

With the death of Ellen White in 1915, the Seventh-day Adventist Church entered a new era. Questions about how the church should relate to the now-dead prophet were vigorously discussed at a Bible Conference in 1919. On this 100th anniversary of that conference, we republish portions of the Minutes from that meeting. Historian George Knight also addresses the issues that have evolved for the church in its relationship to the prophet in the years since her death.

Ellen White's AFTERLIFE

DELIGHTFUL FICTIONS, TROUBLING FACTS, AND ENLIGHTENING RESEARCH

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It is good to be a living prophet. But it may be better to be a dead one. At least it is more peaceful.

That was certainly true for Ellen White in the Angwin/PUC community in the early 1960s during my time as a student. Her days of conflict were over, her book sales were flourishing, and she was undoubtedly held in higher regard by a larger proportion of Adventists than she had been during her long life.

And to top it off, her daughter-in-law, W. C. White's widow, lived on Howell Mountain, and her son Arthur White was a frequent visitor to both her and Pacific Union College. A highpoint of Arthur's visits was his Sabbath-afternoon lectures. He was assured of speaking to a packed house in Irwin Hall as he rehearsed God's prophetic leading in his grandmother's life and ministry. Those were not-to-be-missed events for faculty, students, and community. The early 1960s were indeed the wonderful world of Ellen White and she was secure in it, at least within the borders of Adventism.

That wonderful world was a general phenomenon in Adventism. And it was certainly a significant aspect of Pacific Union College from 1962 through 1965 while I was a student.

The Wonderful World of Ellen White in the Early 1960s

Not the least to be influenced by Ellen White's authority was PUC's religion faculty. I remember Leo Van Dolson's course in the Life and Teachings of Jesus. The only books we read were by Ellen White, and his detailed syllabus was essentially a chronological and topical analysis of *The Desire of Ages* and *Christ's Object Lessons*. Van Dolson even explained how he used Ellen White to determine the chronological flow of events in Christ's life for those points that were not clear or appeared to be conflicted in the Bible. For him, Ellen White was authoritative in every way. The same can be said for Robert W. Olson, who later followed Arthur White as the director of the Ellen G. White Estate. While I never took Daniel and Revelation from him, I remember his

students carrying to class a compilation on those two biblical books that included the Ellen G. White Comments sections from the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Her comments were important and determinative in the presentations. I did take Olson's three-quarter sequence on Ellen White's life and writings. She, of course, was central due to the nature of the class. But what sticks out most prominently in my mind is that in the third quarter each student, on the basis of the Bible and Ellen White, was to

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Artwork: Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

develop a chart indicating the flow of events at the end of time. I still have mine filed away, replete with arrows and a massive number of Ellen White references and two from the Bible. Such charts were not peculiar to PUC, but were ubiquitous in Adventism at that time.

Carl Coffman, who taught the practical topics, also held Ellen White to be centrally authoritative. Not only did he assign such books as *Gospel Workers* and *Testimonies to Ministers* as required reading, but he had each of us develop a loose-leaf notebook from Ellen White's writings with the various pages consisting of compilations on specific issues we might face in our ministry. William Hyde, who taught the systematic theology course, also let Ellen White be a deciding authority, although I do not remember him overly using her writings in his courses on the Old Testament Prophets. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind as I recall the authoritative, and even preeminent, role Ellen White's writings played in my PUC experience, especially in the Department of Religion.

But, and here is a crucial point, not all of the theological professors emphasized Ellen White or her authority. Among that group were Fred Veltman and Eric Syme. Of course, since Veltman only taught Greek and Greek exegesis at that time, one would not expect him to use Ellen White. But my impression from extended interaction with him is that he would never have used her for exegesis under any circumstances. More significant in this discussion is Syme, from whom I took Daniel and Revelation. I do not recall him ever using Ellen White's writings in that class. Midway between those who put Ellen White at the center and those who didn't was Lewis Hartin, who basically taught exegesis of the Pauline Epistles from scripture and only pointed out a few times during the year that she had an opinion on this or that difficult passage.

A point of special significance in the above discussion is that the religion faculty of PUC in the early 1960s was not agreed on the role of Ellen White in the classroom. We will see in the rest of this paper that

Adventists have never been united on the authority and proper use of Ellen White.

My impression of my fellow students, especially in the religious arena, is much more unified. With Ellen White we had the flawless authority on almost everything of importance. If we needed help in understanding the meaning of a Bible passage all we had to do was check Ellen White's comments, greatly facilitated by the scriptural index of the recently published *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, which helpfully supplied Ellen White input in the discussion of the verses themselves, an "Ellen G. White Comments" section at the end of the treatment of each biblical chapter that provided references to her

major remarks for many verses from her published writings, and a major section of "Ellen G. White Comments" at the end of each volume drawn from her unpublished writings and periodical articles that supplied material for a great many verses. With such an array of material

One of my great literary ambitions in my early Adventist life was to compile all of her comments on each verse in the entire Bible on the meaning of each scriptural passage.

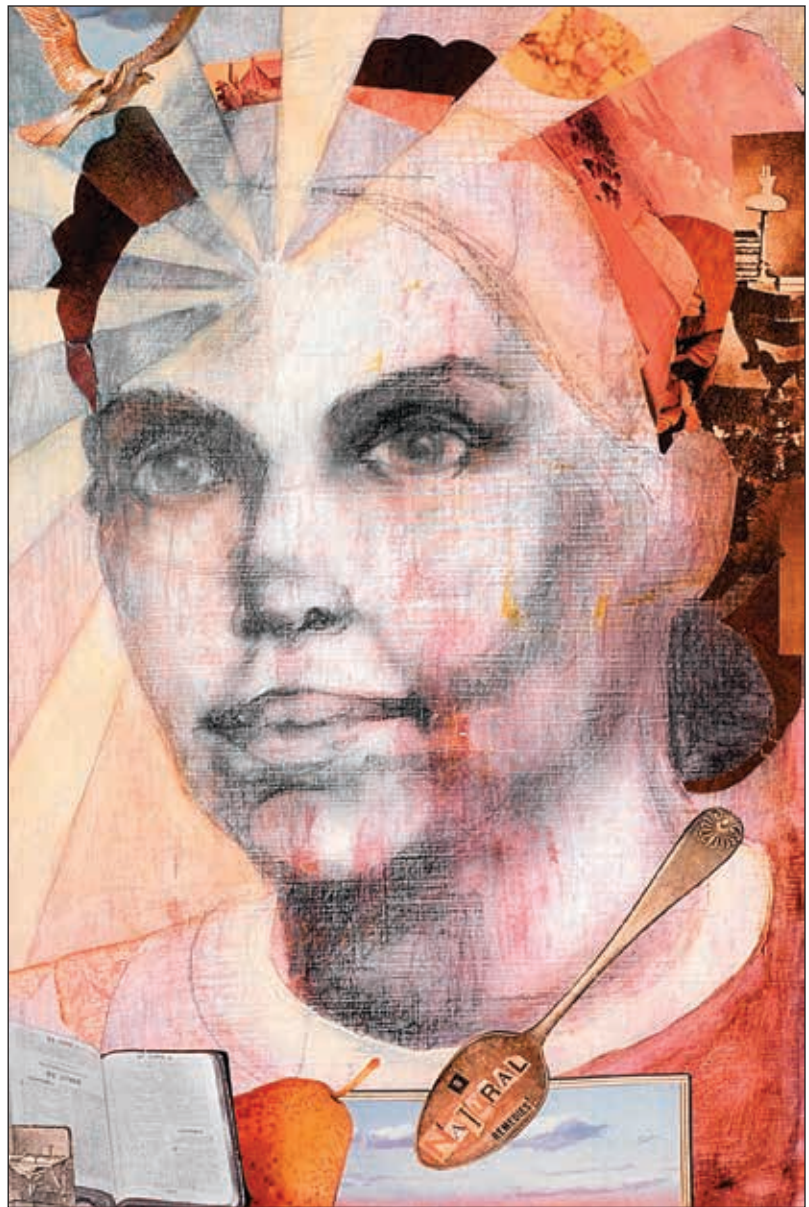
at hand it was easy to feel that she was indeed the ultimate Bible commentator, a divine one, "far above all other commentators," as the editor of the *Review and Herald* put it.¹ In fact, one of my great literary ambitions in my early Adventist life was to compile all of her comments on each verse in the entire Bible on the meaning of each scriptural passage. Such would provide the final word on biblical interpretation.

Her writings in the realm of doctrine and theology also provided us with the final word. It was off to the *Index* or other Ellen White resources if we had a theological problem that needed a divine answer. The Bible, of course, was important, most important theoretically, but in practice Ellen White had the final authoritative word, even on the most marginal and esoteric points. We did a great deal of theology from her writings. We were glad to have her writings since the Bible did not say much on many topics. And we used them to generate our homemade compilations to provide the final answer on topics not sufficiently covered in Scripture.

Ellen White was not only a divine, inspired Bible commentator and a valid source for doctrine, but she was also authoritative for history, chronology, science, and anything else she spoke on. Beyond that, those in my group had no doubt that she was infallible and inerrant and probably verbally inspired. On that last point, verbal inspiration, we were beginning to have some doubts since Book One of *Selected Messages* recently had been published in 1958 and was throwing cold water on that position.² But no matter, we were deep in recent Adventist practice on the point and made large arguments based on her choice of this word or that and even used the structural flow of her sentences to nail down our points, practices reinforced by some of our teachers.

And when it came to the source for her writings, we had not the slightest doubt. It all (except for such minor secular bits of information as the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium) came straight from heaven, as if there were some kind of pipeline from the throne of God through the top of Ellen White's head and out through her fingertips. And voilà, we had divine revelation transposed into divine inspiration. And revelation was the only model most of us ever thought of. Ideas of borrowing and possible plagiarism were far from our pure minds on the topic.

And, if those good things weren't enough, we were told by some authorities that she was 100 years ahead of her times. Combining all of those things with her flawless character and you had the best thing on earth. I still remember us students deciding if something was right or wrong by trying to discover Ellen White's practice on the topic. Thus we could even provide the ultimate answer on such questions as whether it was a sin to wash dishes on Sabbath. In my pre-college year, I still recall crossing the street from my home in Mountain View, California, to ask Alma McKibbin, who had lived with Ellen White in her younger years, questions about Ellen White that I



This portrait of Ellen by Stephanie Gifford Reeder appeared on the cover of *Spectrum* Volume 24, Issue 4, in Autumn 2001.

hoped would provide the final answer to certain esoteric points that I was struggling with. I remember her sorrowfully looking at me, perhaps wondering if I were nuts, and undoubtedly sensing my legalistic frame of mind.

