



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

Response *to* George R. Knight's

"Ellen White's Afterlife"

BY JONATHAN BUTLER

When you see George Knight's title, you know you are going to read his essay. Always the lively writer, he never chooses the leaden, deadly course of so much historical writing on Ellen White. He never turns an extraordinary woman into someone gray or dull. In reading this thoughtful, richly informative essay, my sense is that Knight has distilled here much of his career as a church historian. In two important ways, he ought to be complimented for his achievement with regard to Seventh-day Adventist history: he has gotten us thinking not

only about the nineteenth century but also the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; and he understands that Adventist history is far more than a biography of Ellen White. It requires many other players and plots to understand it, to understand her. I disagree with his essay in important ways, but there is much more to like in it than dislike.

Knight initially delivered it as a 2018 Utt Lecture at Pacific Union College. He began by recalling how White had been viewed during his own "green and golden" time at Angwin. The students in his audience might have

wondered if his lecture was more fiction than memoir. I can assure them, however, that his memory is impeccable. We may be far removed from the Adventism of the early 1960s, but we should not pretend that that quaint world never existed. Nor should we misunderstand how, over many decades, it came into existence, and why it rather abruptly disappeared. For those of us in North America, Europe, or Australia at least, it is now hard to imagine those college days Knight describes, when Arthur White could draw an SRO crowd, when religion courses required Ellen White's books for classroom texts, when the prophet provided the last word on history, science, or religion, and when almost no one equated her writings with plagiarism.

In reflecting on his evocative, long-term memory, it is worth noting the role that Knight played in distancing us from the Ellen White of the early sixties. This distinguished alumnus of PUC would, in time, join other academics in rendering obsolete the way his one-time religion professors had used Ellen White in class. Knight was not involved in the first wave of iconoclastic revisionists, including Ronald Numbers and Walter Rea, who did so much to dismantle the iconic, idealized, and inerrant White. That pristine view of her was in pieces before Knight celebrated his twentieth college reunion. Though missing the controversial first wave, Knight became, certainly, the most significant person in a second wave of Adventist historians who sought to salvage the prophet left in the wake of revisionism. Knight devoted himself to reintroducing Ellen White, as a more realistic and sustainable visionary, to a new generation of Seventh-day Adventists. He saw her as a prophet in whom Adventists could believe, even though she could no longer settle all their doctrinal questions or model for them whether to do the dishes on Sabbath.¹

I do not agree with one of his points (a minor one perhaps) that is occasionally made against some of the "first wave" historians. He writes of a supposed pattern among "the major critics of Ellen White" that separates them from other Adventists. Canright and Ballenger, Numbers and Rea basked in "the wonderful world of

Ellen White's inerrancy." When confronted with evidence to the contrary, however, they "rejected her and her writings with gusto." But here is my quarrel: the future arch-heretics of the church may have once believed in an unrealistic Ellen White, but so did virtually every other Adventist. The "wonderful world" that White's "major critics" embraced was the same world Adventists as a whole embraced, including a youthful George Knight. Arthur White and Walter Rea, Ronald Numbers and George Knight, at one time held an identical view of Ellen White—in fact, for the most part, the *church's* view of her. Nevertheless, they went their separate ways. Growing up with an Ellen White that all Adventists grew up with, therefore, does not account for why some became her "major critics."

When Knight turns to nineteenth-century Adventism—which really carries through 1919—he explores the richest and most thought-provoking vein of his argument. He argues that, in the nineteenth century, Adventists were more open and "enlightened" on Ellen White's inspiration than Adventists would be in the twentieth century, citing W. C. White in particular, who enjoyed a closer proximity

We may be far removed from the Adventism of the early 1960s, but we should not pretend that that quaint world never existed.

to the prophet and a deeper familiarity with how she worked than later Adventists. By contrast, twentieth-century Adventists were further removed from her humanity, reverently committing to memory passages from her gilt-edged books but with no memory of how she had produced them. Knight also makes the case that nineteenth-century Adventists were "divided over the proper use, authority, and nature of [Ellen White's] writings." Twentieth-century Adventists, on the other hand, were more monolithic in their acceptance of a fundamentalist view of her inspiration. According to Knight, then, had Adventists been truer to at least some of their nineteenth-century roots regarding a proper understanding of the prophet, they might have avoided their disillusionment when confronted by the new history of the 1970s and early '80s.

