



Beatrice Neall

Why I Remain a Seventh-day Adventist

There are many reasons I remain a Seventh-day Adventist. First, I believe the Adventist Church has more truth than any other denomination—the Great Controversy, the Sabbath, the nature of man, the health message, the Second Coming. Secondly, the Adventist family is a great family to belong to. When you've come through the Adventist educational system, when you have served in different places, you have friends all over the world. Also, I was born into an Adventist home. But I would like to concentrate on the role of Ellen White in my life.

I derive my primary nourishment from the Bible. I love it and make it my study every day. The Bible is my bread and carrots and potatoes. The Spirit of Prophecy writings are my supplements—my vitamins, minerals, and barley green. I need inspiration every day, and although the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy are inspired, I don't find all parts equally inspiring. There are mountain peaks of the Bible that are awe inspiring—stories of the patriarchs, the revivals under Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, Jesus' farewell discourse, the book of Ephesians. At times some sections seem arid.

Not all parts of the Spirit of Prophecy inspire me, either. I agree with Alden Thompson that there's a movement in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy from Sinai to Calvary, from law to grace.¹ I

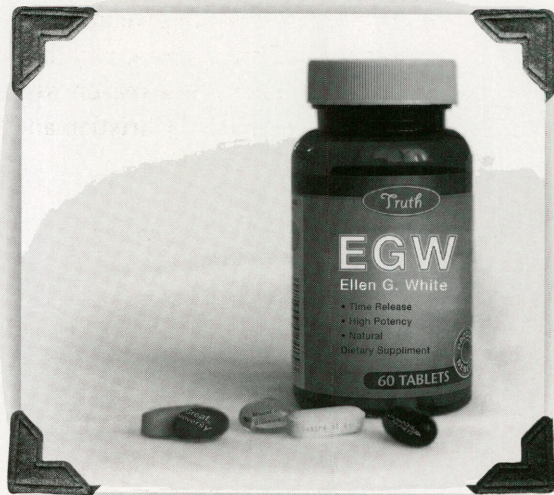
receive the greatest inspiration from the later works of Ellen White—the ones she wrote and rewrote as she learned more and more about the grace of God—especially after 1888. There's where the mountain peaks are. I call these the classics.

The Spirit of Prophecy had an influence in bringing my forebears to the Lord. Mother's family was brought into Adventism by George King, the first Adventist colporteur, around the turn of the twentieth century. King was heeding the counsel of Ellen White to work the cities, especially New York. So he came to my grandparents' door selling some Ellen White books and Uriah Smith's *Daniel and Revelation*. When King delivered the books, Grandpa Gordon's heart sank when he saw that several of them were written by a woman—

"another Mary Baker Eddy," he complained. So he began reading the book by Uriah Smith. Grandma picked up *Patriarchs and Prophets* and said, "Samuel, this is a good book!" So Grandpa read all the books, George King had Bible studies with the family, and they became Adventists.

My father's conversion was different. As a young doctor, he was walking down Broadway in New York City one night trying to decide which movie to attend when he saw on one marquee, "Will the League of Nations Succeed? Hear this compelling address by Carlyle B. Haynes." (Haynes rented the biggest theater in town and packed it every night.) My father was captivated. After two years of attending meetings and studying, he was almost ready for baptism.

Then Haynes introduced him to the Spirit of Prophecy by having him read *Ministry of Healing*. Dad was annoyed that the Adventist Church had a female prophet. Also, he was offended that a lay person would presume to write on health and healing. He accepted the book with many reservations. He liked the part about tobacco and alcohol, but he maintained his belief in the medicinal approach to disease and in a high protein diet. He liked his



meat and coffee and lived a high-stress life. My poor father suffered greatly from ill health for many years before he died of a massive coronary at age seventy-five. Though he read the Bible through every year, I am not aware that he spent much time with the Spirit of Prophecy books. I missed the sweetness of disposition that comes from long tarrying with the life of Jesus. Dad's critical attitude toward the writings had the paradoxical effect of confirming my faith in them.

Mother was the one who reared us four children. She had morning and evening worship with us every day. She called it "prayers"—"It's time for prayers now." This was an important part of our lives. We'd sing and study and pray, joined by any friends who happened to come by. She not only taught us the Sabbath School lessons, the memory verses, and Bible doctrines, she also had us memorize many Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, and other great chapters of the Bible. In the evenings she would read the *Junior Bible Year* and biographies of great Christians.

One year, she read portions of Ellen White's Conflict Series to us. My heart was touched by the story of Jesus' trial and death, and the martyrdom of Huss and Jerome. I

decided I must start reading those books for myself. At twelve years of age, I began getting up early in the morning, going off to a quiet place, and reading *Desire of Ages*.