Beyond the realm of academics, Ellen White's counsel was determinative at PUC in such areas as entertainment, recreation, and other aspects of conduct and dress. And a large portion of the students had arrived on campus with "Ellen White says" already ringing in their ears. In all too many cases the prophet's words had been used to muscle them into correct Adventist paths throughout their lives—a practice that set them up with a desire to



Artwork: Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

escape her influence and avoid her writings when the opportunity seemed justified in the 1970s.

The role of Ellen White at PUC in the early 1960s was a subset of the practices and attitudes of mainline Adventism at the time. The prophet was at the apex of her respect and authoritative position in the denomination. The Sabbath School quarterlies and typical sermons were peppered with Ellen White quotations, and often dominated by them. And in the theological crisis stimulated by the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* in 1957 (which sported three Ellen White compilations in its appendices) the Adventist discussion was permeated by homemade Ellen White compilations on the nature of Christ, perfection, and almost every topic of interest. It was the age of homegrown authoritative compilations. That to a large extent was how theology was done.

The authoritative word of Ellen White settled the problem.

And her style and words themselves caught the attention of many in the 1920s through the 1960s. I have on my shelves a book published in 1953 titled *Literary Beauty of Ellen G. White's Writings* which analyzes her writings by literary standards and finds her “a master of style.”³ The influential M. L. Andreasen made the same point in 1948 when he admitted that he found it difficult to believe that a person with so little education could produce writings of such literary beauty. The only way that such beauty and style could be accounted for, he opined, was “on the basis of inspiration.”⁴ Those were typical evaluations before researchers began to carefully look at her use of literary assistants.

In summary, the early 1960s was a wonderful time to be Ellen White. She was not only authoritative for exegesis and theology, but also inerrant, infallible, 100 years ahead of her times, of a flawless character, and for many verbally inspired. And to top it off, everything she wrote came straight from heaven through divine revelation.

The most remarkable thing about those early-1960s perspectives related to Ellen White is that she herself did not believe them nor agree with them. And neither did most of those of her contemporaries who worked most closely with her.

Ellen White and Her Most Enlightened Contemporaries Never Believed in the Wonderful World Construct

One fascinating aspect of Adventist history is that so much about the nature of Ellen White's work was forgotten in the years after her death. That fact, as we will see, set the denomination up for an Ellen White crisis in the 1970s.

Many of her most enlightened colleagues clearly saw the problem that would be created if people claimed too much for her work. Foremost among that group was W. C. White, the son who worked extremely close to her for the last twenty-five years of her life.

In the wake of the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy* and S. N. Haskell's reaction against the changes that had been made, W. C. White wrote:

I believe, Brother Haskell, that there is danger of our injuring Mother's work by claiming for it more than she claims for it, more than Father ever claimed for it, more than Elder[s] Andrews, Waggoner, or Smith ever claimed for it. I cannot see consistency in our putting forth a claim of verbal

inspiration when Mother does not make any such claim, and I certainly think we will make a great mistake if we lay aside historical research and endeavor to settle historical questions by the use of Mother's books as an authority when she herself does not wish them to be used in any such way.

It is of great significance to realize that Ellen White saw the same dangers. At the end of one copy of her son's letter we find the following handwritten note: “I approve of the remarks made in this letter. Ellen G. White.”⁵

It is of interest that during her lifetime, revisions of her works consistently raised the issue of verbal inspiration. After all, how can inspired words be changed? That problem surfaced in the early 1880s when what has become the first four volumes of *Testimonies for the Church* were being revised. One result of the problem was an action taken by the 1883 General Conference session that read in part that “we believe the light given by God to his servants is by the

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enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.”⁶ Those sentiments were Ellen White’s personal position. Thus, in 1886, she could write that “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.”⁷

That understanding was widespread among Ellen White’s closest contemporaries. Thus, General Conference president A. G. Daniells could note in 1919 that:

there are men who just hold me right up as a doubter of the Testimonies because I take the position that the Testimonies are not verbally inspired, and that they have been worked up by the secretaries and put in proper grammatical

shape. A few years ago a man came onto the nominating committee and wanted me kept out of the presidency because I did not believe the Testimonies were verbally inspired.⁸

Closely related to verbal inspiration is the topic of inerrancy (the idea that inspired writings are free from error). Part of the difficulty for some with the revision of her works was that some of the “facts” were changed. Thus W. W. Prescott was converted from a rigid view on inspiration through his work in revising *The Great Controversy*, a project that she wanted done. Noting that he had had to “adjust” his views during the process, Prescott had come to understand that the real point of Ellen White’s inspiration had to do with the larger themes rather than with factual details. “For instance,” he told the participants at the 1919 Bible Conference, “before

Great Controversy was revised, I was unorthodox on a certain point, but after it was revised, I was perfectly orthodox.”⁹ And, faced with the possibility that there might be mistakes and errors in the Bible due to the work of copyists or translators, Ellen White claimed that that was a genuine probability, but that “all the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.” Her major concern had to do with the broad themes of scripture. “Not one soul would lose its way to heaven” if individuals followed the biblical “guidebook.”¹⁰ Along that line, she penned that the Bible is “an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will,”¹¹ rather than being infallible on every topic it touched.

A second set of ideas that Ellen White and those who worked closest to her were clear on was that her works should not be viewed as a divine, inspired commentary on the Bible and that they should not be used to settle doctrinal issues. Those issues arose during the 1888 era when G. I. Butler, president of the General Conference, and others sought to use her writings to



Ellen White, circa 1878, colored. (Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.)

settle the arguments being hotly disputed over the identity of the law in Galatians and the ten horns of Daniel 7.

Not only did Ellen White decline to settle the biblical issues through appeal to her Testimonies, but she went so far as to infer to the delegates at the 1888 General Conference session on October 24 that it was providential that she had lost the testimony to J. H. Waggoner in which she had purportedly resolved the nature of the law in Galatians once and for all in the 1850s. “God has a purpose in this,” she asserted, “He wants us to go to the Bible and get the Scripture evidence.”¹²

Again, J. H. Morrison read several passages from her *Sketches from the Life of Paul* to “prove” Butler’s interpretation of the Galatian’s law. Ellen White was unimpressed. Earlier in the day she had said “I cannot take my position on either side until I have studied the question.”¹³ It was in that context that she had noted that it was providential that she could not find her testimony to Waggoner on

the topic since some were seeking to use her writings in place of studying the Bible. From her perspective, her writings had their purposes, but one of them was not to take a superordinate position to the Bible by providing an infallible commentary.

She would make that position explicit again twenty years later in the divisive controversy over the meaning of the “daily” in Daniel 8. In that struggle, S. N. Haskell and others were holding that the new interpretation would “undermine present truth” because Adventists had based their traditional view upon a statement in *Early Writings*. Haskell was explicit on his view of the relation of Ellen White’s writings to the Bible: “We ought to understand such expressions by the aid of the Spirit of Prophecy... All points are to be solved” in that manner.¹⁴ Ellen White was just as explicit, writing that “I request that my writings shall not be used as the leading argument to settle questions over which there is now so much controversy. I entreat of Elders H, I, J, 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.”¹⁵

Ellen White made it clear that her writings were to bring people “back to the word” and to aid them in understanding the biblical principles,¹⁶ but she never held them as a divine commentary on scripture. Nor did she see them as a source of doctrine. “The Bible,” she repeatedly asserted throughout her ministry, “is the only rule of faith and doctrine.”¹⁷

Daniells, Prescott, and others who worked closely with her held the same position on the respective roles of

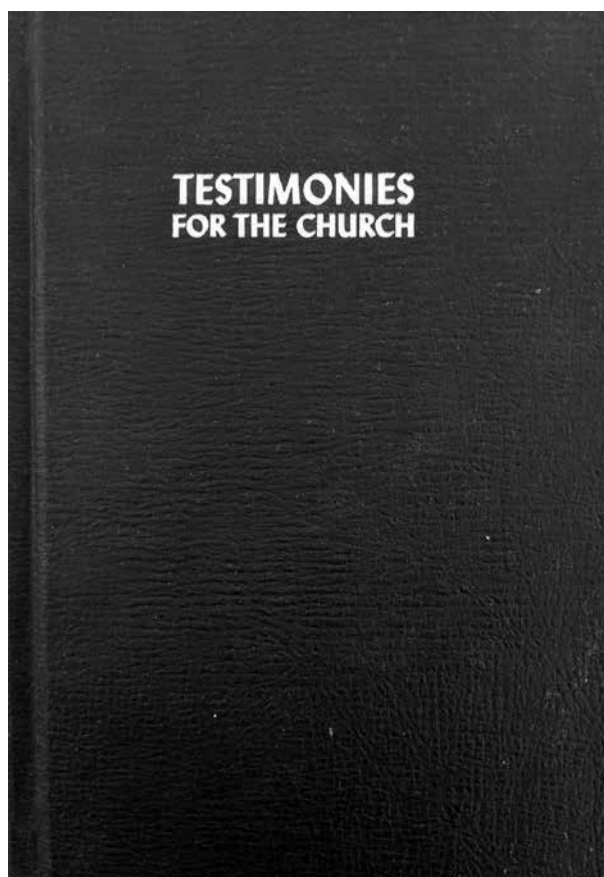
the Bible and Ellen White’s writings. Daniells, for example, noted at the 1919 Bible Conference that “we are to get our interpretation from this Book [the Bible], primarily. I think that the Book explains itself, and I think we can understand the Book, fundamentally, through the Book, without resorting to the Testimonies to prove up on it.” A little later he pointed out that “it is not

our position, and it is not right that the spirit of prophecy is the only safe interpreter of the Bible. That is a false doctrine, a false view. It will not stand.”¹⁸

A third important idea that Ellen White and her close associates were clear on was that not everything in her works came straight from heaven in the form of divine revelation, but that she used historical sources in her writing. “In some cases,” she penned in the introduction to the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy*,

where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but except in a few instances no specific credit has been given, since they are not quoted for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.