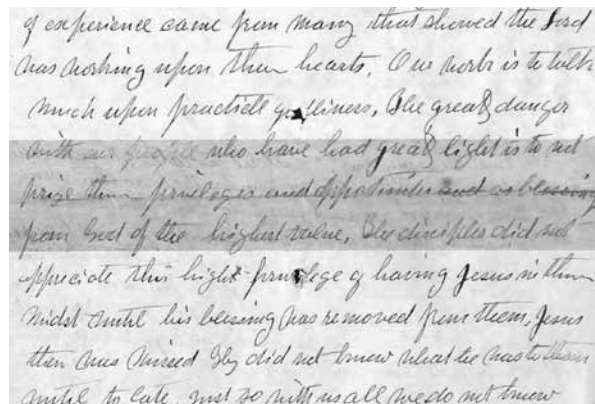
In general, I have come to a different conclusion about nineteenth- and twentieth-century Adventism with respect



Letter written by Ellen White (photo courtesy of Pacific Union College).

Ellen White Letter Found

A previously undocumented letter penned by Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has been discovered by Katharine Van Arsdale in the archives at Pacific Union College, where Van Arsdale is the official archivist. When shared with several historians, it was confirmed that the incomplete document was indeed in Ellen White’s handwriting. “Within 24 hours, the newly recovered letter was being analyzed, transcribed, and even discussed in classes across the country,” reported Eric Anderson, professor emeritus of history and director of PUC’s Walter C. Utt Center for Adventist History, which is collecting significant historical materials relating to the history of the college. Scholars were quick to notice the larger context of this letter, addressed to Adventist evangelist and missionary John Orr Corliss. White was discussing criticism of her life and writings among Seventh-day Adventists, and she wrote at a time when she faced several significant challenges, including a debate about whether her “testimonies” to church members could be corrected or revised. Scholars who confirmed the document include Ronald Graybill, retired professor, formerly of the White Estate, and author of several books about Ellen White; Kevin Morgan, pastor and Ellen White author; and Tim Poirier of the White Estate. News of the discovery and authentication was announced in early February, 2019.



Detail of letter written by Ellen White (photo courtesy of Pacific Union College).

to Ellen White. Where Knight notes the discontinuity between the two eras, I see the continuity. Unlike Knight, I am struck by an Adventist fundamentalism toward the prophet in *both* centuries. For me, there was no “golden age” when Adventists were more broad-minded or sophisticated in their view of White’s inspiration. There were misconceptions, distortions, and unrealistic claims from the very beginning of White’s ministry with respect to how God used her. In fact, I tend to indict the Whites themselves—James, Ellen, and W. C. White—for inflated views of the visionary, and not just rank-and-file followers who appear to have been misguided. No one made higher claims for her inspiration than Ellen White herself. At times guilty of a kind of magical realism, she made a number of personal statements on inspiration that could easily have encouraged a fundamentalist understanding of her.²

In the early nineteenth century, Mary Brunton was considered the superior novelist to Jane Austen, but most of us have never heard of Brunton, and we still read Austen. Why? One historian suggests that it was Austen’s family and friends who did wonders for her reputation.³ In Ellen White’s case, it is unlikely that she would have had any literary “afterlife” without her family—from James White to Willie White to Arthur White—but this came with demands made on Ellen White from an Adventist public. The Whites may have known more about what a prophet should be, but her Adventist followers had their own clear and insistent idea of what *they* wanted of a prophet. The Whites ignored these expectations at the peril of the prophet’s ministry. The controversy over her literary borrowing would provide a striking example of the way Adventist expectations of the prophet blinded them to the realities. Donald McAdams writes that much of the problem over plagiarism was “because the church failed to take her introductory disclaimer [in *The Great Controversy*] at face value.” It was the irony that ran through Adventism: White’s most literalistic, inerrant-believing supporters were the most tone-deaf to her own statements on inspiration.

Throughout her career White had to contend with the often willful demands of her most ardent supporters. With the first vision, a high bar was set *by* Ellen and *for* her on one sliver of writing on the “shut door.” Why did she have to be right to be a prophet? And why, when she appeared to some to be wrong, did James block her altogether from writing in the *Adventist Review*? In writing on health in the

1860s, why did White claim she had not read other health reformers (when she had) before writing out her visions? And why, in the 1880s, could she admit to reading books both before and after her visions and finding in them the language to write out what she had seen? Why could she settle disputes over foundational doctrines of the church in the late forties but refuse to address “the law in Galatians” in the late eighties or “the daily” in the first decade of the twentieth century?

