprudent, if not totally impossible, as recently as just a few years ago.

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One such example is the 1987 reintegration of the former “Z-file” materials back into the main collection of Ellen White’s unpublished letters and manuscripts.³⁸ Many years earlier, eighty-six highly personal letters and manuscripts were placed in two separate drawers. Initially, they were restricted to all except the White Estate trustees and senior office staff. Eventually provision was made for limited use of the documents by others under certain conditions.³⁹ Although helpful instruction from this restricted collection was included in Ellen White compilations produced during the years the “Z-file” existed, it was always done in a manner that protected the identity of the person to whom the original counsel was addressed. The fact that virtually no one living had recollections of the people named in the “Z-file” documents allowed those materials to be reintegrated into the regular unpublished letters and manuscripts file.

The same proved true with the former Manuscript Release Policy. When originally instituted in the early 1930s, the Manuscript Release Policy required that everything requested for release must be read and approved by both the White Estate trustees as well as the members of the General Conference’s Spirit of Prophecy Committee. Initially, only specific quotations, generally consisting of just the requested sentences, were released. The questions asked by both groups were, “Why should we release this? Will it add anything new

to what is already in circulation?” By the time the Manuscript Release program ended in 1991,⁴⁰ in order to provide proper context, entire letters or manuscripts were released.⁴¹ By then, the question asked by those granting permission for release was, “Is there any reason why this material should not be released?” In other words, the determinative question had changed from “Why should we?” to “Why shouldn’t we?”

By the time the Manuscript Release Policy ended, most researchers viewed it as restrictive and cumbersome. They did not realize that the release procedures outlined in the policy had been instituted originally to make materials accessible.

In 1991, the White Estate Board of Trustees voted to plan for the publication of all the unpublished Ellen White letters and manuscripts preserved in its vault.⁴² Digitization and copyediting of the collection progressed through the 1990s. Eventually, between 2000 and 2002, the board took several actions to publish the earlier Ellen White materials as quickly as they could be annotated, including helpful background information regarding the people, places, and issues mentioned in the original letter or manuscript.⁴³ The actual publication of annotated letters and manuscripts covers at least through the year 1863. The White Estate voted in 2013 to prepare all of the unpublished letters and manuscripts, and other resources, for electronic publication during 2015.⁴⁴

Expanding mission of the White Estate

Shortly after the transfer, in 1960, of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary from Takoma Park, Maryland, to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, the White Estate trustees decided to open a branch office in the basement of the new seminary building.⁴⁵ Complete copies of the unpublished letters and manuscripts along with many other original documents were located there. In more recent years, the White Estate Branch Office has become part of the Center for Adventist Research located in the James White Library. In 1986, the Ellen White Research Center located in the Del E. Webb Memorial Library at Loma Linda University was granted full branch office status. Then in 1999, a third branch office was established in the Eva B. Dykes Library at Oak-wood

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University. In 2014, the Oakwood branch office became a research center when Oakwood University became a part of the North American Division. Two additional branch offices were approved in 2013: Adventist University of Africa (AUA), located in Kenya, and Adventist International Institute for Adventist Studies (AIAS) in the Philippines (opened in 2014).

In 1974, the Ellen G. White Estate, in cooperation with the General Conference, opened the first Ellen G. White Research Center at Newbold College in England. Between then and 2002, an Ellen White Research Center⁴⁶ was established in each of the church's world divisions,⁴⁷ with the exception of the North American Division. In 2015, the Oakwood branch office was reclassified as a research center, thus becoming the only division-operated research center in North America. The change occurred when corporate ownership of Oakwood University transferred from the General Conference to the North American Division.⁴⁸

In essence, research centers contain exactly the same types of White Estate resource materials as are found in the branch offices. The primary difference is in the funding of their operation. The General Conference provides most of the funding for the operation of branch offices. For the first research center in a division, the total cost of the primary resource materials, plus half of the cost of the director's salary with benefits, is paid by the General Conference. The remaining costs of operation, including the office space occupied by the center plus all other office staffing, are provided locally. Some divisions have opted to operate additional research centers within their territories. In such instances, the division involved is responsible financially for the entire setup and operational costs for additional research centers. In a few instances, research centers are owned and operated by union conference institutions that are responsible for them financially. Whatever the source of funding, all Ellen White research centers operate under the policies established by the Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees, as outlined in the *General Conference Working Policy*.⁴⁹

[221] At the time of Ellen White's death, the membership of the church was approximately 130,000,⁵⁰ with the majority of those living in North America. By June 2013, world membership was 17,994,120, of which approximately 94 percent lived outside North America.

⁵¹ During the nearly one hundred years of its existence, the White Estate has always attempted to tailor its ministry to meet the changing needs and demographics of a rapidly growing church. This has been especially true with the translation and publication of Ellen White's books in languages other than English. To date, *Steps to Christ* has been printed in more than 165 languages. At present, 115 Ellen White books and major pamphlets have been translated into at least one non-English language. Of that number, 37 have been translated into at least 10 non-English languages; 16 have been translated into at least 25 languages; 5 have been translated into at least 50 languages, and 2 have been translated into 75 or more languages. ⁵² Various programs promote the translation, publication, and distribution of Ellen White books into languages that church members around the world can read, and at an economical price. Many millions of Ellen White books have been published worldwide. These have been extensively promoted and generously subsidized by the denomination. The wide distribution in recent decades is unprecedented.

White Estate branch offices and research centers provide not only Ellen White resources, but also access to a wealth of other research materials for use by people living in their respective regions. The various offices and centers also conduct conferences, develop publications, and otherwise promote Adventist heritage and identity.

In 1996, the General Conference asked the White Estate to be responsible for promoting the Adventist heritage for the church. The following year the White Estate Board of Trustees became the constituency for Adventist Heritage Ministry. It operates Adventist historical sites including: the Joseph Bates boyhood home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts; the Hiram Edson farm in Port Gibson, New York; the William Miller home and farm near Whitehall, New York; and Historic Adventist Village in Battle Creek, Michigan. The organization seeks through heritage evangelism to keep alive, for the thousands of visitors who tour its sites each year, the story of God's leading in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 2015, an associate director of the White Estate was designated to be the executive director of Adventist Heritage Ministry.

Following the instructions of Ellen White in her will, the White Estate has produced a number of helpful compilations on various

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topics utilizing her published and unpublished writings and more than twenty daily devotionals from Ellen White's writings. It has also facilitated the publication, in facsimile format, of several early Ellen White publications. In addition, the White Estate sponsored the production of a six-volume biography of Ellen White, and college textbooks on Ellen White and the gift of prophecy.⁵³

In 1990, the White Estate introduced its then cutting-edge, state-of-the-art Ellen White CD-ROM.⁵⁴ Since that initial offering, other CD-ROM products, phone and tablet apps, Web sites, and other electronic media have been developed in various languages. This expanding and essential process brings Ellen White materials to any person with access to the Internet.

For today's English readers, the White Estate has developed modern English versions of several Ellen White books,⁵⁵ gender-neutral daily devotionals, as well as paraphrases. In addition, the White Estate has produced for several years *Ellen White Visionary for Kids*,⁵⁶ a quarterly online magazine for children ages eight to fourteen, and other resources.

As the church has grown, the number of White Estate trustees has been increased from the five named by Ellen White in her will to fifteen trustees now, five of whom are Life Trustees. The other ten serve as Term Trustees, elected to five-year terms. Throughout the years, various individuals have chaired the White Estate Board and served as secretary/director.⁵⁷ All of those associated with the White Estate are committed to keeping before church members and others the inspired counsels God gave to the Seventh-day Adventist Church through Ellen G. White. In short, the White Estate is dedicated to helping fulfill Ellen White's prediction that, "though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people."⁵⁸

¹Ellen G. White [EGW], Letter 371, 1907; printed in *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:55.