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Her basic claim was that God had revealed to her the spiritual dynamics of the controversy between Christ's and Satan's kingdoms, but that she went to the historians to provide the facts and to fill out the historical tapestry.¹⁹

W. C. White made that point clear when he explained the revisions in the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy* to the Autumn Council of the General Conference on October 30, 1911. "In her public ministry," he pointed out, "Mother has shown an ability to select from the storehouse of truth, matter that is well adapted to the needs of the congregation [or reading audience] before her."²⁰

White expounded on that theme for the rest of his life. I will cite three illustrations from his presentations. First, he noted in 1911, "Mother has never claimed to be authority on history." Rather, she was given what he calls "flashlight pictures" regarding the flow of salvation history. "In connection with the writing out of these views, she has made use of good and clear historical statements to help make plain to the reader the things which she is endeavoring to present." *Histories of the Reformation*, for

example, "helped her to locate and describe many of the events and the movements presented to her in vision."²¹

Looking back some years later, White pointed out that,

she admired the language in which other writers had presented to their readers the scenes which God had presented to her in vision, and she found it both a pleasure, and a convenience and an economy of time to use their language fully or in part in presenting those things which she knew through revelation, and which she wished to pass on to her readers.²²

In a 1912 letter to W. W. Eastman, White indicated that his mother not only used general historians of Christian history in the writing of her works, but also the works of Adventist writers. Thus he pointed out that "Mother found such perfect descriptions of events and presentations of facts and of doctrines written out in our denominational books, that she copied the words of these authorities."²³

Daniells was also knowledgeable regarding Ellen White's use of sources and he could be quite frank in his discussion of the issue. At the 1919 Bible Conference, for instance, he noted that,

she never claimed to be an authority on history; and as I understood it, where the history that related to the interpretation of prophecy was clear and expressive, she wove it into her writings; but I have always understood that, as far as she was concerned, she was ready to correct in revision such statements as she thought should be corrected.²⁴

A bit later Daniells went on to point out the difficulties generated by Ellen White's *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (developed as a companion book for the Sabbath School lessons for second quarter 1883). "We could never claim inspiration in the whole thought and makeup of the book," he asserted,

because it has been thrown aside because it was badly put together. Credits were not given to the proper authorities [W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*].... Personally

that has never shaken my faith, but there are men who have been greatly hurt by it, and I think it is because they claimed too much for these writings. Just as Brother White says, there is a danger in going away from the Book, and claiming too much.²⁵

One thing that should be noted before we move on from Ellen White's use of historical sources is that the Adventist clergy and laity were in a general way familiar with many of the volumes from which she took material. That is not only true of Adventist authors such as Uriah Smith's *The Sanctuary and its Cleansing*, James White's *Life of William Miller*, and J. N. Andrews' *History of the Sabbath*, but also several non-Adventist authors including Merle D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation* and J. A. Wylie's *History of the Waldenses*. Those last two, among others, were advertised in Adventist publications. In fact, within about six weeks after *Sketches from the Life of Paul* was published, the *Signs of the Times* featured an advertisement of Corybeare and Howson's work on Paul (which she had used extensively) with an Ellen White endorsement: "*The Life of St Paul* [sic], by Conybeare and Howson," she wrote, "I regard as a book of great merit, and one of rare usefulness to the earnest student of the New Testament history." She also personally recommended D'Aubigné's history to readers of the *Review* as "both interesting and profitable" for gaining knowledge of the Reformation.²⁶ Such exposures to her source materials would suggest that Ellen White and her contemporaries believed there was nothing to hide or fear regarding her use of them. Beyond that, through such familiarity her contemporaries would have been much more familiar with overlap than a generation decades later who would be seriously shaken in the 1970s by the re-discovery of her significant use of the material of others.

A final topic that Ellen White was consistent on was that use of her works was not to be made prominent in sermons and other public formats. "In public labor," she

wrote in 1894, "do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions. . . . Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. . . . Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White."²⁷ It is probably significant that the references to that topic that I have discovered come from the 1890s. More work needs to be done on the use of Ellen White as authority in sermons and other presentations during her lifetime, but my impression is that use of her works in even theological argumentation was not practiced much until the early 1880s. But, by the early 1890s, such leaders as A. T. Jones were using some of her statements as "texts" for his messages to Adventist groups, although he claimed

that her writings should not be used that way in presentations to non-Adventists.²⁸

At this juncture it is important to note that although Ellen White's most enlightened contemporaries were aware of, and in basic agreement with, her understanding of such topics as verbal

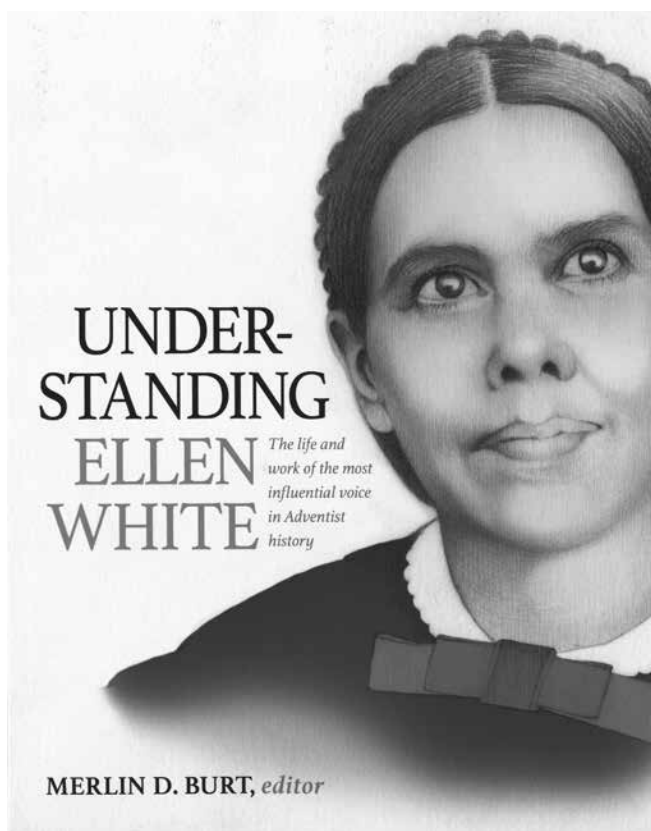
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inspiration, inerrancy, the use of her works in relation to the Bible and doctrine, her use of historical sources, and the use of her writings in public presentations, that does not mean that all were. We have already seen that S. N. Haskell argued vigorously for such things as verbal inspiration and the validity of her works for historical detail. He battled until his death in arguing for the verbal position in spite of W. C. White's repeated pleas to him that he was in the wrong. "Do I believe that Sister White's writings are verbally inspired as much as the Bible?" he wrote in 1919. "Yes; I do," he answered, continuing on to supply seven reasons why "he believed" in the "verbal inspiration of Sister White's writings."²⁹ And the charismatic A. T. Jones shared many of the same views. "I must refer again to the attitude of A. T. Jones," Daniells told the 1919 Bible Conference attendees. "In his heyday you know he just drank the whole thing in, and he would hang a man on a word. I have

seen him take just a word in the Testimonies and hang to it, and that would settle everything.”³⁰

Jones also set the stage for the twentieth-century use of Ellen White as a commentary on the Bible. “The right use of the Testimonies,” he wrote to the church in his 1894 week of prayer reading, “. . . is not to use them *as they are in themselves*, as though they were apart from the word of God in the Bible; but to study the Bible *through them*.”³¹

Thus, as we saw among the PUC Bible teachers in the early 1960s, Ellen White’s contemporaries were divided over the proper use, authority, and nature of her writings. Adventism has ever been a divided camp on that topic.



W. C. White never ceased warning about the dangers of claiming too much for Ellen White and her writings. That topic also came up during the very open and frank discussions of her work at the 1919 Bible Conference. Daniells, for example, pointed out that one way to hurt a student’s relationship to Ellen White and her gift was “to take an extreme and unwarranted position” on her works. “You can do that . . . but when that student gets out and gets in contact with things [i.e., the facts], he may be shaken, and perhaps shaken

clear out and away. I think we should be candid and honest and never put a claim forth that is not well founded.”³²

It is a fact that the warning signs had been placed on the table by those who had worked closely with Ellen White. But it is also a fact that those signs were ignored and even suppressed (as in the case of the 1919 Bible Conference minutes) in the polarizing atmosphere of the 1920s and a new generation of leaders who were more distant in terms of immediate contact with the prophet and how she worked. Between the 1920s and the 1960s mythology regarding her writings and her gift became dominant. And in the end, as W. C. White had predicted, it “hurt Mother’s work.” In fact, it hurt it much more than he probably expected. Such are the hard lessons when a church forgets its history, or when it puts forth claims that cannot be substantiated when faced with exacting scrutiny. One lesson to be learned is that the church and its members will be healthier when we get as much as possible of the truth about Ellen White on the table and then disseminate it. Only in that way can the criticisms of those who have built upon false conceptions be put to rest.

The 1919 Bible Conference represents the apex in openness regarding Ellen White and her work. But that openness had come at the wrong time. The 1920s witnessed the rise of the conflict between fundamentalism and liberalism, and in that polarizing context every Adventist leader who spoke openly at the conference would lose his position.

Thoughts on How the Real World of Ellen White Morphed into the “Wonderful World” of the 1960s

Daniells apparently deemed the discussions at the 1919 Bible Conference to have been too open. Because the report of the discussions was causing dissension on “the Eastern Question” and “the king of the North,” the General Conference president decided that it would be best “to lock . . . up in a vault” the 2,500-page typewritten manuscript of the minutes of the conference and that “it would be better not to print it at all.” And there it sat for over five decades. It would be rediscovered in December 1974 through the efforts of Donald Mansell, assistant director of the White Estate, and F. D. Yost, General Conference archivist.³³ The 1919 document did not come to the notice of Adventist scholars until May 1979 when *Spectrum*

dedicated most of an issue to the reproduction of those sections of the minutes related to Ellen White, along with a short introduction by Molleurus Couperus. That publication, as we will see in the next section of this paper, would fan the flames on a discussion of Ellen White that had begun in the same periodical in 1970.

Meanwhile, we should note, there were good reasons for keeping the 1919 minutes under wrap as 1919 moved into 1920. In that year, Curtis Lee Laws, the editor of a prominent Baptist paper, defined “fundamentalists” (a term he coined) as those willing “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals” of the Christian faith. Laws and 154 other Baptist conservatives called for a “General Conference on Fundamentals.” And May 1919 had witnessed the first meeting of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, which attracted over 6,000 people. The concern of these Protestant conservatives was symptomatic of the times. For more than a half century a confrontation had been developing in American Protestantism over how to relate to modern intellectual developments, including (but not limited to) Darwinism and the critical study of the Bible.³⁴

The issues in the conflict were many, but the central one was epistemology and the question of religious authority. The modernists had come to rely on reason and the findings of science and biblical criticism as their starting point and had arrived at the conclusion that the Bible, for all of its spiritual insights, was permeated with superstition, mythology, and historical error. As a result, it had to be interpreted and validated in terms of modern knowledge. If anything wasn’t rational (e.g., virgin birth, resurrection, and other miracles) it needed to be explained in such a way as to make sense to twentieth-century minds.

As might be expected, those who had been evolving into fundamentalists reacted vigorously in the 1920s. They had no difficulty realizing that the central issue was religious authority. After all, reasoned the conservatives, hadn’t the liberals departed the “Christian” path through their rejection of the authority of the Bible for that of

human reason? Thus the center of the struggle, as the fundamentalists saw it, was the concept of the Bible being completely trustworthy in every respect. Their platform in the controversy would be a Bible that was both verbally inspired (at least in its autographs) and inerrant. While the issue had been seething in the minds of conservative leaders since the turn of the century, in 1920 it exploded and would become the defining issue of the decade for American Protestantism.

