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# In Defense of Compilations

by Arthur L. White

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One day in August 1944, R.A. Anderson and L.E. Froom, representing the ministerial association of the General Conference, walked into my office at the Ellen G. White Estate. "Are there in the White Estate files specific counsels on evangelistic ministry," they asked, "that could be drawn together and published as a single volume?" They pointed out that aside from a chapter here or there in *Gospel Workers* and the *Testimonies*, there was no place to which an evangelist could conveniently turn for guidance. Consequently, not a few of the evangelists were a law unto themselves, with varying degrees of success in their work. Anderson and Froom wanted to help in bringing greater uniformity to the evangelistic outreach of the church.

These leaders came to me as chief executive officer of the White Estate because the Estate had previously published nine compilations of Ellen White's writings. Since compilations have evoked comment—even a bit of controversy in some countries—it may be instructive to recount when compilations of Ellen White's work were started, how many there have been all together, why they have been published and how they were edited to avoid the bias of the editors.

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## *When Were Compilations Started?*

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Actually, some of the books by Ellen White published in her lifetime were compilations of her earlier writings. She used a series of 19 articles on Martin Luther, published in the *Signs of the Times* in 1883, to form chapters of *Spirit of Prophecy* Vol. IV, the forerunner of the 1888 *Great Controversy*. A series of her *Youth's Instructor* articles on Daniel in 1903, and a series in the *Review and Herald* on Ezra and Nehemiah, appearing in 1907 and 1908, found their way into *Prophets and Kings*.

During the last 30 years of her life Ellen White could not, as in her earlier years, just sit down and write a book. We might like to picture Ellen White working in comfortable, secluded circumstances, with reference works at hand, uninterruptedly writing chapter after chapter. In reality, except for brief periods when she gave a few consecutive weeks exclusively to writing, her work was done under less than favorable circumstances. She spent entire summers traveling from campmeeting to campmeeting, speaking once or twice daily at as many as 14 meetings in almost continuous succession.<sup>1</sup> One tour of the eastern United States took her away from home for seven months. In addition, Ellen White traveled through Europe three times in two years. In Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, England, France and Italy she spoke almost every day,

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Arthur White has just completed the final volume of his autobiography of Ellen G. White. From 1937 to 1978 he was the secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate.

holding interviews and writing personal testimonies, often describing things God had revealed to her before she met the recipients of the message. During her 70 years of active ministry Ellen White never enjoyed a sabbatical year to slip away to some hideaway spot to concentrate on writing.

Throughout this time, however, she was building up a tremendous reservoir of writings. On trips, whether for a week or three months, she took her office staff with her, carrying typewriters, office supplies and all things needful to carry on her literary work from day to day. Sometimes she wrote on her lap as she traveled by horse-drawn carriage. Other times she wrote on cross-country train trips. As a result, she accumulated innumerable letters, periodical articles, day-by-day journals, transcribed sermons and materials published in pamphlets and books.

In the earlier years, a handwritten copy of Ellen White's communication, many times

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the only copy, was sent to the person for whom the message was intended. But as the church grew, Ellen White was challenged by the fact that the messages God had given her must be shared with a wider audience. In the year 1868 Ellen White was instructed in vision that by dealing with "the wrongs of one, He [God] designs to correct many."<sup>2</sup> Of the vision she wrote:

I was shown that which fully justifies my course in publishing personal testimonies. When the Lord singles out individual cases and specifies their wrong, others, who have not been shown in vision, frequently take it for granted that they are right,

or nearly so. If one is reproved for a special wrong, brethren and sisters should carefully examine themselves to see wherein they have failed and wherein they have been guilty of the same sin.<sup>3</sup>

From the time typewriters came into use in her work in 1883, Ellen White's letters were kept on file, growing to a collection of a thousand pages or more each year. In these letters she endeavored to deal less with applications to particular individuals than with general principles. She wrote in 1905, "I am endeavoring by the help of God to write letters that will be a help, not merely to those to whom they are addressed, but to many others who need them."<sup>4</sup>

Ellen White described how these materials were compiled into books for broad church readership:

I feel very thankful for the help of Sister Marian Davis in getting out my books. She gathers materials from my diaries [day-by-day journals] from my letters, and from the articles published in the papers. I greatly prize her faithful service. She has been with me for twenty-five years, and has constantly been gaining increasing ability for the work of classifying and grouping my writings.<sup>5</sup>

At another time, writing of Miss Davis' work, she explained:

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

The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is one of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have not time to do. . . . Marian is a most valuable help to me in bringing out my books.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, at one time Ellen White said, Marian "is my bookmaker."