²Ellen White died at 3:40 p.m., Friday, July 16, 1915, at her "Elmshaven" home in northern California. W. C. White stated that prior to his mother going to Australia in 1891, she had a will prepared; no copies of it are now known to exist. See W. C. White, "A Statement to Those Members of the General Conference Committee Assembled at Mountain View Regarding the Proposed 'Joint Bill of Sale and Agreement' to Be Entered Into by the White Estate Trustees and the General Conference Corporation,"

dated "Mountain View, Calif., January 27, 1933," 5. Other draft wills located in the files of the White Estate include one signed and dated October 16, 1901; one signed and dated August 14, 1906; one unsigned dated 1909; and the actual signed and probated will dated February 9, 1912. See White Document File 823.

³W. C. White, "A Statement to Those Members" 5.

⁴Two W. C. White statements: One is dated February 10, 1937, and the other is printed in the June 1, 1913, General Conference Bulletin, 219. Copies of both are in the White Estate Questions and Answers File, 43-B-2.

⁵Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, 1996 ed., s.v. "Druillard, Nellie Helen (Rankin)"; Ellen G. White Encyclopedia, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013), s.v. "Druillard, Nellie Helen (Rankin) and Alma"

⁶Theodore A. Bell to W. C. White, February 29, 1912.

⁷Theodore A. Bell to W. C. White, January 10, 1912.

⁸A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, February 6, 1912.

⁹"Last Will and Testament of Ellen G. White" dated February 9, 1912, paragraph ELEVENTH.

¹⁰"Inventory and Appraisement" document filed with the Napa County Superior Court, dated September 21, 1915. Photocopy of document located in Ellen G. White Estate records dealing with Ellen White's estate.

¹¹"First and Final Assessment" document filed with the Napa County Superior Court, undated, though last entry listed is for December 31, 1916. The document was accepted by the court on February 13, 1917. Photocopy of documents located in Ellen G. White Estate files dealing with Ellen White's estate; see also Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1982), 6:457, where in round figures he lists the indebtedness of the estate at \$88,000 and its assets as being \$66,000; also, according to the minutes of the General Conference Committee, November 17, 1915, A. G. Daniells reported to those in attendance that the liabilities of the Estate were \$87,000 against assets of \$63,000. The slight discrepancy in totals can be accounted for depending upon which document is looked at. One document in the White Estate's file lists several minor adjustments found by the court-appointed auditor that needed correcting. According to the information stated in this audited document, one entry in the "First and Final Assessment" document was mistakenly listed twice, another small cash receipt had not been listed, etc. It appears that the General Conference actually paid a total of \$89,047.47 for Ellen White's estate, including notes payable and accrued interest.

¹²EGW to J. N. Loughborough, February 19, 1899, Letter 35, 1899; and EGW to Dear Brother Olsen, June 21, 1890, Letter 115, 1890.

¹³EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, volumes 7 (1902), 8 (1904), and 9 (1909); *Education* (1903); *The Ministry of Healing* (1905); *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911); the revision of *The Great Controversy* (1911); *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (1913); and *Gospel Workers* (1915).

¹⁴EGW, *Life Sketches* (1915); *Prophets and Kings* (1917); plus book manuscripts on the history of the denomination's health work, Ellen White's years in Europe (1885-1887), and her years in Australia (1891-1900).

¹⁵According to a note written by Arthur L. White in a White Estate Document File dealing with Ellen White's estate, Edson and W. C. White each owed their mother approximately \$10,000 at the time of her death. However, documents filed with the probate court seem to indicate otherwise. Whereas Edson did in fact owe his mother approximately \$10,000 at the time of her death, Willie is listed as owing her only \$1,500.

¹⁶According to the financial records maintained by her accountant, at the time of Ellen White's death her estate was valued at \$121,382.90 against an indebtedness of \$65,923.70.

¹⁷"Report of Conference Held at Elmhaven, June 22, 1915," 1.

¹⁸C. H. Jones to W. T. Knox, December 30, 1915.

¹⁹"In the Superior Court of the State of California, in and for the County of Napa, Order Confirming Sales of Real and Personal Property," October 2, 1916, 5.

²⁰W. C. White to W. T. Knox, October 2, 1916.

²¹Undated six-page document apparently written in early 1941 by Arthur L. White entitled "A Statement," 4 (White Estate Document File 821).

²²W. T. Knox to H. G. Childs, December 22, 1915.

²³A. H. Mason, Ellen White's accountant, reported in a letter to D. E. Robinson, Ellen White's grandson-in-law, dated December 1, 1915, that the State of California would not allow anything to be paid to the heirs until all the creditors had been paid in full. Consequently, according to Mason, it was being proposed that the heirs sign off on the amounts they were to receive, at least until after the entire debt had been paid in full.

²⁴See "Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White," dated February 9, 1912, paragraph FIFTH, where she named William C. White, Clarence C. Crisler, Charles H. Jones, Arthur G. Daniells, and Frank M. Wilcox as the original trustees of her estate.

²⁵Arthur L. White, "A Statement," 4.

²⁶See "Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White," dated February 9, 1912, paragraph SECOND; also paragraph FOURTH, subdivision (d), point 1.

²⁷See points 1 and 2 in "Propositions for Basis of Agreement in the Settlement of the Estate of Mrs. E. G. White," copy located in White Estate Document File 832.

²⁸*Ibid.*, section fifth, and paragraph FIFTH, section 2.

²⁹"General Conference Committee Minutes," action 135-96G, entitled "Ellen G. White Estate—Promoting Awareness of Church Heritage," voted April 2, 1996, 96-29, 96-30.

³⁰Ellen White's Elmhaven office remained where it had been during the last 15 years of Ellen White's life. It was only after the death of W. C. White in late 1937 that, in January 1938, the White Estate office and materials were all transferred to the General Conference, where they are still located.

³¹"Minutes of the Council-Meeting held at 'Elmhaven, St. Helena, Cal., Oct. 28-29, 1915, by the Persons Named in the Will of Mrs. E. G. White to Act as Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate," 1, 2 (filed with White Estate Board Minutes).

³²See "Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White," dated February 9, 1912, paragraph FOURTH, subdivision (d), point 2.

³³"Minutes of the Council-Meeting at 'Elmhaven,' " 5, 6. "Although no motion was adopted it was the concensus [sic] of opinion that no unpublished MS even though it might have Sister White's O.K. should be published in connection with published Mss. That if such O.K.'d MSS were ever used it should be in separate form with suitable explanations."

³⁴Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1963), 3:3207 (s.v. “1932 Medical Ministry”); see also EGW, *Medical Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1963), vii.

³⁵The White Estate trustees repaid the 4 percent loan to the General Conference from royalties earned on Ellen White’s English-language books.

³⁶His reasoning was reported to have been, “Everyone believes in Ellen White, so why is the White Estate needed? Besides, do we really need to publish all of those unpublished materials?”

³⁷As told to the writer by Dr. Robert W Olson, director of the White Estate to whom the threat was made.

³⁸There are an estimated 50,000 typewritten pages in the letter and manuscript files. These reduce to approximately 40,000 pages when computerized; White Estate Board Minutes, May 7, 1987. See also Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 484. Of the 120 file drawers containing approximately five thousand letters and three thousand manuscripts, only two drawers containing eighty-six letters and manuscripts were in the “Z-file.”

³⁹Exactly what year the “Z-file” was created, or why it was so named, is not now known, though it appears to have been set up in the early 1930s.

⁴⁰White Estate Board Minutes, July 11, 1991. The last Manuscript Release was numbered 1600.

⁴¹The practice of releasing the entire document rather than just the few requested sentences from it began in 1983. See “A Word of Explanation,” Manuscript Releases, vol. 21, 1993, unnumbered introductory page.

⁴²White Estate Board Minutes, May 9, 1991. The vote was to move toward printing the unpublished letters and manuscripts, beginning chronologically with the earliest ones.

⁴³See White Estate Board Minutes for actions taken on February 17, 2000; April 26, 2001; September 20, 2001; and March 21, 2002;

⁴⁴See White Estate Board Minutes, January 4, 2013.