It is into that loaded context that Claude E. Holmes and J. S. Washburn, two disgruntled Adventists who were still upset over the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy* and the topic of the “daily,” became vocal in April 1920. Their immediate targets were the 1919 Bible Conference and those who had spoken openly about the work and authority of Ellen White. Holmes published a tract dated

April 1, titled *Have We an Infallible “Spirit of Prophecy”?* His answer was a resounding “yes.” “There is a dangerous doctrine that is rapidly permeating the ranks of our people,” Holmes noted in his opening sentence. “I feel that it ought to be met and met squarely. It is this: That Sister White is not an authority on history.

Some, as you know, go even further, and claim that she is not an authority on doctrine or health reform. That was practically the position taken last summer,” at the 1919 Bible Conference. Whatever she wrote on any topic was fully divine and authoritative to Holmes. He closed his presentation by declaring that he stood “absolutely and uncompromisingly for the inspiration of Sister White’s writings. I draw no line between the so-called human and divine; *they are all Scripture to me.*”³⁵

Two weeks later Washburn published his open letter titled *The Startling Omega and Its True Genealogy*.³⁶ That tract continued Holmes’ argument. They not only had Daniells, Prescott, and others who had been frank in the 1919 discussions in their sights but also W. C. White, who had not attended but who had claimed that his mother was not an authority on history.

“In public labor,” she wrote in 1894, “do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions. . . . Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God.”

Those two tracts were widely circulated at the 1922 General Conference session and were instrumental in unseating Daniells from the presidency, a position he had held since 1901. The times had changed and those church leaders who had spoken openly about issues related to inspiration at the 1919 conference found themselves in less influential jobs. The ground had shifted and the first post-Ellen White decade found Adventism with a new cadre of leaders who had not worked closely with Ellen White, but who had the advantage of being more in harmony with the spirit of the times.

In the polarized atmosphere of the 1920s there was no place for theological neutrality. Adventism, as was repeatedly pointed out in the graphics and other published presentations during the decade, was being forced to choose between modernism and fundamentalism. Since no Adventist at that time would elect liberalism, the only viable choice was the other extreme. The major casualty in that polarized era was the moderate and open approach to inspiration held by Ellen White and those who had worked most closely with her.³⁷

One result of that dynamic was Adventism's drift into verbalism, inerrancy, and related topics during the 1920s. That drift toward fundamentalist assumptions regarding inspiration was evident among many of the denomination's leaders. For example, F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*, disclaimed any belief in verbal inspiration at the 1919 conference, but noted in 1928 that he held to the "verbal inspiration of the Bible and Ellen White."³⁸ Other indicators for the shift are found in the General Conference-sponsored textbook by B. L. House that claims that "the selection of the very words of Scripture in the original languages was overruled by the Holy Spirit"³⁹ and the "Valuable Quotations" section of *Ministry* in 1931, that gave its approval to the idea that the Bible as inspired by the Spirit, was "without a flaw or error" and was authoritative and without mistakes in its historical data and other fields of human knowledge which it touched.⁴⁰

While such positions were never voted as the official position of the denomination, they progressively dominated Adventist thinking in the following decades, although not everyone accepted them among either the laity or the clergy. But the balance of thinking on the topic had definitely shifted among the denomination's leaders. In that context, it is undoubtedly significant that

Walter Martin and Donald Grey Barnhouse, the two men who extended the hand of fellowship to Adventists in the 1950s, were leaders in American fundamentalism rather than middle of the road (on issues of inspiration) evangelicals. Instead of the Adventist/Evangelical Conferences they should be titled the Adventist/Fundamentalist Conferences.

Interestingly, one of the holdouts for the more open position was W. C. White (director of the White Estate), who was still arguing against verbal inspiration, using his mother as a historian, and related topics in the late twenties and early thirties.⁴¹ But by then W. C. had been largely isolated from leadership and no longer had the influence of earlier years. His location in Elmhaven, California, placed him nearly 3,000 miles from General Conference headquarters with its younger generation of leaders.

In summary, the decades after the death of Ellen White witnessed a decided shift in the understanding of the majority of Adventist leadership toward the assumptions of the 1920s fundamentalists. And even though they were not formally stated, those assumptions permeated Adventist thinking. The majority of Adventists had taken those assumptions on the inspiration of the Bible and applied them to the writings of Ellen White. The new understanding would be central to Adventism up through the 1960s. One result was that the denomination had set itself up for a rude awakening.

The End of the Wonderful World of Ellen White in the 1970s and Early 1980s

Cracks in the widely held position on Ellen White and her inspiration and authority began to appear in 1970 when a new generation of young professionally trained historians and other scholars began to ask more exacting questions regarding Adventism and its prophet. The initial venue for asking questions was *Spectrum* magazine, which had been birthed in 1969 as a quarterly, interdisciplinary journal that could deal with scholarly issues from a variety of perspectives. The autumn 1970 issue witnessed Roy Branson and Herold Weiss, both professors at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, calling for scholarly study of Ellen White's writings. That same number saw William S. Peterson, an English professor at Andrews University, publish a piece titled "A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen G. White's

Account of the French Revolution.”⁴² To put it mildly, Peterson’s conclusions initiated what Ben McArthur would later refer to as “the first great age of Adventist historical revisionism.”⁴³ While Peterson moved on to other projects, Donald McAdams, who had put Peterson onto the topic in the first place, began to devote considerable energy and skill in the early 1970s to further exploration of Ellen White’s use of historical sources in *The Great Controversy*. Through a three-phase, multi-year study of her use of historical sources in Chapter 14 on the English Reformation, Chapter 6 on John Huss, and a handwritten fragment of a draft for a half-chapter on Huss, McAdams arrived at some unsettling conclusions. “The historical portions of *The Great Controversy* that I have examined,” he wrote, “are selective abridgements and adaptations of historians. Ellen White was not just borrowing paragraphs here and there that she ran across in her reading, but in fact following the historians page after page, leaving out much material, but using their sequence, some of their ideas, and often their words.” That usage at times included their “historical errors.”⁴⁴

McAdams balanced his research findings with Ellen White’s own statements in the introduction to *The Great Controversy*. First, he pointed out, she had noted that “it is not so much the object of this book to present new truths concerning the struggles of former times, as to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events.” And, second, she freely told her readers that she had used the overviews and even the words of historians when their statements, as she put it, provided “a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.”⁴⁵ As a result, McAdams could write in 1980 that he believed “the evidence is compatible with Ellen White’s statements claiming inspiration regarding historical events and describing her use of Protestant historians.”⁴⁶ Her inspiration, Ben McArthur noted in summarizing McAdams’ view in 2008, “lies not in the

history she summarizes but in the religious meaning she imparts to it, the contest between God and Satan. The Holy Spirit provided her the ‘big picture’ rather than particular facts. If there had been disillusionment over the fact of her extensive literary borrowing,” McAdams pointed out, “it was because the church failed to take her introductory disclaimer at face value.”⁴⁷

McAdams never published his findings. Desiring to work with the White Estate and the leaders of the church, he shared his research with them and entered into a dialogue that extended through much of the 1970s. He eventually summarized the results of his work and that of others in a 1980 article on “Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s.”⁴⁸ Much more prob-

lematic than McAdams for the White Estate and the church was the approach of Ronald Numbers, the grandson of a General Conference president. While McAdams was at least friendly to the idea of inspiration, Numbers discounted the concept and adopted a naturalistic perspective. Beyond that, he decided to publish immediately. Harper and Row released

One possible explanatory factor behind the rather consistent pattern of those who have journeyed from one extreme to the other in regard to Ellen White’s writings is that their relationship to her was not merely intellectual but also emotional.

his *Prophetess of Health* in 1976. Numbers argued that Ellen White was not only a child of her times in regard to many of her ideas on health, but that she had drawn upon the ideas of health reformers of her day and often copied from them. The most damning finding for Numbers was that on the basis of textual comparison he had concluded that she had lied about her use of certain sources.⁴⁹ The Ellen G. White Estate responded to Numbers’ book with *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health*, also published in 1976. That volume presented a chapter-by-chapter evaluation, arguing that Numbers had left out important evidence and had at times misread his sources on significant points. The Critique also concerned itself with what it believed was an “air of cynicism” that pervaded the book.⁵⁰

The years following 1976 saw a continuing examination of Ellen White and her work. One endeavor along

that line was that of Walter Rea, an Adventist pastor. Rea's research had led him to the conclusion that Ellen White's borrowing in such books as *The Desire of Ages* and *Patriarchs and Prophets* was extensive but not admitted. In response to Rea's claim, Neal Wilson, president of the General Conference, appointed a well-qualified committee to meet with Rea and examine his evidence. While

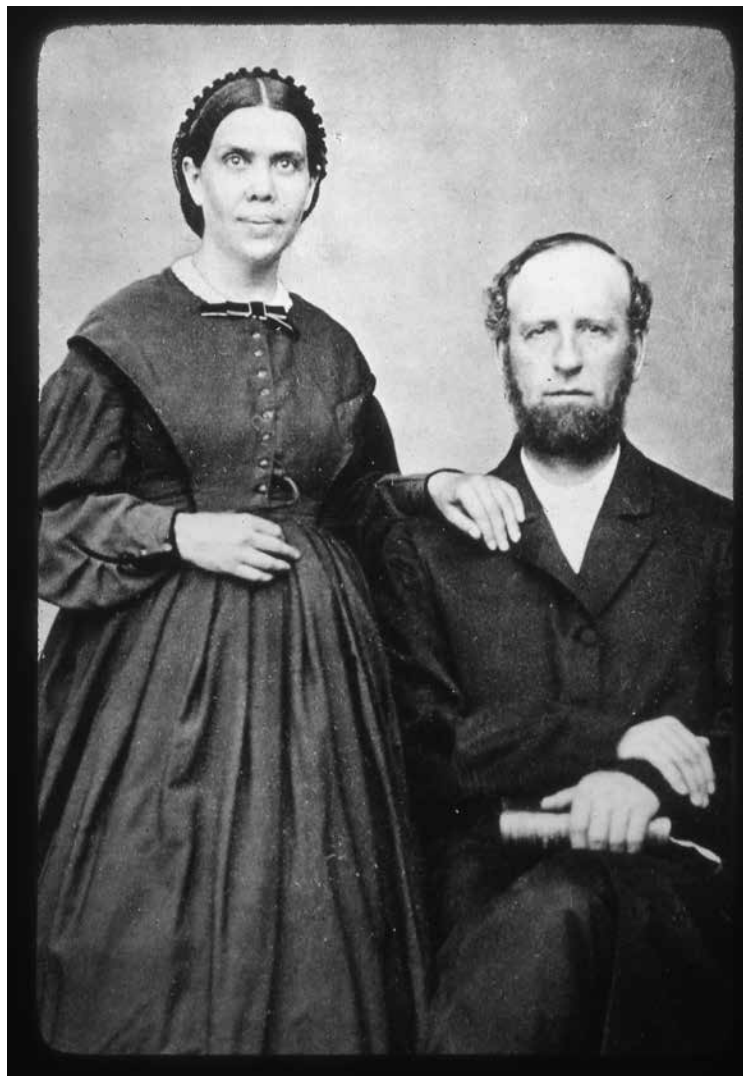
writings that had become problematic but also her integrity as a person.⁵¹