## *How Were Compilations Prepared?*

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**I**t was natural that at the end of her life Ellen White would anticipate that her writings in a wide variety of forms—published and unpublished—would

continue to be compiled. In her will she authorized "the printing of compilations from my manuscripts."<sup>7</sup>

After Ellen White's death her son and my father, W.C. White, continued to supervise compilations of her writings, starting with *Counsels on Health*. When I succeeded my father as executive secretary of the White Estate, the work of compiling Mrs. White's manuscripts continued. When Anderson and Froom came to me I was happy to recommend that the White Estate Board approve a compilation on evangelism. I knew that Ellen White herself would have approved.

The production of this compilation—neither the first nor the last prepared at the White Estate—was typical. In the light of Ellen White's wishes and her own practice, the White Estate board was sympathetic to the request of Anderson and Froom and requested that I investigate the feasibility of the *Evangelism* compilation. I gave some hours to a survey of materials—letters of counsel to various evangelists, sermons, articles in *Gospel Workers* and the *Testimonies* and periodical articles. I reported to the board, Anderson and Froom that ample materials existed. Some days later the advisory council of the

## How I Wrote the Ellen G. White Biography

by Arthur L. White

I was greatly surprised when the board of trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate came to me, asking me to complete a definitive biography of Ellen G. White. It was 1966. Sixteen years earlier the task of assembling biographical data—including handwritten diaries and early family letters—was begun. F. D. Nichol, editor of the *Review*, authored the project until the early summer of 1966 when, struck by a sudden aneurysm, he died.

Called upon to continue his work, I hesitated, knowing that some felt a member of the Ellen White family could not be objective in writing her biography. But finally, I agreed.

In the beginning, the work was slow. I was serving as secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, dividing my time between office duties, teaching and public ministry. But in 1978, when circumstances allowed, I resigned my official position to devote full time to the biography. This allowed the production of a volume a year—quite important, considering my advancing age.

### *How the Work Progressed*

Beginning in the early 1950s, members of the White Estate staff put in type-written form and on file all diaries and family letters, aggregating several thousand pages. An experienced member of the staff, Miss Bessie Mount, made a 4" × 6" index with some 8,000 cards, noting Ellen White's principal activities. Without this initial preparation, the writing of the biography within

a decade or two by one person would have been impossible.

Working on a year-by-year basis, I first went through the biographical cards, which averaged about 60 per year, choosing the principal events of the year. Then, page by page, I went through the issues of the *Review and Herald* for the year, watching for significant factual data. I typed on 4" × 6" slips of paper key quotations and information, making certain all reference data appeared at the head of the slip. I then scanned diary materials and letters of biographical significance, typing similar notes on 4" × 6" slips. This yielded from 75 to 150 sheets of notes per year.

Then, having in mind two or three 15-page chapters for a given year, I sat down to my faithful Standard Royal typewriter and began to write.

After my retirement in 1978, most of this work was done at home, free from interruptions. I edited as I put the materials together, and further edited before the chapter was passed to my secretary at the White Estate office. She prepared the finished copy on a word processor. Then copies were submitted to 10 or 12 White Estate Trustees and other experienced denominational workers for critical reading and suggestions for correction and improvement before the final approval.

After the manuscript was placed in the hands of the publisher, it was edited and all quotations verified. As the production of each volume proceeded, proofs were read and illustrations chosen by the author from the photograph files of the White Estate and the *Review and Herald*. The volumes were printed in initial editions of 20,000 copies.

ministerial association lodged with the White Trustees an official request for the preparation and publication of a compilation giving counsels to the evangelists and Bible instructors. The board of trustees at their meeting on September 10, 1944, took the following action:

VOTED: That, in harmony with the recommendation of the Ministerial Association Advisory Council, we authorize the compilation of a manuscript, "Counsels to Evangelists and Bible Instructors" [later renamed *Evangelism*], the work to be done by a committee of five, appointed by the chair. The committee named was as follows: A.L. White, W.H. Branson, R.A. Anderson, Miss Louise Kleuser, J.L. Shuler.

Of course, variations of the process I have described have entered into the work through the decade I have been laboring on the project. And various members of the White Estate staff have assisted greatly in various ways.

### *The Order of Publication of the Six Volumes*

The fact that volumes of the biography were published in a somewhat reverse order has occasioned some questions. Here are the principal reasons:

- Books relating to Ellen White's life, long available, contain quite a detailed account of her early life, while very little has been published about her middle and later years. Because of this, and considering my age and some uncertainty about the future, I felt my first efforts should be in areas least covered in print.

- A decade or more ago when the work began, there were some persons still living and available for interviews who were personally acquainted with Ellen White.

- At the outset, the matter of concern was the writing and not so much the publication, but with the manuscript for Volume 5 prepared and Volume 6 well along, the relevance of the materials was such that it was deemed appropriate to begin publication and make the volumes available one at a time, rather than asking readers to wait until the writing was completed.