⁴⁵Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, 1996 ed., s.v. “Andrews University”

⁴⁶This is the shortened name by which the Ellen G. White Seventh-day Adventist Research Centers are generally known.

⁴⁷By 2014, research centers and branch offices were established as follows: Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA (1960); England (1974); Loma Linda University, California, USA (1976—upgraded to a full branch office in 1985); Australia (1976); Mexico (1978); Argentina (1979); Philippines (1981, upgraded to a full branch office in 2014); South Africa (1983); India (1985); Brazil (1987); Nigeria (1990); Korea (1992); Russia (1995); Oakwood University Branch Office, Huntsville, Alabama, USA (1999—reclassified as a research center in 2015); Kenya (2001); France (2002); Jamaica (2003); Texas, USA (2004); Peru (2009); Puerto Rico (2010); Costa Rica (2010); northeast Brazil (2011); Adventist University of Africa Branch Office, Kenya (2013).

⁴⁸General Conference Working Policy defines branch offices as located only at General Conference institutions, Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2013,) 389.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 290-292.

⁵⁰Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences, Missions, and Institutions in North America (Including Summaries From World Field), 1942, 7, [16]. The membership summary table for the North American Division lists 72,015 members at the close of 1914, and 77,735 members at the close of 1915. The summary table for total world membership lists 125,844 members at the close of 1914, and 136,879 members at the close of 1916.

⁵¹Information from the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, as of June 20, 2013.

⁵²More than fifty languages are Christ's Object Lessons, The Desire of Ages, Patriarchs and Prophets; more than seventy-five languages are The Great Controversy and Steps to Christ.

⁵³Examples include T. Housel Jemison, A Prophet Among You (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1955); and Douglass, Messenger of the Lord.

⁵⁴The first Ellen G. White CD-ROM was introduced at the 1990 General Conference Session held in Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁵⁵Examples include True Education (2000); Ministry of Health and Healing (2005); and a modern English edition of the five condensed Conflict of the Ages Series books.

⁵⁶This quarterly online publication was produced from 2007 to 2012. It is referred to as *Ve.Z.*

⁵⁷Board Chairs: Arthur G. Daniells (1915), Francis M. Wilcox (1915-1922), Arthur G. Daniells (1922-1935), J. E. Fulton (1935-1936), J. L. Shaw (1936-1937), Francis M. Wilcox (1938-1944), Milton E. Kern (1944-1951), Denton E. Rebok (1952), A. V. Olson (1952-1963), Frances D. Nichol (1963-1966), W. Paul Bradley (1966-1980), Kenneth H. Wood (1980-2008), Don Schneider (2008-2013), G. T. NG (2014-). Secretaries/Directors: Clarence C. Crisler (1915-1917), William C. White (1917-1937), Arthur L. White (1937-1978), Robert W. Olson (1978-1990), Paul A. Gordon (1990-1995), Juan Carlos Viera (1995-2000), James R. Nix (2000-).

⁵⁸EGW, Selected Messages, 1:55.

Chapter Sixteen - The Gift of Prophecy and Contemporary Ideas

Gerhard Pfandl

After sin entered this world, the gift of prophecy became an important means of communication between God and humanity. From Abraham, the first man to be called a prophet ([Gen. 20:7](#)), to Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, there is a long line of faithful messengers of the Lord who guided, counseled, and frequently rebuked and admonished the Israelites and their kings ([1 Sam. 13:13, 14](#); [1 Kings 18:21](#); [Mal. 3:8, 9](#)). Following a four-hundred-year interval, the prophetic gift appeared again within Judaism in New Testament times ([Luke 2:25-32, 36-38](#); [Matt. 3:1-3](#)) and later in the Christian church ([Acts 13:1](#); [15:32](#); [21:9](#); [1 Cor. 14:29-32](#)).

The perpetuity of the prophetic gift

That the gift of prophecy was not meant to disappear with the first-century church is clearly stated in the New Testament. In [Ephesians 4:11, 12](#), Paul tells us that God has placed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”¹ How long were these gifts to remain in the church? “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” ([Eph. 4:13](#)).

Similarly, in [1 Corinthians 12:28, 29](#), Paul lists the prophetic gift among other spiritual gifts. As long as the church of Christ is in this world, spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, will be needed to bring them into the unity of the faith. To the Thessalonians, Paul therefore wrote that they should “not despise prophecies” ([1 Thess. 5:20](#)); and in [1 Corinthians 14:1](#), the gift of prophecy is specifically

mentioned as the gift to be desired above all others. Finally, in the book of Revelation, the remnant church in the time of the end is identified as having the testimony of Jesus ([Rev. 12:17](#)), which John explains is the “spirit of prophecy” ([Rev. 19:10](#)) or the prophetic gift ([Rev. 22:9](#)). Hence, we should not be surprised to find that God in modern times has called, and may still call, individuals to be His prophets.

Sources of prophetic revelation

God

All through the ages, biblical prophets have consistently declared that what they proclaimed came from the Lord. “The LORD spoke to Moses” ([Exod. 8:1](#); [12:1](#)); “Thus says the Lord” ([Obad. 1:1](#); [2 Sam. 7:8](#); [Josh. 7:13](#); [Jer. 13:1](#)); and “The word of the LORD . . . came to me, saying” ([Ezek. 12:1](#)) are some of the expressions the prophets used to make sure that their hearers understood that what they said was not their word but God’s word. The expression “word of God” ([1 Sam. 9:27](#)) indicates very clearly the source of the message.

Satan

Prophets and prophecies were known in the ancient Near East outside of the Bible. The Mari texts from Mesopotamia (eighteenth century B.c.) refer to prophets (*nabu*) who provided guidance for the kings through their omens. The Egyptian story of Wen-Amon records that while Wen-Amon was in Phoenicia (ca. 1090 B.c.), a young attendant at the Phoenician court fell into a trance and delivered an oracle authenticating Wen-Amon’s mission.²

Throughout history, individuals have made predictions, some of which came to pass. Nostradamus, in the sixteenth century, supposedly “foresaw and predicted almost every major historical event in France and crises in many other countries”³ Tycho Brahe, the official astrologer to Rudolph II of Austria, is said to have predicted the Great Plague that swept Europe two years before it happened in 1665. The psychic Edgar Cayce in April 1929 predicted the Wall Street crash based on a dream he had had. Six months later, on

October 29, the stock market crashed. And in the summer of 1961, Jean Dixon reportedly foretold that Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN Secretary General, would be killed in a plane crash in mid-September. [230] Hammarskjöld lost his life in a plane crash on September 18, 1961.
4

In all of these cases, only certain predictions came true while many others did not. The Bible is clear that those who speak for God must always be cor-rect in their communication ([Jer. 28:1-17](#)). God does not allow a true prophet to make a false prophecy, as demonstrated by Balaam ([Num. 22](#)). Even the Bible recognizes that some false prophets may make correct predictions or even perform miracles, but if the influence of their ministry does not lead to the God of the Bible, then the source is not from God, but rather from Satan ([Deut. 13:1-5](#)).

The human person

Sometimes people will claim that they have a message from God when in fact what they say is the product of their own imagination, neither from God nor from Satan. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a number of such persons in their ranks, for example, Anna Garmire, Anna C. (Phillips) Rice, Margaret Rowen,⁵ and more recently, Jeanine Sautron.⁶ Ellen White was at times accused of falsely claiming divine inspiration for her writings. Her visions, it was said, were due to hysteria and epilepsy.⁷ However, the supernatural phenomena associated with her visions have been so extensively documented⁸ that in her case the visions could come only from God or from Satan.⁹ While in vision, she was utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her; she did not breathe during her visions, which lasted from a few minutes to more than four hours. This was repeatedly proven by closing the mouth and nostrils by hand.¹⁰ Her husband, James White, wrote in 1868,

Immediately on entering vision, her muscles become rigid, and joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them. At the same time her movements and gestures, which are frequent, are free and graceful, and cannot be hindered nor controlled by the strongest person.