The combined effect of the books by Numbers and Rea, along with the *Spectrum* articles, was the intellectual equivalent of throwing a bomb into what had become since the 1920s the "settled understanding" of Ellen White and her gift. By 1982, the wonderful world of EL-

len White had been both challenged and shattered in the eyes of many thinking Adventists. Adventism had arrived at the end of an era. With the findings of the Walter Rea committee in place there was no possible room left to doubt that Ellen White's borrowing from historians was much more extensive than anyone had known. The denomination's understanding of her work would forever be changed. As McArthur noted in 1979, "once the Pandora's box of history has been opened, there can be no recalling the disturbing facts that will escape."⁵² There is only one option, McAdams noted a year later: "We have no choice but to be honest at heart, acknowledge the facts, and seek the truth."⁵³ And Eric Anderson's 1978 remarks were prescient when he penned that "far from being heresy, McAdams' views are likely to become the new orthodoxy."⁵⁴

Before moving on, it is significant to note that the major critics of Ellen White across time have tended to follow a pattern. Namely, they had begun their journey fully embracing the wonderful world of her inerrancy, exclusive dependence upon revelation in her writings, and "perfect" character, among other perspectives. But when they found their views threatened they reacted (perhaps overreacted is a better descriptor) and rejected both her and her writings with gusto. That was true of D. M. Canright in the late 1880s, A.

T. Jones and A. F. Ballenger in the early twentieth century, Numbers and Rea in the 1970s, and Dale Ratzlaff in the 1980s. A college classmate of Numbers, for example, reports that in his younger years he viewed Ellen White as the final word.⁵⁵ And Rea reports that he not only taught himself to type by copying *Messages to Young People*, but he spent a great deal of time collecting Ellen White quotations with the idea of "preparing an Adventist Commentary by



Artwork: Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

some committee members found Rea's research lacking in scholarly precision, the committee as a whole was convinced that her borrowing from contemporary works was more widespread than previously believed. In 1982 Rea published his findings in *The White Lie*. His title reflects an extension and magnification of Number's accusation of her dishonesty. For Rea her whole corpus of writings was becoming a lie. For him and others it was not only her

compiling” all her “statements pertaining to each book of the Bible, each doctrine, and each Bible character.”⁵⁶ And then he concluded that they had been plagiarized. His faith in Ellen White and her writings had been shattered. For him the wonderful world was on the rocks. One possible explanatory factor behind the rather consistent pattern of those who have journeyed from one extreme to the other in regard to Ellen White’s writings is that their relationship to her was not merely intellectual but also emotional. As a result, it can be hypothesized that a sense of betrayal helped energize their protest and kept it alive.

There is an important lesson here. Namely, that claiming too much for Ellen White and her writings eventually leads to disaster. W. C. White saw that point clearly in 1911 in meeting S. N. Haskell’s overblown ideas.

Facing the Facts: From the End of the Wonderful World of Ellen White to the Construction of a More Adequate Understanding in the 1980s

A significant signal that Adventism was ready to take a major step forward in its understanding of Ellen White and her work was delivered to the church in March 1980 when General Conference president Neal Wilson published an article on his position concerning Ellen White in the *Adventist Review*. The 1970s

had been a difficult decade and the leaders of the denomination and the White Estate officials had very reluctantly come to accept the conclusions of the committee appointed to investigate the work of Walter Rea and the findings of other researchers. But the new White Estate director, Robert Olson, was in agreement with McAdams that the facts needed to be faced responsibly. Wilson, in his article, also owned up to that truth. He then went on to set forth and illustrate five points related to the prophetic gift.

1. Originality is not a test of inspiration. . . . 2. God inspires people, not words. . . . 3. The Holy Spirit helps the messenger to select his material

carefully. . . . 4. The Prophet’s use of existing materials does not necessarily mean that the prophet is dependent upon these sources. . . . 5. Whenever we recognize similarities we must also see the dissimilarities.⁵⁷

In response, McAdams noted that Wilson’s statement “is [the] most significant article to appear in the *Review* in this century. The president of the General Conference is openly and honestly acknowledging the facts about Ellen White’s use of sources and pointing the church toward a definition of inspiration that will be new to most Adventists and threatening to some.”⁵⁸ Wilson’s honesty also must have been a reinforcement to McAdams personally since he had spent much of a decade “diplomatically” seeking to convince the denomination’s leadership that the traditional views on Ellen White were untenable. At last, even the denomination’s president was willing

to admit that the time had come to investigate more thoroughly the work of Ellen White and the implications for the church’s understanding of inspiration.

One of the first moves toward a healthier and more accurate understanding of Ellen White and her gift also took place in 1980 with the publication of *Selected Messages*, Book Three, which

devoted 135 of its 465 pages to providing authoritative and enlightening documents that shed light on her ministry. Section two, “Principles of Inspiration,” had eight chapters that included material on such topics as the primacy of the Bible, how she received her visions, and how she presented and understood her divine messages. Section three, “The Preparation of the Ellen G. White Books,” highlighted her use of literary assistants along with chapters on how she worked in the development of such books as *The Desire of Ages*.⁵⁹

Those sections did much to begin the reeducation of the church. However, not least in importance in Book Three of *Selected Messages* were the three appendices from the pen of W. C. White, who had worked extremely close to his mother during the second half of her ministry. The most

extensive appendix is his 1911 presentation to the General Conference Autumn Council on the revised edition of *The Great Controversy* and a related letter to the publication committee. In those documents White noted that his mother never claimed to be an authority on history and that she received divine guidance in the selection of material from historians as she filled out *The Great Controversy* theme shown her in vision.⁶⁰

The other two appendices were letters that W. C. White penned to W. W. Eastman in 1912 and L. E. Froom in 1928 and 1934. Here we find White being extremely open and candid about his mother's use of sources from both Adventist and non-Adventist authors. In those letters he reiterated several of the themes he had set forth in his 1911 discussion of the revised *Great Controversy*, but he also expanded his discussion in helpful ways. For example, White wrote to Froom on January 8, 1928, that:

notwithstanding all the power that God had given her to present scenes in the lives of Christ and His apostles and His prophets and His reformers . . . , she always felt most keenly the results of her lack of school education. She admired the language in which other writers had presented to their readers the scenes which God had presented to her in vision, and she found it both a pleasure, and a convenience and an economy of time to use their language fully or in part in presenting those things which she knew through revelation, and which she wished to pass on to her readers.⁶¹

But White could be even more explicit. Thus, in talking about Adventist publications, he noted that at times "Mother found such perfect descriptions of events and presentations of facts and of doctrines written out in our denominational books, that she copied the words of these authorities."⁶²

Such straight talk was a start in helping people understand Ellen White and her writings. But it was only a beginning. Robert Olson, director of the Ellen G. White Estate from 1978 to 1990, followed up that beginning in March 1981 with his widely circulated *One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White*. That little book, in its candid approach, continued the discussion begun by the third volume of *Selected Messages*. Olson's book might

have justly been titled *Frank Discussions about the Sanctuary and Ellen White*.

One Hundred and One Questions had sections on such topics as literary borrowing, copying, the use of literary assistants, the perfect-prophet image, inerrancy, and verbalism. But perhaps one of the most unexpected contributions dealt with Ellen White as a Bible commentator. Olson probably shook up more than one reader when he wrote that "Ellen White's writings are generally homiletical or evangelistic in nature and not strictly exegetical." He then illustrated how she used the same verse to make quite different points, accommodating the words to fit her presentations. Olson noted in the same section that "to give an individual complete interpretive control over the Bible would, in effect, elevate that person above the Bible. It would be a mistake to allow even the apostle Paul to exercise interpretive control over all other Bible writers. In such a case, Paul, and not the whole Bible, would be one's final authority."⁶³

So much for the divine, inspired commentary approach. I should note that the 1981 Robert Olson was not teaching the same things on the topic that he had when he was my teacher at Pacific Union College in the early 1960s. By the early eighties he had had to face the hard facts of the shortcomings of the wonderful world of Ellen White approach and those facts were transforming his outlook and presentations. He wasn't the only one. There was a significant segment of the church's scholars who were on the same journey of discovery and transformation.

One of the most important initiatives by the General Conference during the early 1980s was the hiring of Fred Veltman, whose doctoral degree was in the exacting area of textual analysis, to intensively study Ellen White's use of sources in *The Desire of Ages*. After the equivalent of five years of full-time study, Veltman concluded that Ellen White had borrowed extensively but that it was not blind borrowing. To the contrary, she "used the writings of others consciously and intentionally." Such borrowing indicates that she had "originality" and was not "slavishly dependent upon her sources." Ellen White's "independence," Veltman pointed out, "is . . . to be seen in her selectivity. The sources were her slaves, never her master." In short, while she did use sources more extensively than generally recognized, she crafted her finished product to fit the message she sought to get across to her readers.⁶⁴

Following another line of investigation, George Rice published *Luke, a Plagiarist?* in 1983. His starting point was that Adventism's understanding of Ellen White was vulnerable because it had a very inadequate view of inspiration, having focused its understanding nearly entirely on a model of inspiration in which prophets receive their information by revelation directly from heaven. To indicate the inadequacy of that position, Rice demonstrated from the gospel of Luke how the Bible writers used research and existing documents to produce their inspired books. That broader view of inspiration had obvious implications for the debate on Ellen White's inspiration and use of sources. As Rice put it,

the charge that Ellen White cannot fill the role of a spokesperson for God or that she could not possibly have received the gift of prophecy because she 'borrowed' is rooted in a misunderstanding of inspiration. Once the Lucan model is established and accepted, this model can then be allowed to explain the work of Ellen White.⁶⁵

Rice had effectively driven a wedge between the concepts of inspiration and revelation by demonstrating that not everything that is inspired by God comes through the experience of divine revelation. The freshness of that thought is indicated on the copyright page of the book in which the publisher sought to protect itself by defensively stating that,

the purpose of this book is to investigate a concept of inspiration not generally held by most Seventh-day Adventists. Although the publisher believes that this book will stimulate a constructive study of this subject, this book does not represent an official pronouncement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church nor does it necessarily reflect the editorial opinion of the Pacific Press Publishing Association.⁶⁶

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Rice's book brought a strong reaction from the fundamentalist administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and certain elements in the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute. But White Estate director Robert Olson saw its explanatory power and brought Rice on as an associate director even though up to that time he had not specialized in the fields of Ellen White's writings or Adventist studies.