Throughout the writing of the biography, as I watched how God gave insights, revealed history, provided guidance and imparted instruction through Ellen White, I tried to open to the reader the many-faceted manner in which the Lord of the universe communicated with a member of the human family on earth.

The committee of five met and decided that the forthcoming volume would serve best if it were complete in its coverage. It should therefore draw from all sources published and unpublished, even though doing so would reprint some already published articles. Arthur White and Louise Kleuser were named a working team to prepare the manuscript.

First, the team had to decide what procedures to use. Either an outline could be drawn up and material then researched to develop the manuscript, or all known sources could be consulted and then, with the E.G. White statements as its basis, the manuscript developed. Such a course would minimize the influence of the compilers, allowing Ellen White uninhibitedly to come through in the finished work. Even though this procedure would be the most time-consuming and expensive method, it was chosen as the safest and the best.

Loise Kleuser and I set to work. We first employed the indexes to the E.G. White letter and manuscript files, then perused files of periodicals before looking at Ellen White's books. We followed every clue to locate all relevant materials. Each item was painstakingly copied (no electronic copiers were available in those days) and individually filed. Items tied particularly to a given person were not included. However, there proved to be very few of these. The result of this initial search yielded more than 2,000 sheets.

Even during the selection process, it was easy to see where Ellen White placed her emphasis. A general outline of the subject matter naturally emerged, leading us to set down 22 general divisions (later reduced to 20). With this list of topics before us, we sorted the materials into their appropriate sections. Where there were two, three or more specific statements covering the same point, the strongest or most complete, regardless of source, was chosen. The others were laid aside.

At this point, each section was organized. Overlapping points or phraseology were

eliminated. Because there could be no change in the words employed by Ellen White, the items were arranged and drawn together by employing side headings, highlighting the main point of the item selected. Many prayers were offered seeking guidance of the Holy Spirit as the work was being done, particularly that there be an absolute fairness to Ellen White and the prospective reader in the way materials were employed.

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A paragraph from the White Estate minutes of May 2, 1945, seven months after the work began, offers insights in the progress of the project:

The Secretary pointed out that the manuscript for the new book, "Counsels to Evangelists" [later renamed *Evangelism*], is taking shape, and arrangements should be made for a reading committee. It was suggested that this committee be one which could serve the Officers of the General Conference and the Ministerial Association as well as the Trustees. The following committee was appointed: W.H. Branson, L.K. Dickson, F.M. Wilcox, R.A. Anderson, J.L. Shuler, T. Carcich, D.E. Venden, C.A. Reeves, and T.G. Bunch.

Just two months later, the White Estate trustees meeting gave further consideration to the manuscript for the proposed book. The secretary, after reporting that good progress was being made on the project, sought counsel about employing italics to emphasize certain parts of the manuscript. The ensuing action read:

VOTED: That the Trustees feel that it would be out of place to use italics to emphasize certain parts of the manuscript, and might appear to take on the form of private interpretation.

Then there was the question of whether the compilers should be named in the foreword. The secretary pointed out that volumes prepared during Ellen White's life did not list the compilers in order that the focus be on the author. As a result the trustees

VOTED: That the foreword to the Evangelism manuscript be signed by the Trustees, and that we request the Secretary to draft a statement for consideration.

The nine readers of the manuscript mainly suggested wording for side headings and referred the attention of the compilers to a very few additional E.G. White statements. With reports in hand, the working team of two examined the entire manuscript, cutting out some repetition of materials and making other suggested adjustments. In its virtually finished form, 25 copies were mimeographed and the adjusted manuscript submitted to the board of trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate (and others) for final approval at their October 25, 1945 meeting. Minutes of that session describe the book:

An analysis of the manuscript indicates that it contains 200,785 words, and if issued with a type page similar to *Testimonies to Ministers* will make a volume, including index and title page, of approximately 675 pages. In analyzing the contents, the Secretary pointed out that 50 per cent of the matter is drawn from the Manuscript Files, 24 per cent from periodical articles, *Special Testimonies*, and out-of-print works, and 26 per cent from the current available E.G. White books. Thus 74 per cent of the manuscripts present materials which were not available prior to the issuance of this volume.

Fourteen months after it was decided to prepare a compilation, *Evangelism* was published. It has enjoyed a good sale, serving effectively as a guide and inspiration to those engaged in evangelistic ministry.

**A** vital concern to White Estate personnel involved in making compilations was—and is—ensuring that it is fully representative and free from the bias of the compiler. Let me cite an example. A few years before the publication of *Evangelism*, when *Counsels on Diet and Foods* came from the press, I was drawn into the

compilation process. I was aware of a half-dozen E.G. White statements that set forth circumstances in which the use of meat was justified. I am a vegetarian and could very easily have ignored these, but I had no desire to do so; indeed, I would not have dared to do so. The preferences of the compiler must not weigh in selecting materials. The compilation must correctly and completely represent the emphases of Ellen White. For example, all the statements known to exist recognizing a justification for meat-eating are in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*.