On coming out of vision, whether in the day-time or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her power to distinguish even the most brilliant objects, held within a few inches of the eyes, returns but gradually, sometimes not being fully established for three hours. This has continued for the past twenty years; yet her eyesight is not in the least impaired. ¹¹

[231] J. N. Loughborough at the General Conference in 1893 testified, “I have seen Sister White in vision about fifty times. . . . She has been examined while in vision by skillful physicians, and we have testimonials from them which declare that the phenomena of her visions are beyond their comprehension.” ¹²

Testing the prophets

In order to distinguish between true and false prophets, God gave some criteria by which true prophets could be recognized. The most important are: ¹³

1. What a true prophet says has to be in harmony with previous revelations of God’s will (Isa. 8:20). God does not contradict Himself.

2. What prophets predict must take place ([Deut. 18:21](#)). We must take into account, however, conditional prophecies, which are common in Scripture. They are based on a human response to God’s revelation and may be modified due to how circumstances develop ([Deut. 28:1, 15](#)). Examples include the story of Jonah, the temple in Ezekiel ([Ezek. 40-48](#)), and the untimely death of Josiah ([2 Kings 22:14-20; 23:29](#)). The principle behind conditional prophecy is explained in [Jeremiah 18:7, 8](#).

3. True prophets witness of Christ. In his first letter, John wrote, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” ([1 John 4:1, 2](#)). When John wrote these words, he was thinking of certain false teachers who denied that the Son of God had actually become a human being, they denied that “the Word became flesh” ([John 1:14](#)). In a broader sense, this test applies not only to the incarnation but to everything the Bible teaches about Christ—His sinless life,

His atoning death, His resurrection and ascension, His high-priestly ministry in heaven, and His second coming. A true prophet is to recognize and teach all these things.

4. The lives of true prophets have to bear evidence of their calling. Jesus in [Matthew 7:15, 16](#) says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.” Not only must a true prophet teach the truth, but he or she must also live it out and lead others in advancing the work of God here on earth.

A true prophet will meet all these tests, not just one or two. Yes, God has made it possible for His people to distinguish between true and false prophets; and in the case of Ellen White, she passed all these tests with flying colors.

Pentecostalism and the prophetic gift

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Within the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, the gift of prophecy has held and continues to hold a significant place. “Prophetic revelations,” wrote C. Hill in 1989, “is becoming increasingly common as a normal part of the church’s worship and spiritual life.”¹⁴ This is true not only in Pentecostal and charismatic churches but also in “mainline churches that until recently have been totally closed to any such possibility”¹⁵ Indeed, a number of modern prophets exist today within Evangelical churches and the Pentecostal and charismatic movement.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Metro Vineyard Fellowship in Kansas City had three modern prophets: John Paul Jackson, Bob Jones, and Paul Cain—today they all have their own ministries.¹⁶ The prophecies and messages of these “Kansas City prophets” were frequently false and often foolish. For example, John Paul Jackson said in one message that God blew up the space shuttle *Challenger* on January 25, 1986, to teach America a lesson, given that there was a teacher on board.¹⁷ Bob Jones predicted that one thousand religious leaders would be killed by God in 1990. He also spoke of a new breed of human beings, the “elected seed,” supposedly “created by God in 1973 to form a super church that would be ten thousand times greater than the church of the book of Acts”¹⁸ Though believed to be inspired by God, the messages of these modern prophets are not

considered as authoritative as the messages of the biblical prophets. Not only do they have less authority, they may be “out of order or even incorrect at times”¹⁹ And modern prophets readily admit that they have often prophesied falsely. Bob Jones once said, “If I hit two-thirds of it, I am doing pretty good”²⁰ Nevertheless, the prophecies these men deliver are received by thousands as revealed truths from God.²¹

Not so long ago, Seventh-day Adventists were seen as a cult because they claimed to have a prophet in their church. Today, Pentecostal and charismatic churches have their own prophets; and evangelical theologians have worked out a whole theology to justify the *modus operandi* of these modern prophets.

New Testament versus Old Testament prophets

Contemporary explanations concerning modern prophets are based on the supposed difference between the inspiration of Old Testament and New Testament prophets. Wayne Grudem, chairman of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes:

[233] There is little if any evidence for a group of *prophets* in the New Testament churches who could speak with God’s very words (with “absolute divine authority” that could not be questioned) and who had the authority to write books of Scripture for inclusion in the New Testament.

On the other hand, there is a very prominent group of people in the New Testament who do speak with absolute divine authority and who did write most of the books of the New Testament. These men are called not “prophets,” however, but “apostles.” In many ways they are similar to the Old Testament prophets.²²

Grudem believes that the Old Testament prophets and the apostles and their associates who wrote the New Testament were verbally inspired and therefore inerrant. The New Testament prophets mentioned in Acts and 1 Corinthians, however, were not. The prophesying of New Testament prophets, according to Grudem, “is reporting something that God spontaneously brings to mind.”²³ To the question, “Does this kind of prophecy equal the Word of God?” he responds by saying:

Certainly not in the sense we usually use the phrase “the word of God,” namely, to refer to the “words of the Bible, which have *absolute divine authority* and can never be wrong.” Instead, errors can be made in prophecies that are spoken. That is why Paul says, “Let the others weigh what is said” (1 Cor. 14:29) and “Do not despise prophesying, but *test everything*; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20, 21). He could not have said these things if prophecies were the very words of God in the sense Scripture is the very word of God. Therefore, prophecies must have had much less authority than Scripture. ²⁴

This distinction is important for Grudem. He accepts modern prophets in the church, but he identifies them with the New Testament prophets because, as indicated earlier, modern-day prophets frequently make mistakes. Grudem, therefore, says in regard to modern prophets, “Prophecy today is *merely human words* reporting what God has brought to mind, while the prophecies that were written down in the Old Testament were men speaking *God’s words* to report what God had brought to mind.” ²⁵

This differentiation between Old and New Testament prophets is, of course, valid only if one believes in the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament prophets. As Seventh-day Adventists, who believe in what is generally called thought inspiration, we cannot make this distinction. Nevertheless, some Adventists, unfortunately, have adopted Grudem’s reasoning and are trying to put Ellen G. White in the same category as these modern charismatic prophets, who quite openly admit that they are frequently wrong. ²⁶ Admittedly, [234] this would be a convenient way of explaining away some of the troublesome sayings of Ellen White. But is it the right way?

Grudem bases his distinction on his understanding of Paul’s discussion of the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21. In contrast to the warning against false prophets in Matthew 7:15-20 and in 1 John 4:1-6, Grudem believes that in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Thessalonians 5 the issue is not false prophets but false prophecies of true prophets. “The context of 1 Corinthians 14:29,” he says, “indicates that the members of the congregation would all listen to the prophet’s speech and evaluate it in some way, but they would not judge the prophet himself to be true or false.” ²⁷

“To prophesy” in Corinth

The crucial passage in the discussion of New Testament prophets is 1 Corinthians 14. This letter was written in the mid-50s of the first century A.D.²⁸ It is interesting to note that in this letter, written from Ephesus, there are a number of references to prophets but no reference to elders or bishops, whereas in the Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, written around A.D. 63 and later, there are many references to elders and bishops but not one reference to prophets.

In Corinth, those who claimed to be prophets seem to have been vocal in the church at that time, as they were probably in other churches. There were significant problems in Corinth that are addressed by Paul. These include the so-called prophets present in that church. There are legitimate prophets in the New Testament. In [Acts 13:1](#) we hear about the church in Antioch in which there were several prophets. During one of their church services the Holy Spirit spoke to one (or more?) of the prophets and said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (verse 2, NASB). The record suggests that there were no apostles present; this was the local body of believers at worship, some of whom were prophets.