The Rice book, with its iconoclastic demonstration of the separation of inspiration and revelation, which set forth revelation as only one possible source for inspired writings, shook up settled ideas on the topic. But his findings dovetailed theoretically with those of Veltman. Combined, they began to provide Adventism with the foundation to develop a more sophisticated understanding of revelation and inspiration.

More specifically related to Ellen White concerns than Rice's work was the publication of my *Myths in Adventism* in 1985. Unlike Olson and Rice, I wasn't especially concerned with defending Ellen White or developing an apologetic for her or her writings. I was merely trying to understand what I was reading and trying to teach. That was crucial to me because I sensed that the explanatory models of the time were inadequate, and where they were adequate they had not been sufficiently developed or illustrated from her own writings against the historical background in which she wrote and applied her counsels. The opening chapter, "The Myth of the Inflexible Prophet," undoubtedly got the most attention and cut into the most new territory. In a world in which the independent Ellen White compilation makers used her quotations as if they all had the same background, I sought to demonstrate on the basis of a hermeneutic based on her own interpretation of her writings that argued for the use of literary and historical contexts, common sense, her understanding of the distinction between the real world and the ideal world, and other principles, that there was not necessarily a single Ellen White position on a given topic. Rather than a

single position, one could find several quite different and even contradictory positions and counsels (based on radically different contexts) of her understanding on how to apply Christian principles on many topics. In essence, I was putting forth the hypothesis that to do justice to Ellen White and her writings the denomination would have to develop a much more sophisticated and sensitive hermeneutic. That chapter hit a live nerve in the Adventist world and was soon republished in abbreviated form in the *Adventist Review*.⁶⁷ The rest of the chapters confronted such myths as that of Ellen White being a hundred years ahead of her time and sought to rectify many serious misconceptions about Ellen White's counsel deeply rooted in the denomination's thinking and practice. One of the fallouts from the publication of *Myths* was a phone call from Olson with my first invitation to join the White Estate team at General Conference headquarters. (It was an invitation I chose not to accept.)

The late 1980s found me still struggling with trying to better understand Ellen White and the proper use of her writings. Perhaps the most significant of my research during those years was an examination of the use of authority at the 1888 General Conference session. Up to that time many aspects of the Minneapolis event had been explored, but no one had examined the struggle over authority in any depth yet. The available documentation was massive. And for me the most important finding was the fact that Ellen White refused to let her writings be used to interpret the meaning of Bible passages or to establish doctrine. I presented my findings in my daily lectures in Nairobi, Kenya, to the General Conference Annual Council in 1988, where they raised some eyebrows and generated some resistance. But they shouldn't have if we take the claims of Ellen White seriously. After all, she herself repeatedly and emphatically claimed that we must have Bible evidence for every doctrine and practice.⁶⁸ That had always been her position,⁶⁹ as well as that of her husband and the other pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was only later (probably in the 1880s) that some in the denomination began to rely on her for Bible interpretation and doctrinal extensions. Those approaches, although widely practiced in the Adventism of the 1920s to the 1960s, were in essence heresy rather than orthodoxy from the perspective of Adventism's founding generation and of Ellen White for her entire life.

At its clearheaded best, the denominational leadership had always recognized that Ellen White should not

be used as authority for such things as doctrine. But theory is one thing and practice another, especially when many leaders still had a belief that some of Adventism's early beliefs had in one way or another found their genesis in Ellen White's writings, a perspective definitely put to rest in the 1990s by Rolf Pöhler's *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*, my *Search For Identity*, my biography of Joseph Bates, and Merlin Burt's PhD dissertation on the development of Adventist theology between 1844 and 1849. The facts of the case are that not one of Adventism's distinctive "pillar" doctrines was developed by anyone who ever became a Sabbatarian Adventist and that the concept of the centrality of the three angels' messages in apocalyptic mission was fleshed out by Bates.⁷⁰ But even with the findings spelled out and documented some of us have been aggressively criticized for not giving a larger role to Ellen White in the process. The sad fact is that Ellen White mythology not only dies hard, but it has a tendency to spontaneously resurrect.

A final initiative during the 1980s aimed at breaking up such concepts as Ellen White being 100 years ahead of her time was *The World of Ellen G. White*, published in 1987 under the editorship of Gary Land. That volume of essays did much to help Adventists see the historical context in which she lived and wrote and how her concerns and many of her solutions were those of her era.⁷¹

The works that I have mentioned were significant but are merely the tip of a very large iceberg of studies related to Ellen White. The eighties saw a multitude of articles, research papers, White Estate shelf documents, and even dissertations and theses on the topic.⁷² By the end of the 1980s most of the creative work on the recreation of Ellen White had been completed.⁷³

The 1990s and beyond saw a relaxation on the debate over critical issues related to Ellen White, even though Alden Thompson's *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (1991) stirred up a bit of a tempest in some circles.⁷⁴ Most of the books published after the eighties tended to consolidate information, expand on ideas put forth in the 1980s, and make the information more widely available. Major agents in that endeavor were Herbert Douglass's encyclopedic *Messenger of the Lord* (1998);⁷⁵ my own four small volumes on Ellen White, *Meeting Ellen White* (1996), *Reading Ellen White* (1997), *Ellen White's World* (1998), and *Walking with Ellen White* (1999);⁷⁶ and *The Ellen G. White*

Encyclopedia, edited by Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon and published in 2013.⁷⁷

The most significant exception to the consolidation and exposition pattern in the post-eighties decades was Don S. McMahon's *Acquired or Inspired? Exploring the Origins of the Adventist Lifestyle* (2005). McMahon's path-breaking study divided Ellen White's counsels on health into what he called the "whats" and the "whys." He found her remarkably accurate on the specific counsel that she gave but only comparable with her contemporaries in the reasons for that counsel.⁷⁸ That conclusion, even though it has been criticized for inadequate methodology,⁷⁹ lines up well with what we can demonstrate about her visions as they relate to the use of historical sources and it fits well with the Adventist understanding of inspiration as set forth in the period after 1980. As an indication of the new attitudes related to Ellen White, Doug Morgan in reporting on the First International Conference on Ellen G. White and SDA History (funded by the General Conference on the recommendation of the White Estate), remarked that,

no one seemed unduly perturbed by McMahon's conclusion that only 66 percent of Ellen G. White's health and medical statements in her book *Ministry of Healing* would be deemed accurate by modern standards (considerable slippage from the 100 percent PAQ—"prophetic accuracy quotient"—touted some twenty-five years ago by Rene Noorbergen in *Prophet of Destiny*).⁸⁰

Needless to say, what we now know about Ellen White and her use of sources in history and almost certainly in the medical field has major ramifications for some of her statements on scientific issues, some which appear to be problematic. In fact, a couple of years ago when I was asked to have the annual George Saxon lecture on the interface between science and religion at Southwestern Adventist University, I had tentatively chosen as my

topic an analysis of selected Ellen White statements on science in relation to what we now know in regard to her use of history and, apparently, medical authorities. (I should note that I was unable to take the appointment. As a result, the paper was never developed.)

Two other important books are also pushing the frontiers of Ellen White studies in the early twenty-first century. The first is Jud Lake's *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (2010).⁸¹ Lake has pioneered a new level of sophistication in Ellen White apologetics that utilizes many of the understandings developed since the 1970s. In the process the author not only uses the new perspectives to expose the faulty assumptions of many of Ellen White's critics, but also highlights the significance of the new understandings in the context of the historical and contemporary struggle to recapture a more adequate understanding of Ellen White.

The second book is Gilbert Valentine's *The Prophet and the Presidents* (2011). Valentine's treatment (following Jerry Moon's study of the relationship between W. C. White and his mother⁸²) points the way to a whole realm of new insights on how the gift of prophecy worked in the everyday world of Ellen White as a person inter-

acting with individuals with the gift of administration. Here is a fruitful area for extended future research that has the potential to shed a great deal of light on the function of Ellen White in the church and the nature of her gift.

Two other recently published multi-authored volumes, *Understanding Ellen White*⁸³ and *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*⁸⁴ (both 2015), continue to extend the new understandings of Ellen White, but the latter work has especially enriched the discussion through its examination of the gift of prophecy in the Bible and Christian history. *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, published by Oxford University Press in 2014,⁸⁵ finds its primary significance in repackaging views of Ellen White and her work for non-Adventist readers rather than in pushing into new territory on the nature of her work and inspiration.

Perhaps the best illustration of the integration of the new perspectives on Ellen White put forth in the 1970s

An important fact in Ellen White studies is that there are no non-believers. Everyone either has some belief positive toward her ministry or some belief negative toward it.

and 1980s is Andrews University Press's publication of a critical edition of Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*, with a historical introduction and notes by Denis Fortin (2017). He deals with such topics as how Marian Davis searched Ellen White's files for relevant material from her pen that could form the basis for the presentation, the controversy over the book's authorship, and the Methodist roots of

problems associated with the traditional approach and the revolutionary findings of the seventies, eighties, and beyond have all too often not registered with the average Adventist in the pew. As a result, viewing certain aggressive internet sites can throw them into disarray. The education of the Adventist public is an ongoing need, as are explorations into areas of Ellen White studies that still need to be looked at seriously.

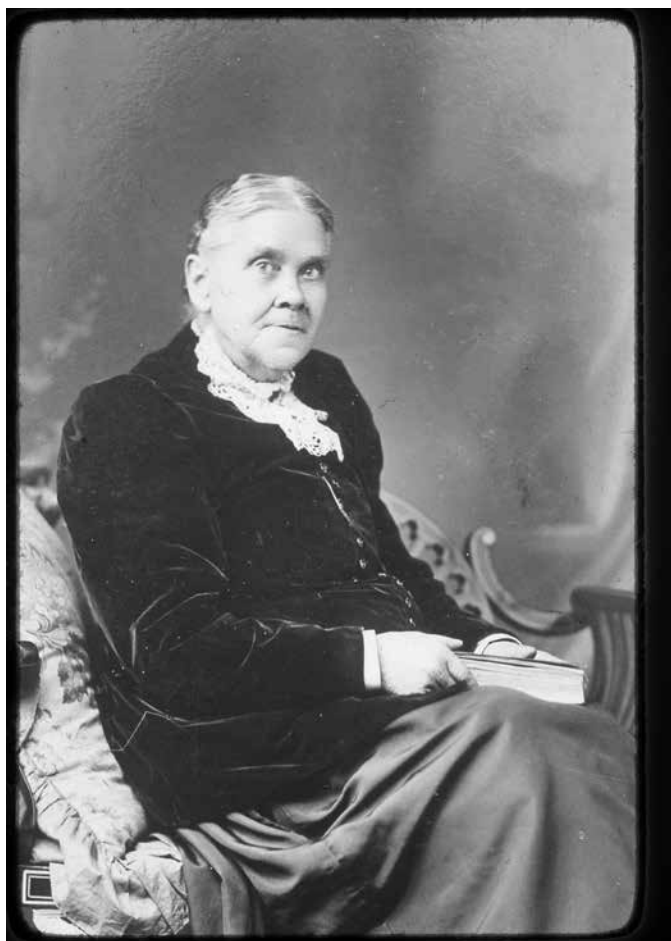
Here we need a word of caution lest some might conclude that there is unity at last on Ellen White and her work. In 2004, Colin and Russell Standish (Colin had been a president of Columbia Union College and was the founding president of Hartland Institute) published *The Greatest of All the Prophets*. Not only did they argue that Ellen White was greater than the biblical prophets, but they went on to note the "disgraceful denial of faith in 1919."⁸⁸ With the Standish brothers we have a return to the period (and theology) of the 1920s to the 1960s. For them, her writings and even the facts in the historical sources she used were inerrant. After all, "once charges are laid that inspired writings are errant they lose their authority."⁸⁹ And thus, in nearly 400 pages, the past becomes the present.