In her later years, Ellen White occasionally expressed her desire to get out a book on the Christian home. This project was delayed in order to complete other volumes such as *Acts of the Apostles; Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students; Gospel Workers and Prophets and Kings*. The book on the home had to wait, and Ellen White passed to her rest before the work could be undertaken.

Soon after the acceptance of the manuscript for *Evangelism*, the White trustees

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commissioned the preparation of a manuscript on the home, following the methods described for *Evangelism*. The materials assembled made two books, *The Adventist Home* and *Child Guidance*. The procedure of assembling all that Ellen White wrote on a given subject often brings to light such a wealth of materials, it is difficult to hold a volume to desirable limits. Another compilation that ran beyond anticipated limits was the popular *Mind, Character and Personality*, issued in two volumes.

Down through the years the White Estate has been requested to prepare compilations on many subjects. Although the White trustees see no light in providing Spirit of Prophecy counsels already available elsewhere, the posthumous books they have produced have implemented what Ellen White had in mind when she made this statement near the close of her life:

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.<sup>8</sup>

## *The Integrity of the Compilations*

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Questions have occasionally been raised as to whether taking selections from various Ellen G. White sources and putting these together, one after the other, may have created distortions. Others have asked how sentences or paragraphs taken from a letter addressed to an individual can be lifted from the letter and used in a book for general reading. These questions have already been partly answered, but the fuller answer is found in the quality and nature of the materials included in the compilation.

This point in particular should be noted: Statements representing facts, principles and truths are quite as much truth in the abstract as in an immediate setting. The truth expressed in the words, "God is love," needs no context or explanation. Counsel to an administrator pointing out efficient ways to conduct the work of God, or even pinpointing certain weaknesses or dangers, is truth unaffected by circumstances or specific context. Counsel to parents on the proper manner of administering discipline would apply to other families where the same elements exist. Of course there are times when a fuller context might be of

interest, and for this reason each item included in the compilations carries its own source reference, but space limitations prohibit using letters or articles in their entirety.

Even when delivering particular counsels to specific individuals, Ellen White very often couched the message in terms of general principles. This is a point she made in writing of a certain experience in New Zealand. As she visited one of the cities, she became aware of the failure of the evangelist-pastor and his wife, the McCullaghs, to exercise proper control over their three-year-old daughter, and so wrote a message to the parents giving guidance. However, observing the attitudes of the parents and being aware of the sensitive nature of the matter, she did not give them the letter. She later explained in writing to the parents:

I intended to give it to you, but did not do so because I gave a discourse there in which I took up very plainly the principles stated in this letter. You both heard my words, spoken under the power of Holy Spirit, and Sister McCullagh told me that she received this message as given to herself for she needed it. She said that she had never seen the case presented in that light before, and that she would make a decided change in her course of action in regard to her child. But this work has been strangely neglected.

Then she explained a procedure often followed in her work which many times proved effective in avoiding a confrontation that could repel rather than win:

It is my first duty to present Bible principles. Then, unless there is a decided, conscientious reform made by those whose cases have been presented before me, I must appeal to them personally.<sup>9</sup>

With this quality evident in many of the messages directed to individuals, conferences or institutions, it is easily seen that statements of vital principles can well be employed in compilations of E.G. White materials. It is also apparent that counsels that serve the church well can be widely disseminated to benefit its members, thus preparing a people to meet their Lord at his second coming.

In some cases, as counsels on a given topic are drawn together in close proximity, the reader has the benefit of the full range of the presentations of E.G. White on a given point. Sometimes this yields a concentration on a topic, which may seem overwhelming as God's ideals for his church are portrayed. Nevertheless, the assemblage of the materials in this form brings within easy reach phases of important guidance and instruction that should not be overlooked.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1. Arthur L. White, *E.G. White Biography*, Vol. 3, *The Lonely Years*, pp. 35-71.

2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 112.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Ellen G. White, Letter 79, 1905.

5. Ellen G. White, Letter 9, 1903 (see 3 SM 93).

6. Ellen G. White, Letter 61a, 1900 (see 3 SM 91, 92).

7. F.D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, pp. 675-678, for the full text of the will; p. 677 for the clause containing this provision.

8. Ellen G. White, Letter 371, 1907, to F.M. Wilcox (see 3 SM 76).

9. Ellen G. White, Letter 69, 1896. Cf. *E.G. White Biography*, Vol. 4, *The Australian Years*, pp. 276, 277.