Some view the “prophets” in [1 Corinthians 14](#) to be true prophets, whereas others see them as people sharing a “prophetic” message in a more preaching or exhorting role while not necessarily being prophets (see chapter 1, “The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture”). In either event, Paul gives four regulations for prophesying in [1 Corinthians 14:29-33](#): (1) only two or three were to speak on any one occasion; (2) the other “prophets,” or the whole congregation, were to judge what was said; (3) if someone else had a revelation, the first speaker was to yield to him; and (4) each “prophet” was to speak in turn.²⁹

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The second regulation is of crucial importance. Grudem claims that [1 Corinthians 14:29](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:19-21](#) do not refer to testing true prophets from false prophets, or even evaluating the “prophetic” messages of other believers, but to the judging of the messages of true prophets. “Each prophecy might have both true and false elements in it. . . . The congregation would simply evaluate

the prophecy and form opinions about it. Some of it might be very valuable and some of it not.”³⁰ Similarly, F. W. Grosheide argues that “even if a prophetic utterance is correct, inspired by the Spirit of God, the congregation has the duty to ‘discern’ what must be done with such an utterance, namely whether it is of value for the church.”³¹ He then refers to the incident in [Acts 21:10-14](#) and claims that Paul hears the word of the Spirit, uttered by the mouth of Agabus, yet “he does not obey it but travels to Jerusalem.”³²

However, nowhere does Agabus say to Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem. Luke says,

And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”“ Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem ([Acts 21:10-12](#)).

Agabus under inspiration told Paul what would happen, he gave a prophecy; the prophecy did not include the admonition not to go to Jerusalem. It was Luke and those present who beseeched Paul not to go to Jerusalem. “But Paul would not swerve from the path of duty. He would follow Christ if need be to prison and to death.”³³ Paul was not disobedient to any of God’s directives.

Grudem uses the Revised Standard and New International versions to support his contention; the Revised Standard Version translates [1 Corinthians 14:29](#) as “let the others weigh what is said.”³⁴ The Greek text, however, does not have the phrase “what is said.” Thus “a principle exegetical argument for a different kind of prophecy, a fallible prophecy whose ‘good’ elements must be separated from its ‘bad,’ arises from wording that is not found in Scripture.”³⁵ A more faithful translation of the original text is found in the New American Standard Bible, which says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”

Sitting in judgment on God’s messages

What Grudem and others are suggesting, would mean, in practical terms, that God gives a specific message to a prophet and the [236]

rest of the congregation sits in judgment on whether the message is valuable or not; whether it should be accepted or not. Nowhere else does Scripture support the idea that fallible human beings should sit in judgment on God's Word.

Paul and the early Christian believers realized that words spoken in church may come from three different sources—the Spirit of God, evil spirits, and the human spirit. Jesus warned His disciples about the danger of false prophets, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits” ([Matt 7:15, 16](#); cf. [24:11, 24](#)). He did not say, “Beware of the false elements in the sayings of the prophets” No, he said, “Beware of false prophets” [1 John 4:1-6](#) is another warning about false prophets. It also provides a test on how to identify them. Given the low spiritual atmosphere in Corinth, we should not be surprised that Paul advised them to judge the prophets, not just what they said.

Grudem claims, “While the other passages speak of tests to reveal false prophets, [1 Corinthians 14:29](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:19-21](#) speak rather of a different sort of evaluation, the evaluation of the actual prophecies of those already accepted by the congregation”³⁶ However, are those “in sheep’s clothing” not those already accepted by the congregation? Jesus in [Matthew 7:22](#) says, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ” These people are church members, not strangers coming from outside the church. Paul warned the elders from Ephesus, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” ([Acts 20:30](#)). What better way to lead people astray than to claim that one has a message from God?

The concept that “every member of the congregation would listen carefully and evaluate each statement, distinguishing what he or she felt to be good from the less good, what was thought to be helpful from the unhelpful, what was perceived to be true from false”³⁷ seems utterly at variance with the rest of Scripture, but it is certainly useful in accommodating the phenomenon of modern prophets in the Christian church. The driving force behind this new understanding of [1 Corinthians 14:29](#), unfortunately, is not biblical

exegesis but the justification of the mistakes of supposed modern prophets in the churches today. This has led to a distortion of what the text is really saying. It is always dangerous for human reasoning, even sanctified human reasoning, to be in the judgment seat over prophetic revelation.

First Corinthians 14 is one of the most difficult and contentious chapters in the New Testament. Commentators agree that Paul advised the church to carefully evaluate and pass judgment on³⁸ what these prophets said. The question is, For what purpose was it to be done? Was it to weed out the errors from what they were saying, or was it to weed out false prophets on the basis of what they said? Adam Clarke, who wrote before modern Pentecostalism came to the fore, commented on the phrase “and let others judge” (1 Cor. 14:29) as follows: [237]

It appears to have been taken for granted that a man might pretend to this spirit of prophecy who was not sent of God; and therefore it was the duty of the accredited teachers to examine whether what he spoke was according to truth and the analogy of faith.³⁹

Similarly, Charles Hodge, who wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians wrote concerning 14:29, “The other prophets, i.e. those who did not speak were to sit in judgment on what was said, in order to decide whether those claiming to be prophets were really inspired.”⁴⁰

The meaning of *diakrino*

Grudem claims that Paul’s use of *diakrino* (discern, judge) in 1 Corinthians 14:29 supports his interpretation. “If Paul had meant that the Corinthians were to judge whether each speaker was a true or false prophet, he probably would have used some other word—not *diakrino* but probably *krino*”⁴¹ This is an interpretation that is clearly not supported by the Greek text.

The verb *krino* “to judge” is used 114 times in the New Testament. Paul uses it forty-three times; primarily in the sense of “to condemn” (Rom. 2:1, 3, 12, 16, 27; 3:7; 14:3; 1 Cor. 4:5; 5:3, 12, 13, etc.). God judges and condemns or vindicates people (Heb. 10:30, 31). Not once is it used in the sense of distinguishing between people. *Diakrino* appears nineteen times in the New Testament and

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seven times in the writings of Paul. It has a variety of meanings, one of which is to distinguish between people. Peter says that God “made no distinction [*diakrino*]” between Jewish and Gentile believers in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 15:9](#)). Paul asks the Corinthians, “For who makes you different [*diakrino*] from anyone else?” ([1 Cor. 4:7](#), NIV). And in the same letter he asks, “Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge [*diakrino*] a dispute between believers?” ([1 Cor. 6:5](#), NIV). James says to his brethren, “Have you not discriminated [*diakrino*] among yourselves” by making a difference between the rich and the poor ([James 2:3, 4](#), NIV)? “In these passages, three different New Testament authors use the term *diakrino* to indicate a distinction between people not between ideas. It is worth noting that two instances of this use of the term are found in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.”⁴² This clearly contradicts Grudem’s argument. This meaning of *diakrino* also makes perfect sense in [1 Corinthians 14:29](#): “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment [as to who is a true prophet]” (NASB). Eric Wright, therefore, concludes, “The discrimination believers are to make is not just between truth and falsehood in a prophecy, but between true and false prophets.”⁴³

An Old Testament example of this same judgment of true or false prophets is in [1 Kings 22](#) as explained by Micaiah. There are two categories of prophets who are called to prophesy before Ahab and Jehoshaphat. One group says that they will be granted victory in the war they are contemplating. Micaiah comes in and declares that God has not spoken by those prophets. He declares that if they go to war, Ahab will be killed. The king attempts to coerce the prophet by declaring that he should be locked up and not released unless they returned safely. Micaiah responds by declaring that “if you indeed return safely the LORD has not spoken by me” ([1 Kings 22:28](#), NASB). Micaiah clearly understood that if his words proved to be false, so was his calling. There was no allowance for a false prophecy in a true prophet.

In view of the larger context of Scripture, this seems to be the natural reading of the text. The evaluation and examination of what was said had the purpose of testing the spirits to see whether they were from God,⁴⁴ not just picking what was true or false in what genuine prophets said. Contrary to Grudem, and many other

interpreters, Paul was not advocating that fallible human reason is to sit in judgment on the messages God gave to these prophets.