As a result, one thing remains constant: Adventists have always been divided on Ellen White's work and the nature of her inspiration.

Possible Ways Forward in Ellen White Studies

Throughout this paper I have noted that discussions of Ellen White and her inspiration have often been contentious and that various Adventist factions have been at odds with one another on her significance, the nature of her inspiration, and her role in the church. That has not changed in 2018. And it will probably not change in the future. Beyond that, fully understanding the topic may be beyond our research techniques and theoretical models. But, as the above history has demonstrated, researchers on Ellen White who come from various perspectives can and do aid each other in arriving at better understandings of their complex and somewhat elusive topic.

What we have learned from past Ellen White studies must be thought through carefully since it should provide a foundation for future study. One helpful way forward has been hinted at by Jonathan Butler in his recently published



Artwork: Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

its theological concepts.⁸⁶ As Jonathan Butler has pointed out, such a publication "for general Adventist consumption . . . would not have been possible in an earlier era."⁸⁷

The findings of the recent decades would have been anathema in the times of the wonderful world of the 1920s through the 1960s. But the hard facts set forth by the critical researchers and writers of the seventies pushed those writing in the 1980s and beyond to take a second look at Ellen White's work, the denomination's understanding of inspiration, and the mythology that largely grew up around her after her death in 1915. Unfortunately, the depth of the

essay, "Seventh-day Adventist Historiography: A Work in Progress." Butler perceptively describes two distinct but related streams of Adventist research. One he labels as historians of Adventism and the other Adventist historians. The first tend to be, from his perspective, more academic while the second are more apologetic. But their apologetics is a new and more respectable sort that takes into consideration the uncomfortable facts uncovered in recent decades by historical research. In short, the new apologists know the facts but still believe. Both groups, he points out, "exclude the supernatural from their historical explanations," but he still finds it helpful to label one group as "scholars" or "academics" and the other as "apologists," as if believing is somehow opposed to scholarship (which it probably is in some cases). But I would argue that a believer may also function as a true scholar. And in some parts of his essay Butler appears to accept that conclusion. In fact, he several times notes that "there is no hard, unyielding line between" the two groups.⁹⁰ Some even fall into both camps in their writings. One aspect of Butler's taxonomic challenge is that his evaluative criteria are based on his personal philosophical presuppositions. As a result, his objectivity is to some extent in conflict with his subjective bias.

Perhaps the current Adventist historical enterprise might best be seen as a continuum along a naturalistic/religious axis rather than a dichotomy. Grant Wacker, a non-Adventist historian who teaches at Duke University, came to conclusions that are in harmony with that model after attending an academic symposium on Ellen White. "Some of the authors in this work," he wrote in his foreword to the published essays that came out of the conference, "identify with the Adventist tradition, some with other streams of the great Christian river, and some with no religious tradition at all. The reader will be hard-pressed to know which is which, since they all adhere to the most rigorous standards of critical yet appreciative historical inquiry."⁹¹ For that reason, as Butler points out, "there are remarkable instances of reciprocity between SDA scholars and apologists" and "both types of historians have learned from each other."⁹²

The sad fact is that Ellen White mythology not only dies hard, but it has a tendency to spontaneously resurrect.

With those remarks in mind, I would like to suggest that Eric Anderson was on track when he wrote that "a twenty-first century historian might profitably begin the study of a nineteenth-century visionary by noticing where the official apologists and the angry heretics agree."⁹³ Anderson was speaking to a specific field of research, but it seems to me that his suggestion can be profitably generalized to the idea that historians of Ellen White who come from differing perspectives might find it fruitful to make foundational their agreements rather than their differences. Then from a platform of mutual respect, but without complete agreement, they could move forward in facing new questions that need answers.

With a common platform in mind I would like to venture four suggestions. First, a healthy approach to Ellen White studies needs to recognize that both "bias for" and "bias against" are less than helpful. Both perspectives distort, and that is especially so in an emotionally charged field. An important fact in Ellen White studies is that there are no non-believers. Everyone either has some belief positive toward her ministry or some belief negative toward it. Furthermore, postmodernism has helped us realize that neutrality is not a possibility, nor is completely moving beyond one's belief bias. Probably the best we can do is to recognize our biases, how they affect our approach, and take corrective measures as honestly as possible in our explanations.

A second suggestion is that historians of all orientations in relation to Ellen White need to be able to see her with "new eyes." As in most fields of study, both her supporters and her detractors have developed patterns of viewing her, her claims, and her contributions. Such patterns are all the more damaging in that they tend to perpetuate, albeit often unconsciously, interpretations gleaned from "trusted" secondary and "selected" primary sources. As a result, often less-than-adequate understandings are built upon over time as the repeated understandings of both detractors and supporters become "tradition" rather than history. Such traditions eventually form the basis for loose generalizations, standard quotations, angle of vision

perspectives, and even “one-liners” which are passed from one investigator to another. Seeing Ellen White with new eyes includes not only reading her with contextual sophistication and extensively examining primary sources, but reading her with new questions and reading beyond the well-beaten paths that utilize certain selected documents that established the traditional interpretive perspectives in the first place.

A third suggestion that is closely related to seeing Ellen White with new eyes is reading her with an enlarged awareness of her own self-understanding of her work, her mission, and her inspiration. The alternative, of course, is to superimpose our own understanding of those topics on her and then evaluating her by that criteria. Such is the course of those who apply fundamentalist assumptions of inerrancy and verbalism upon her without investigating her views on the topic. Again, investigators need to take her statements on such topics as history or science within the context of whether she viewed her mission to be one of making authoritative statements in such fields or whether she saw such statements as asides to what she perceived as her mission.

Once scholars begin to investigate Ellen White more consistently through the lens of her own self-perceptions and purposes, rather than through the eyes of her supporters and detractors, a new generation of questions will arise. Even such seemingly obvious questions as her use of “I saw” or “I was shown” will need to be reexamined inductively for their full implications.

A fourth area of concern oriented toward a more adequate investigation of Ellen White is the need to take seriously what might be termed the “ragged edge” on the frontier between history and religion. By its very nature, genuine religion will always have an element that lies beyond historical investigation. That element includes, among other things, that “mystical something” that motivates individuals

and groups to follow the guidance of a charismatic personality. Such themes are beyond the reach of historical investigation.

On the other hand, many topics on the interface between religion and history are open to the historical method. In that realm, for example, is the remarkably objective historical data in the Bible that indicates major character flaws in such charismatic personalities as David, Abraham, Jonah, and Peter. Disregarding such data in the heart of the Judeo/Christian tradition, both Ellen White’s supporters and her detractors have trucked in perfectionistic assumptions in their evaluations of her person and work when the

personality profiles presented as historical fact in the Bible would have been more to the point. As with theories of inspiration, all too often fundamentalistic and perfectionistic ethical concepts have been assumed in even serious historical studies by both Ellen White’s detractors and supporters. Interestingly enough, as in several other areas of Ellen White studies, such misconceptions have generally been shared by both sides of the debate even though they line up with neither the biblical picture nor

with Ellen White’s own claims.

In short, while on the ragged edge of the frontier between history and religion there are definitely items not open to the historical method, there are other fruitful areas that can be examined historically. But those in the latter category have all too often been overlooked in the reach for traditional assumptions by all parties in Ellen White studies, thereby shifting arguments into directions that are not only inaccurate but often unhistorical. As a result, viewing Ellen White with “new eyes” must move beyond words and contexts to assumptions that are too often taken as fact without being thoroughly tested.

This paper has overviewed the shifting view of Ellen White over the past century. The remarkable fact

Again, investigators need to take her statements on such topics as history or science within the context of whether she viewed her mission to be one of making authoritative statements in such fields or whether she saw such statements as asides to what she perceived as her mission.

is that our present understanding of her inspiration is closer to that of Ellen White herself and her closest contemporaries than it was to the beliefs of most in the decades after her death. Historical research over the past fifty years has helped clarify that conclusion. And with “new eyes” future research will hopefully continue to clarify our understanding as researchers from various perspectives attempt to work together in exploring an important topic.