Early in the morning, I would crawl out of bed and walk to the top of Sunset Hill, where there was a shelter, and read. My eyes nearly wore a hole through the

passages about Peter's denial and Jesus' forgiveness, and the pages got all wrinkled from my tears. When World War II struck and I went to live on my aunt's farm, I read *Great Controversy* before going to sleep, huddled under the covers while the wind howled around the icy windows. Those were precious times for me. When I entered my teens and the hormones began to surge, I was kept from many temptations by the loving admonitions of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Years later, during the years my husband Ralph and I served in the mission field, I tried to bring the gospel to people of other cultures by writing books and Bible courses. The portrayal of Jesus and his role in the Great Controversy never ceased to thrill my soul. As I endured the stresses and heartaches of life and felt a need for Jesus, I always knew where I could find him—in the Ellen G. White classics.

The most difficult time for me was in the 1980s when my family was in turmoil; Union College was in turmoil; the Church was in turmoil with Merikay Silver, Desmond Ford, Walter Rea, and Donald Davenport; and anything that could be shaken really got shaken. I personally was involved in theological ferment finishing my

doctoral program, modifying my views of inspiration and my confidence in the Church.

That's when I experienced the deepest gloom—what Wesley called the "dark night of the soul." Heaven seemed closed to me and I didn't know where to go. I had lost my innocence, the simple faith of my earlier years. There seemed to be a black cloud over my head shutting me off from heaven. But I soon found that there is nowhere else to turn except to God. He's all we've got! The place to find him is in the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy writings, and the great hymns of the Church. These words gripped me:

How firm a foundation ye saints
of the Lord
is laid for your faith in his
excellent Word.
What more could he say than
to you he hath said?
Who unto the Saviour for
refuge have fled.

All that we need is there in God's Word. What more could he say than what he had already said? I also found this beautiful passage: "O for a living, active faith! We need it, we must have it, or we shall faint and fail in the day of trial. The darkness that will then rest upon our path must not discourage us or drive us to despair. It is the veil with which God covers His glory when He comes to impart rich blessings."²

Other quotations that I had memorized in college years comforted me: "Never feel that Jesus is far away. He is always near. His loving presence surrounds you. Seek Him as one who desires to be found of you. He desires you not only to touch His garments, but to walk with Him in constant communion."³ "Never a prayer is

offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it.”⁴

The conviction deepened that the Bible was inspired, Ellen White was inspired—not, perhaps, in the way I had thought, verbally, mechanically—but dynamically. You can pick flaws with isolated statements, you can argue over sources and originality, but if you want to know how to find life through Jesus, how to experience the heights and depths of the love of God, how to aspire to and achieve the highest goals in life, how to avoid the snares of Satan, how to maximize health, how to have a happy home, how to bring souls to Jesus, how to live and end your life with the greatest satisfac-

tion, then make it a habit to read the great Ellen G. White books.

Just this last year I went through some deep trials. I needed the Lord with me. Once again I pulled out *Desire of Ages* and feasted on its contents. Then I turned to *Ministry of Healing*, especially those last chapters, “In Contact with Others,” that tell how to be Christlike in the midst of strife. Then I went on to *Christ’s Object Lessons*, *Steps to Christ*, and *Mount of Blessings*. I found Jesus there. I found that he had experienced all I was going through and much more. I clung to him and prayed, “Lord, help me to act as a Christian through all of this.” I slipped a few times, but he helped me through.

I find that I need not only my bread of the Word every day, but my supplements—the great Ellen

G. White classics—to give me easy access to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. That is one reason why I remain a committed Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist.

Notes and References

1. Alden Thompsen, “From Sinai to Golgotha,” *Adventist Review*, Dec. 3, 10, and 17, 1981.
2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:215.
3. Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942), 85.
4. Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 206.

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Rehabilitating the Testimonial

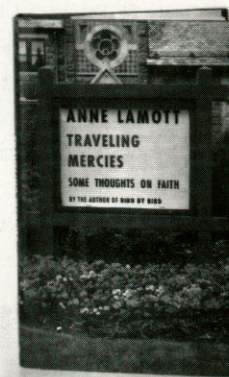
Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith. By Anne Lamott, New York: Pantheon Books, 1999. x + 276 pages

Reviewed by Dennis Brand

I am reluctant to admit my Christianity. Partly this is because I can’t help wishing to distance myself from wild-eyed, far-right-wing-type Christians. You know; those overly sincere, humorless folks who bomb abortion clinics, think Jesus destroyed the World Trade Center to get back at homosexuals, and use words like “abomination” with no trace of irony.

But there’s also the cringing, status-conscious, wannabe liberal arts intellectual part of me worrying that in the smart-people culture Christianity is just not cool. Yes, it’s straight back to junior high. So, even more remarkable to me than

the power and beauty of Anne Lamott’s meditations on faith and living in touch with the love of Jesus is the fact that she makes Christianity seem cool, something compatible with feminism, reading the *New Yorker*, and thinking.



She also rehabilitates the testimonial. *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* is basically a testimonial—stories from her life, often relating how faith or God helped her deal with death, heartbreak, and that hardest trial of all, daily life. Unlike most testimonials—where ex-sinners detail the many and lurid escapades of their previous life until they hit rock bottom and in the end get themselves saved—Lamott takes the end of most stories and begins hers there. She fits her entire preconversion story (which has as much drama as any I’ve ever

Photo: Thomas Osborn