The gift of prophecy was found throughout Bible times. Its continuity in the church is clearly indicated in the New Testament. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that this gift was manifested in the church in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

For more than one hundred years, so-called prophets have appeared from time to time in Pentecostal churches; and in recent decades there has been a proliferation of prophetic voices within Pentecostal, charismatic, and some mainline churches. These “prophets,” while claiming inspiration, do not claim equal authority with the biblical prophets because of their many mistakes and failed prophecies. This has led to the emergence of a particular theology and interpretation of New Testament texts to justify this modern phenomenon.

Some Adventists are trying to put Ellen White into the same category as these modern prophets whose existence is supported with a faulty exegesis. In 1889, Ellen White wrote a lengthy testimony on “The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies,” at the end of which she made the following appeal: [239]

And now, brethren, I entreat you not to interpose between me and the people, and turn away the light which God would have come to them. Do not by your criticisms take out all the force, all the point and power, from the *Testimonies*. Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven and what is the expression of mere human wisdom. If the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial cannot be united. ⁴⁵

This is a particularly appropriate counsel for today, which we all need to take to heart. What we have said does not negate the fact that we need to use proper hermeneutics to study and correctly interpret what Ellen White has written. However, the basic information of her visions, the God-given message, cannot be subjected to the reasoning of fallible human minds.

¹Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New King James Version®.

²H. B. Huffmon, “Prophecy” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:477.

³Justine Glass, *They Foresaw the Future* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 120.

⁴*Ibid.*, 155, 228, 224.

⁵R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1979), 256, 450.

⁶See the shelf document of the Ellen G. White Estate titled "Jeanine Sautron's 'Dreams and Visions' " (May 1990).

⁷Delbert H. Hodder, "Visions or Partial-Complex Seizures?" *Evangelica* 2, no. 5 (November 1981): 35; Molleurus Couperus, "The Significance of Ellen White's Head Injury" *Adventist Currents* 1, no. 6 (June 1985): 31. For a response to these allegations, see Donald I. Peterson, *Visions or Seizures: Was Ellen White the Victim of Epilepsy?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1988).

⁸George I. Butler testified, "While she is in vision, her breathing entirely ceases. No breath ever escapes her nostrils or lips when in this condition. This has been proved by many witnesses, among them physicians of skill, and themselves unbelievers in the vision, on some occasions being appointed by a public congregation for the purpose." "Visions and Prophecy," *Review and Herald*, June 9, 1874. For a collection of eyewitness accounts, see John N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1905), 204-210.

⁹Ellen White herself wrote in 1876, "My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil." *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 4:230.

¹⁰D. T. Bourdeau, Battle Creek, MI, February 4, 1891, quoted in Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1931), 154, 155; see also Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 135-137.

¹¹James White, *Life Incidents, in Connection With the Great Advent Movement, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1868), 272.

¹²J. N. Loughborough, "The Studies of the Testimonies," *General Conference Bulletin*, January 29, 1893, 19, 20.

¹³For other tests of a true prophet, see Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1931), 108-124.

¹⁴Clifford Hill, *Prophecy Past and Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1989), 291.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶See their Web sites: <http://www.bobjones.org>; <http://www.streamsministries.com> (John Paul Jackson); <http://www.paulcain.org>.

¹⁷James A. Beverly, *Holy Laughter & the Toronto Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 124.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 123, 124.

¹⁹Douglas A. Oss, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic Response to Richard Gaffin, Jr.," in *Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?—Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 92.

²⁰Quoted in John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 67.

²¹Among the many others who claim to be modern prophets are Dr. Yancey U. Dickens; Dr. Barbara D. Eason; Patricia King.

²²Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 27.

²³Wayne Grudem, "Should Christians Expect Miracles Today" in *The Kingdom and the Power*, eds. G. S. Greig and K. N. Springer (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 78.

²⁴*Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶Graeme S. Bradford, *More Than a Prophet* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2006), 79, 80, 215.

²⁷Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 59.

²⁸Donald Guthrie suggests the spring of a.d. 57. *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 441.

²⁹Many scholars understand the Greek word *propheteuo* in this context to mean "preaching" or "teaching" rather than prophesying. Anthony C. Thiselton says, "We shall argue that here prophecy amounts to healthy preaching, proclamation, or teaching which is pastorally applied for the appropriation of gospel truth and gospel promise, in their own context of situations, to help others" *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1084. See also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1056; William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians*, *Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 306; Margaret E. Thrall, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 97; and Adam Clarke, "Romans to Revelation" *Clarke's Commentary* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 273, 274. For the purpose of this chapter, we will assume that "prophecy" in Paul's letter to the Corinthians refers to inspired prophecy, not preaching..

³⁰Wayne Grudem, cited in Bradford, *More Than a Prophet*, 80.

³¹F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 338.

³²*Ibid.*

³³EGW, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 397.

³⁴Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 54, 55, 57, 163, 188, 287, 316. The same wording is found in the English Standard Version and the New Jerusalem Bible.

³⁵O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 98.

³⁶Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 59.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 60.

³⁸The Greek word *diakrino* "doubt, decide, judge" has a wide range of meaning in Paul's writings, where it appears seven times: "doubt" (Rom. 4:20; 14:23), "differ from" (1 Cor. 4:7), "judge, pass judgment on" (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:31; 14:29), and as a participle "judgment" (1 Cor. 11:29).

³⁹Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 2:153.

⁴⁰Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 302.

⁴¹Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 60.

⁴²Robertson, *The Final Word*, 99.

⁴³E. E. Wright, *Strange Fire?* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1996), 286.

⁴⁴See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 664.

⁴⁵EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:691.

Chapter Seventeen - Why Should I Read Ellen White?

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Chantal J. Klingbeil

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Ever since the interruption of communication in Eden between God and humanity, God has been trying to reestablish and re-start the conversation. Through nature and the Bible, He attempts to speak to us individually and collectively. Unfortunately, because fallen nature often produces confused stimuli and because the Bible is often perceived as being irrelevant, God's redemptive conversation too often cannot take place. In biblical times, God's people often reached critical moments in history where they could no longer hear God through His given Word. Then God would choose a prophet who spoke on His behalf. The prophet would speak in the language of the people, and what was said was always relevant. The prophet would often offer a critique of current attitudes and behavior, provide guidance, and always hold out hope for redemption (cf. the ministry of Elijah, Isaiah, Amos, or most of the other biblical prophets).

The recognition of Ellen White's prophetic call predates the official organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For some, however, her writings have lost their relevance. This generation reflects a modern cultural, pro-media, anti-reading model, in a peer-dominated society, as is evident from national studies. ¹ According to the latest ValueGenesis study, only 2 percent of sixth to twelfth graders in the Seventh-day Adventist school system read Ellen White once a week. ² Acceptance of Ellen White's role as a prophet and confidence in her writings have also decreased from 54 percent to 45 percent. When comparing the results from the 2010 ValueGenesis versus the 2013 study, we find a disturbing pattern emerging. In 2010, 61 percent of teens seemed to have a biblical understanding of the inspiration of Ellen White as opposed to 46 percent currently. The ValueGenesis study also found that associated key doctrines, such as the church as the remnant, pre-Advent judgment, and the sig-

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nificance of 1844 in relation to the sanctuary doctrine, also showed a marked decrease.

While apologetic books and articles can argue against plagiarism charges and ably defend the integrity of Ellen White's writings, increasingly many of our members, especially the younger generation of the church, consider her writings irrelevant.

So what makes her writings relevant? What would I, as an individual or the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole, miss out on without her writings?

Renew interest in the Bible

The first challenge to the relevance of Ellen White's writings would be the why question. If Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible and the Bible only³ as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all lifestyle choices, why then would another prophet be needed at all? In answer to this question it should be noted that Ellen White's writings were never meant to take the place of the Bible. Their relevancy lies in the fact that they were written to draw attention to the Bible. She saw her function as exalting the Bible and attracting "minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all."⁴

If in the nineteenth century there was a need to go back to the Bible—there is a much greater need in the twenty-first century as we flounder in a sea of secularism. The Bible still promises to provide a time-tested set of norms and principles for ordering both society and our lives. These Bible truths or doctrines were not invented by a particular individual. Various people were used to draw attention to or rediscover biblical doctrine. Ellen White never discovered or invented any of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.⁵ They were discovered through a collective study of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She did, however, draw special attention to newly discovered doctrines.⁶ These were put into the framework of the overarching biblical great controversy theme, around which she organized all of her writings.