End Notes

1. F. M. Wilcox, “The Testimony of Jesus,” *Review and Herald* (June 9, 1946): 62.
2. See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1958, 1980), 21.
3. Gladys King-Taylor, *The Literary Beauty of Ellen G. White’s Writings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1953), 123.
4. M. L. Andreasen, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” chapel talk, Loma Linda, CA, (Nov. 30, 1948).
5. W. C. White to S. N. Haskell, Oct. 31, 1912. Note that this letter was never sent. Rather it was revised by dropping out one paragraph (not the one cited) and adding a sentence and sent on Nov. 4.
6. “General Conference Proceedings,” *Review and Herald* (Nov. 27, 1883): 741; E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 96.
7. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, 21.
8. A. G. Daniells, “The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History,” July 30, 1919, in *Spectrum*, (May 1979), 28. The most complete study we have on the 1919 meetings is Michael W. Campbell, “The 1919 Bible Conference and Its Significance for Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2008).
9. W. W. Prescott, in “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” 1919 Bible Conference minutes, (Aug. 1, 1919), 24, 25.
10. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, 16.
11. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950, vii).
12. E. G. White, Morning Talk, Oct. 24, 1888, MS 9, 1888. For a major discussion of the use of authority at the Minneapolis General Conference session, see George R. Knight, *Angry Saints* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 121–140 (100–115 in 1989 edition).
13. E. G. White, MS 9, 1888.
14. S. N. Haskell to W. W. Prescott, Nov. 15, 1907.
15. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, 164.
16. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 663–668. Quotation on p. 663.
17. E. G. White, “The Value of Bible Study,” *Review and Herald* (July 17, 1888): 449.
18. Daniells, “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy,” 30.
19. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), (h); a slightly modified version of the same statement is found in the 1911 edition on p. xii.
20. W. C. White, “*The Great Controversy*—1911 Edition,” October 30, 1911. The entire document has been reproduced in *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 433–440. The quoted passage is found on p. 438.
21. *Ibid.*, 437.
22. W. C. White to L. E. Froom, Jan. 8, 1928.
23. W. C. White to W. W. Eastman, Nov. 4, 1912.
24. Daniells, “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy,” 34.
25. *Ibid.*
26. See E. G. White, “Testimonials,” *Signs of the Times* (Feb. 22, 1883): 96; E. G. White, “Holiday Gifts,” *Review and Herald* (Dec. 26, 1882): 789.
27. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 29–30; cf. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1946), 256.
28. A. T. Jones, “The Third Angel’s Message—No. 15,” 1893 *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 358.
29. S. N. Haskell to a conference president, Sept. 23, 1919. For a fuller discussion of Haskell’s position, see George R. Knight, “The Case of the Overlooked Postscript: A Footnote on Inspiration,” *Ministry* (August 1997): 9–11.
30. Daniells, “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy,” 36.
31. A. T. Jones, “The Gifts: Their Presence and Object,” *Home Missionary* [Extra] (Dec. 1894): 12 (italics in original).
32. Daniells, “Use of the Spirit of Prophecy,” 36.
33. Donald E. Mansell, “How the 1919 Bible Conference Transcript Was Found,” July 6, 1975; “Sequence of Materials in the 1919 Bible Conference Transcript and Papers,” n.d., xiii.
34. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 159; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), 243. For other helpful works on this period of American church history see William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (New York: Oxford, 1976); Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001–2006).
35. Claude E. Holmes, *Have We an Infallible “Spirit of Prophecy”?* (no publication data, 1920), 1, 11 (italics supplied).
36. J. S. Washburn, *The Startling Omega and Its True Genealogy* (no publication data, 1920).
37. For more on the polarizing effects of the 1920s in Adventism, see George R. Knight, *A Search For Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2000), 128–138.
38. F. M. Wilcox, in “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy,” Aug. 1, 1919, 3; F. M. Wilcox to L. E. Froom, Aug. 5, 1928.
39. Benjamin L. House, *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges* (Berrien Springs, MI: College Press for the General Conference Department of Education, 1926), 66.

40. "Valuable Quotations," *Ministry* (June 1931): 21.
41. W. C. White to L. E. Froom, Jan. 8, 1928; Dec. 13, 1934.
42. Roy Branson and Herold Weiss, "Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship," *Spectrum* (Autumn 1970): 30–33; William S. Peterson, "A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen G. White's Account of the French Revolution," *Spectrum* (Autumn 1970): 57–68.
43. Benjamin McArthur, "Where Are the Historians Taking the Church?" *Spectrum* (Nov. 1979): 9.
44. Donald R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s," *Spectrum* (March 1980): 27–41; Donald R. McAdams, "Ellen G. White and the Historians: A Study of the Treatment of John Huss in *Great Controversy* [sic], Chapter Six 'Huss and Jerome,'" unpub. MS, revised Oct. 1977, 19.
45. Eric Anderson, "Ellen White and Reformation Historians," *Spectrum* (July 1978): 24; E. G. White, *Great Controversy* (1911), xii.
46. McAdams, "Shifting Views," 34; cf. McAdams, "Ellen G. White and the Historians," 233.
47. Benjamin McArthur, "Point of the Spear: Adventist Liberalism and the Study of Ellen White in the 1970s," *Spectrum* (Spring 2008): 48.
48. See note 44.
49. Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
50. Staff of the Ellen G. White Estate, *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health* (Takoma Park, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1976), 11.
51. Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M&R Publications), 1982.
52. McArthur, "Where Are the Historians," 14.
53. McAdams, "Shifting Views," 40.
54. Anderson, "Ellen White and Reformation," 24.
55. Interview with Virginia Smith, January 2015.
56. Walter T. Rea, "Elder Walter T. Rea, Ph.D.," an autobiographical sketch, <https://www.nonegw.org/rea/bio.htm>. Accessed October 9, 2018.
57. Neal C. Wilson, "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," *Adventist Review* (March 20, 1980).
58. McAdams, "Shifting Views," 38. The published version of his remark has "a most significant article" rather than "the." But since "a" did not fit the context I asked McAdams if he meant "the" instead of "a." He answered in the affirmative, but noted that with the passage of time he doubts "that Wilson's statement was the most significant statement ever. But at the time, after all my negotiations with the White Estate, it seemed that way to me." Donald McAdams to George Knight, Nov. 11, 2018.
59. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 27–124.
60. *Ibid.*, 433–444.
61. *Ibid.*, 445–465 (quotation on p. 460).
62. *Ibid.*, 447.
63. Robert W. Olson, *One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 41–44.
64. Fred Veltman, "The Desire of Ages Project: The Conclusions," *Ministry* (Dec. 1990): 11–15.
65. George E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1983), 110.
66. *Ibid.*, [4].
67. George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism: An Interpretive Study of Ellen White, Education, and Related Issues* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1985); George R. Knight, "The Myth of the Inflexible Prophet," *Adventist Review* (April 3, 1986): 14, 15.
68. See Knight, *Angry Saints*, 100–115 (100–115 in 1989 edition) for numerous claims by Ellen White on this point.
69. Some have suggested that the point regarding EGW's relation to the Bible in the resolution of theological differences breaks down in her treatment of A. F. Ballenger's problem over the sanctuary teaching in 1905. On that occasion she came across much more authoritatively than she did during the Galatians and "daily" conflicts. Thus, the Ballenger incident is an excellent test case. As a preliminary hypothesis, it seems to me that we find a fundamental difference between Ballenger's case and the other two. From EGW's perspective, Adventist scholars had already thoroughly studied from the Bible the point at issue with Ballenger, whereas the law in Galatians and the "daily" still needed more attention when disagreement arose over them. As a result, she related to Ballenger's situation differently than she did in the other cases. Such a hypothesis has yet to be tested, but it should prove to be an interesting and meaningful task for some scholar in the future. A beginning point for such testing is the evidence Robert Olson quotes from Ellen White on page 45 of *One Hundred and One Questions* to make just the opposite point from mine. He quotes her as saying that she felt "bidden to say in the name of the Lord that Elder Ballenger is following a false light" from the perspective of "established truth" regarding the sanctuary doctrine (italics added). It should be noted that EGW's seemingly variant treatment of Ballenger's situation should not be attributed to some historical development in her theological assertiveness, since the Galatians and "daily" controversies chronologically span the Ballenger incident.
70. See, for example, Knight, *Search For Identity*; Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000); Merlin D. Burt, "The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849," PhD diss., Andrews University, 2002; George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2004), 77–134.
71. Gary Land, ed., *The World of Ellen White* (Washington, DC: *Review and Herald*, 1987).
72. See, for example, the following extensive collections of documents. [Robert W. Olson, comp.], *Periodical Articles Concerning Inspiration, Ellen G. White, and Adventist History* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1986); Roger W. Coon, comp., *Anthology of Recently Published Articles on Selected Issues in Prophetic Guidance*, vol. 1:1980–1988; vol. 2:1989–1992 (no publication data).

73. One topic that should be noted, but does not fit into the flow of my presentation, is the Israel Dammon crisis that broke on the church in 1987 (see *Spectrum* [August 1987]: 29–50) and whose implications of Ellen White’s involvement with fanatical believers shook up many Adventists. But, as I demonstrated in *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), Sabbatarian Adventism was birthed in the fanatical, shut-door, post-Millerite faction. While the open-door, Albany faction only had to define itself over against the fanatical shut-door “spiritualizers,” those who were becoming Sabbatarian Adventists had to *disentangle* themselves from the fanatics, a process that took a couple of years (see pp. 245–325). That insight is one reason, as Ben McArthur puts it, that I treat “explosive topics, such as the Israel Dammon episode in the immediate post-Disappointment months with a disarming matter-of-factness, as if these revelations should have been untroubling to begin with.” (Benjamin McArthur, “Historian and Provocateur,” in Gilbert M. Valentine and Woodrow Whidden, eds., *Adventist Maverick: A Celebration of George R. Knight’s Contribution to Adventist Thought* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2014], 18.) Of course, Ellen White’s being in close association with fanatical elements in the post-1844 period is also evident in many places in her autobiographical statements related to her early history. It seems to have been common knowledge to her early contemporaries who had passed through those difficult years.

74. Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1991). For the most energetic response to Thompson, see Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1992).

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

76. George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1996); George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply Her Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1997); George R. Knight, *Ellen White’s World: A Fascinating Look at the Times in Which She Lived* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1998); George R. Knight, *Walking with Ellen White: The Human Interest Story*, (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 1999).

77. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds. *The Ellen White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2013).

78. Don S. McMahon, *Acquired or Inspired? Exploring the Origins of the Adventist Lifestyle* (Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing, 2005); for a popularized version of McMahon’s book, see Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005).

79. The criticism indicates need for a study utilizing a more adequate research design with tighter controls. However, McMahon’s conclusion definitely lines up with what we can already demonstrate about Ellen White’s use of sources in such areas as history, indicating that he is probably onto a valid track that needs further investigation to test his hypotheses.

80. Douglas Morgan, “A New Era of Ellen G. White Studies?” *Spectrum* (Autumn 2002): 59; Rene Noobergen, *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* (New Canaan, CT: Keats Publishing, 1974), 92–134.

81. Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010).

82. Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011); Jerry Allen Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship Between the Prophet and Her Son* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

83. Merlin D. Burt, ed. *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015).

84. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Edmond, eds., *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History* (Silver Spring, MD: *Review and Herald*, 2015).

85. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (New York: Oxford, 2014).

86. Denis Fortin, “Historical Introduction,” in Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 125th anniversary edition (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017).

87. Jonathan M. Butler, “Seventh-day Adventist Historiography: A Work in Progress,” *Church History*, 87:1 (March 2018), 149–166. Quotation is on p. 165.

88. Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (Narbethong, Vic., Australia: Highwood Books, 2004), 3–5.

89. *Ibid.*, 138, 140; and if we think inerrancy is dead, Samuel K. Pipim is more than happy to put us straight with his affirmation that “all the claims that the Bible makes on any subject—theology, history, science, chronology, numbers, etc.—are absolutely trustworthy and dependable.” Of course, Pipim is speaking of the Bible, but in fundamentalist Adventism ideas on the Bible’s inspiration are carried over to Ellen White. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “An Analysis and Evaluation of Alden Thompson’s Casebook/Codebook Approach to the Bible,” in Holbrook and Van Dolson, *Issues in Revelation*, 63, n. 3.

90. Butler, “SDA Historiography,” 150, 166, 152, 161.

91. Grant Wacker, “Foreword,” in Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White*, xiv.

92. Butler, “SDA Historiography,” 152, 166.

93. Eric Anderson, “War, Slavery, and Race,” in Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White*, 262.



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