Provide a comprehensive biblical worldview

Perhaps more than ever before we are acutely aware of the numerous natural and man-made disasters, which crowd our news sources daily. Every thinking person struggles to make sense of all this mayhem. This is where Ellen White's writings show their timeless relevance and answer a real need. Her writings do not provide an explanation of every disaster that affects us on an individual level, but her writings do provide a framework for making sense of all the seemingly random chaos in life. It is the framework of the great controversy between Christ and Satan that has made Seventh-day Adventism "one of the most subtly differentiated, systematically developed, and institutionally successful of all alternatives to the American way of life"⁷

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This theme informs and determines principles of how we do theology, our philosophy of education, and, on a practical level, even our health. This framework is big enough to provide an understanding of who God is as well as when and why He acts in human history.⁸

The great controversy theme also provides the framework for understanding the entire Bible. It shows God to be a God of love. It puts everything into the context of the war between God and Satan. All of humanity is caught up in this war of cosmic dimensions with Satan attempting to misrepresent the loving character of God.⁹ He does this by distorting God's law and discrediting His love. Arguably, he has been successful in trying to produce a false dichotomy between God's law and His love. In direct contrast to this dichotomy, which has gained momentum even in Christian circles, Ellen White set out in her writings to show that "the history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love"¹⁰

Although many other writers throughout history have written on the war between good and evil, "no other writer has unfolded the cosmic dimensions and the eternal consequences of the conflict between Christ and Satan as Ellen White has done"¹¹ In March of 1858, Ellen White had perhaps her most significant vision in Lovett's Grove, Ohio. This became known as the great controversy vision,¹²

although this was a repeat and amplification of what she had already been shown before. This vision provided the framework and context to all of her many thousands of pages of writing.

So what is the relevance of this great controversy worldview? It shows us that God is not the kind of person that Satan has made Him out to be. He is not arbitrary or unfair. God's best exhibition of love was sending Jesus. And in response to Satan's claim, Jesus demonstrated that law of love and that it could be kept.¹³ Humans were created "in His own image" to communicate with God, and He gives each of us a choice to decide whose side we take in this cosmic battle.

[246] Humans are created as an "indivisible whole wherein such components as the physical body, mind, soul, spirit, emotions, and the will interact, influencing each of the other components. [These] components are interdependent and all are needed for human beings to survive in a healthy state."¹⁴

Restore enthusiasm for the Second Coming

One cannot read Ellen White's writings without getting a sense of urgency. Her personal relationship with Jesus began during the expectation of Jesus' soon coming in 1844, and even though she came to understand that other events would take place before the Second Coming, she lived her life energized by that enthusiasm. Predictions of God's coming in judgment and deliverance are a common denominator with many of the Old Testament prophets. Again and again they predicted the coming of the "day of the Lord"¹⁵ The New Testament writers took up this theme in their writings.¹⁶

Belief in the soon coming of Jesus has been the precursor for change and the driving force for the rapid spread of the gospel throughout most of the Roman Empire. It is also this belief in the soon coming of Jesus that inspired the growth and spread of Adventism from a few hundred believers to a worldwide movement numbering millions. George Knight remarks that, for Ellen White, Jesus' coming "was not only a future reality, but it had a sense of immediacy that demanded urgency in preaching its message to all the world in as short a time as possible"¹⁷ She wrote: "The Lord

is coming. We hear the footsteps of an approaching God. . . . We are to prepare the way for Him by acting our part in getting a people ready for that great day” ¹⁸

This expectancy for the second coming of Jesus provided the orientation for her life and work. For some, a belief in the soon coming of Jesus led to fanaticism, ¹⁹ but because Ellen White’s belief was firmly anchored in Scripture, her writings provide a wonderful example of the delicate art of living between now and eternity. Rather than unfitting her readers for a useful life, it is precisely this belief that motivates us to live our lives conscious of our individual and collective need to prepare a world for the coming of Jesus. Her letters and articles are full of case studies in making practical plans for the building up of God’s kingdom while all the time focusing on the Second Coming.

Demonstrate practical Christian living

Practical could be a synonym for relevant, making Ellen White’s writings of particular importance. She believed that the “Bible was given for practical purposes,” ²⁰ and in her writings she never attempted to set out a traditional systematic theology or provide the ultimate Bible commentary. “To the contrary, they [her writings] are practical to the utmost. Beyond rebuking sin, they point out the better way and provide guidance for daily Christian living and for the daily application of biblical principles.” ²¹

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The basic needs and problems of living in a sinful world have not changed, despite the many advances in technology, communications, and sciences. In fact, these core issues and realities do not change at all and require a clear response based on Christian principles. Ellen White upheld the Bible as setting out principles that are applicable across time and space. In her writings, she took and applied these biblical principles to the challenges and questions of nineteenth-century life, showing us that the biblical principles are just as valid today as they were over a century ago. ²²

Show involvement in contemporary issues

Even a cursory reading of her writings shows that Ellen White was engaged in the affairs and issues of her day. Ellen White was a strong supporter of the temperance movement²³ and very vocal on abolition.²⁴ She supported with voice and pen the causes that were stirring up the nation and dividing communities in the nineteenth century, but she did not wholeheartedly endorse or support *everything* on these reform tickets. Although she herself broke the mold by preaching and talking in public and encouraged and affirmed women in their work for God, she did not endorse or put the weight of her influence behind the movement for women to gain the right to vote.²⁵

For Ellen White, the great controversy theme was so much more than a theory or a way of organizing her writings. This theme helped her to identify the areas in her society where she could choose sides and promote God's agenda. Her understanding of humanity's creation in the image of God and God's deliberate gift of freedom of choice made her vocal in her support of slaves being free and having the freedom of conscience to choose their own temporal and eternal destiny.²⁶ By the same token, she believed that alcohol addiction destroyed the person and deprived them of their freedom of choice.

Her writings show a timeless relevance in negotiating the potential maze of being involved in our communities and countries without letting causes force us to take on agendas that are not kingdom building.

Give principles for improving our quality of life

[248] During much of the nineteenth century, health seemed to be a matter of luck. The majority of people had no idea about the existence of germs and believed that night air caused disease. Disease was treated by dangerous drugging, which more often than not aided in the patient's speedy demise.²⁷ Yet, slowly but surely, some people began to note cause and effect in diet and hygiene. This led to a number of health reform movements that sprang up, each emphasizing a particular aspect of health reform.²⁸

What made Ellen White's contribution so unique was the comprehensive concept of health laid out in her writings. It is interesting to note that even this health message was framed in an understanding of the great controversy theme. The early church pioneers, who struggled continually with poor health, came to realize that by following the guidelines set out in Ellen White's health visions and by making lifestyle changes²⁹ their health and quality of life improved significantly. This in turn made them more useful in working for others.³⁰ By following and advocating a healthy lifestyle, they were following Jesus' example of helping those who were sick and suffering. Health education and lifestyle change became the goals of the day.³¹

Disease, health care, and quality of life are still relevant topics. It has been estimated that over a third of the world's population suffers physically, mentally, or emotionally at any given time.³² And even with all the advances in medical science, sickness and disease are still a major problem.

Medical science, while still focusing on finding new drugs to cure disease, is beginning to realize that lifestyle change is the best remedy for changing overall health. The Adventist Health Study, which is one of the longest studies on lifestyles and their impact on wellness and disease, showed that members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who practice the lifestyle principles Ellen White promoted significantly lowered the risk of killer diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, certain types of cancer, and diabetes, and they live longer than other comparable groups. Following the dietary principles and using natural, simple remedies to aid nature in its work as a preventive medicine will promote well-being, reduce the incidence and severity of many diseases, prolong life, and, most important, improve the quality of life.³³

Provide practical advice for relationships

With the traditional constraints on relationships stripped away by a post-modern culture, our interpersonal relationships have become, if anything, more complex. Love relationships, work relationships, and even our relationship with God can often be confusing and we may need a listening ear. Ellen White wrote many letters of counsel

[249] to people, giving practical advice. People quickly came to value her advice in these areas and wrote asking questions ranging from the profound to the ridiculous.³⁴ Ellen White, however, did not want to give all the answers and micromanage relationships. She wanted to wean people from depending on her counsels for quick, mistake-free decisions they faced in their personal lives. Rather, she wanted to encourage individuals to become secure in their relationship with God and be able to recognize His will as He spoke to them individually through Scripture.³⁵ She provided case studies in which she encouraged readers to find and prayerfully apply the principles involved in the relationships.³⁶ These principles are still relevant to relationships in the twenty-first century.

Give guidance for the church as a whole

Ellen White's writings show God's active involvement in the founding and organization of this church. Although she did not discover or introduce new doctrines, it is safe to say that without her prophetic guidance the church would never have become what it is today. Because of the unhappy experience that Millerite believers had with the organized churches (from which many had been disfellowshipped because of their belief in the Second Coming), they regarded church organization with great suspicion. Although there were many practical factors urging organization, it was the prophetic advice and counsel that empowered the process of organization. Ellen White urged that the guiding principle for organization should be mission.³⁷ The organizational principles outlined in her writings still motivate and challenge the Seventh-day Adventist Church not to settle into a rut, but to be willing to make bold changes and not to become an institution but retain our focus as a movement. In addition to this, the three principal ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—publishing, health, and education—are a direct result of prophetic guidance through Ellen White.

Ellen White's writings can also prepare us to face potentially divisive attacks from both within and without the church by showing the areas in which we as a corporate body need to be particularly vigilant, and by documenting, as case studies, doctrinal issues that have already rocked the church in its relatively short history. They not

only provide us insights into the issues being faced, but they remind us of the spirit in which we should approach potential confrontation.
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Ever since the interruption of communication in Eden between God and humanity, God has been trying to bring us back into relationship with Him. Unfortunately, many still perceive God's redemptive conversation as being irrelevant. At this crucial moment in Earth's history, God's end-time remnant has been blessed with the testimonies from God's messenger, and, even a hundred years later, they continue to offer a critique of current attitudes and behavior, provide guidance, and always give hope by pointing to the only real solution to all of humanity's problems. Ellen White's writings lead readers to Jesus and magnify the plan of salvation, showing us that He is the only real hope in the crisis we face.

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Perhaps the saddest reality regarding Ellen White's writings is that many people do not even read them before deciding that they are irrelevant. Hopefully this chapter has provided just a few areas in which her writings have continuing relevance. Space does not begin to allow for all of the helpful contributions that she can make to our Christian lifestyle and walk with God. The only way to discover these is to read her for yourself. The invitation of a Kellogg's corn-flakes advertisement from a few years ago is even more appropriate when applied to Ellen White's writings and ministry. So whether you are someone who has lived with her writings your whole life or a person who has never read her, the invitation is to "taste them again for the very first time."³⁹

¹Numerous studies are available online. See, e.g., the study by Jessica E. Moyer of the University of Minnesota, online at <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2010/11/teens-today-dont-read-books-anymore-a-study-of-differences-in-interest-and-comprehension-based-on-reading-modalities-part-1-introduction-and-methodology/>.

²E-mail communication with V. Bailey Gillespie on February 26, 2013, providing relevant data from the latest unpublished ValueGenesis study. For the previous study, see V. Bailey Gillespie et al., *Valuegenesis Ten Years Later: A Study of Generations* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center Publications, 2004).

³See the in-depth discussion found in Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 12:22-57.

⁴Ellen G. White [EGW], *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005), 5:665.

⁵Dores E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1965), 60.

⁶Gerhard Pfandl, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2008), 88.

⁷Malcom Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989), ix.

⁸See Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1998), 256-267.

⁹“Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor” EGW, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1956), 11.

¹⁰EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005), 33.

¹¹Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 446.

¹²Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1985), 1:368.

¹³EGW, *Steps to Christ*, 11.

¹⁴Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 258, 259.

¹⁵E.g., see Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 30:2-4; Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:6-8; Obadiah 1:15.

¹⁶E.g., see 2 Peter 3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 5:3; and James 5:7, 8.

¹⁷George Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1996), 118.

¹⁸EGW, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1946), 218, 219.

¹⁹For a very readable introduction to the fanatical landscape of post-1844 Millerism, see George Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2010), 209-227.

²⁰EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 1:20.

²¹George Knight, *Reading Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1997), 19.

²²For some practical examples of this, see George Knight, *Ellen White’s World* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1998), 142-144.

²³Ellen White wrote strong denunciations of alcohol use. See *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1991), 101-103.

²⁴For an overview of Ellen White’s stance on slavery and race relations, see Ronald D. Graybill, *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1970). Cf. EGW, *Steps to Christ*, 11.

²⁵In an article in the influential church paper, she points out that a woman has more important work to do than trying to gain the vote: “I do not recommend that woman should seek to become a voter or an officer-holder; but as a missionary, teaching the truth by epistolary correspondence, distributing tracts and soliciting subscribers for periodicals containing the solemn truth for this time, she may do very much. In conversing with families, in praying with the mother and children, she will be a blessing.” EGW, “Address and Appeal: Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work,” *Review and Herald*, December 19, 1878, 194.

²⁶Ellen White made no concessions regarding slavery: “The whole system of slavery was originated by Satan, who delights in tyrannizing over human beings” EGW, *The Southern Work* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2004), 60.

²⁷Drugs used included arsenic, mercury calomel, and other deadly poisons.

²⁸Peter Landless provides a concise overview of the development of the health movements of her day in “The Grace-filled Health Message,” *Adventist World*, November 2013, 24, 25.

²⁹Mervyn G. Hardinge, *A Physician Explains Ellen White’s Counsel on Drugs, Herbs, & Natural Remedies* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2001), 203.

³⁰Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Progressive Years 1862-1876* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1986), 2:110-127.

³¹Hardinge, *A Physician Explains Ellen White’s Counsel*, 203.

³²*Ibid.*, 9.

³³Cf. Dan Buettner, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who’ve Lived the Longest* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2009), who discusses five international locations where people live the longest. He devotes a significant section (pp. 124-165) discussing the benefits of the Adventist lifestyle.

³⁴People sometimes wanted advice on what career path to take or whom to marry. Other people wanted a list of exactly what can be safely eaten. Here is a perspective on Ellen White’s view regarding many of these questions: “When I open a letter beginning, ‘I am sorry to trouble you, Sister White, but I am in trouble, and I wish to know about something in regard to my family and in regard to myself,’ I feel sad at heart. When it is essential for you to know, God will let you know. He has promised that if you ask wisdom from him, he will give it to you. But it is not always essential for us to know all the why’s and wherefore’s. We dishonor God by striving to get some one whom we think understands our case to help us. Is not Christ close beside us, and will he not give us the help we need? His word repeats the promise over and over again. ‘If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it,’ he says. ‘If ye love me, keep my commandments.’” EGW, “Our Supply in Christ,” *General Conference Bulletin*, April 4, 1901, 36.

³⁵Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 419.

³⁶Copies of letters written to various individuals are inserted throughout the volumes of the *Testimonies for the Church* and the three volumes of *Selected Messages*; see also Merlin D. Burt, “Ellen White and Mental Health,” in *A Christian Worldview & Mental Health: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, ed. Carlos Fayard et al. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 55-74.

³⁷The flexibility of the organizational structure, when organized around mission, was demonstrated in the reorganization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1901-1903.

³⁸This is a good reminder of the fact that having the right doctrine with wrong motivations doesn’t get us anywhere. See, e.g., EGW, “The Test of Doctrine,” *Review and Herald*, August 27, 1889.

³⁹From a Kellogg’s Corn Flakes advertisement.