Answers to these questions must take into account that dynamic and delicate balance between a prophet and her people. For the prophet to function—with honor in her own country—she must meet expectations, and even exceed them. In the early 1850s, Ellen White vacillated on whether a woman had called her neighbor a “witch” or “bitch,” and spawned Adventism’s first offshoot, The Messenger Party. In the early 1880s, she called for minor revisions in the *Testimonies* and her most ardent supporter and a personal friend, S. N. Haskell, bitterly opposed the changes. He believed that not just her words were inspired but her punctuation. Haskell became the prophet’s closest confidante—next to her son Willie anyway—and carried on the most voluminous correspondence with her of any contemporary. He even proposed marriage to her.⁴

Yet White and Haskell were supposedly at odds on the nature of her inspiration. In all likelihood, however, Haskell, not W. C. White or even Ellen White, best represented nineteenth-century Adventism’s understanding of inspiration. W. C. White warned Haskell of “injuring Mother’s work by claiming for it more than she claims for it, more than Father ever claimed for it”—or several other Adventist leaders.

But with regard to “injuring” White, that train had already left the station. The W. C. White letter is good evidence that the “enlightened” view had exerted little influence on Adventist contemporaries. In fact, White considered it too hot to handle for an Adventist public and wrote it for Haskell’s eyes only. W. W. Prescott wrote to W. C. White with similar candor but typed the letter himself to hide it from his secretary.⁵ The “enlightened” seem to have been too few and too low profile as

spokespersons for their viewpoint to have been considered a faction in the church. It is instructive to note that several of Knight’s more compelling quotes on White’s inspiration were never published, or were published years later, with the path-breaking *Selected Messages, Book One* (1958). Adventists had to wait until after the “first wave” historians jolted the church in the 1970s for an answer in *Selected Messages, Book Three* (1980). Nineteenth-century Adventists would have been oblivious to much of this material.⁶

Though the Whites were among the “enlightened,” we should not be too sanguine with respect to them. Politics mattered to the first family, but the political landscape could change. As her publisher, James White did what he could to conceal his wife’s literary blemishes with revised editions of her work. After his death, however, the Ad-

ventist public increasingly learned of the prophet’s work habits as a writer, which the “enlightened,” including the Whites, felt compelled to address. They did so in Ellen White’s seminal introduction to the 1888 edition of *The Great Contro-*

versy, an introduction that White’s inner circle probably had a hand in writing. The Whites and their closest colleagues were shifting the paradigm by which to understand Ellen White, but they conceded only as much as the current evidence demanded. More accommodations would be necessary after the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*. Ellen White, herself the pragmatist, refused to weigh in on “the law in Galatians” or “the daily,” though she had expressed herself on theology in the past. It just may have been that, if she took sides on either issue, she would alienate part of her base. And she cared more about her authority among Adventists as a whole than she did about any, single, divisive issue on doctrine. But, in the final analysis, she stayed out of “the daily” debate because it was too trivial: it was “not to be made a test question.” Her involvement would have elevated its importance.⁷

The 1919 Bible Conference could experience catharsis regarding Ellen White’s inspiration only because the prophet had died a few years earlier. The passing of a strong-willed parent allowed for candor among her

The future arch-heretics of the church may have once believed in an unrealistic Ellen White, but so did virtually every other Adventist.

children. It was fortunate, too, that W. C. White did not attend; he might have imposed too heavy a hand on the proceedings. But this conference was not “the apex in openness regarding Ellen White” that Knight says it was. On the contrary, it was held behind closed doors—how “open” can that be?—and minutes of the meeting were deep-sixed. The outspoken attendees also did not provide a window into nineteenth-century Adventism as it was, but as it was not. These were outliers that did not speak for their contemporaries. At any rate, why should A. G. Daniells be considered more representative of nineteenth-century Adventism than Claude Holmes, the *Review and Herald* linotype operator? Holmes, the “hard hat,” believed Daniells, the “clerical collar,” was undermining White’s authority. Which of the two men was more reflective of their era? Holmes circulated a tract at the 1922 General Conference session, outing Daniells as a closet liberal on White, and Daniells lost his presidency. Holmes had been “open” in the way Daniells had not been, and it cost Daniells dearly.⁸

Knight contends that, beginning in the 1920s, Adventism “morphed” into “the wonderful world of Ellen White” that he entered at PUC in the 1960s. A. G. Daniells and W. C. White had “morphed” into F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald* and B. L. House, author of a denominational textbook. Both Wilcox and House flaunted White’s verbal inspiration. Knight explains the shift in Seventh-day Adventism with the takeover of American evangelicalism by fundamentalism. I like what Knight does here. Adventists, who had historically defined themselves as at odds with American culture, had turned into cultural chameleons. They absorbed fundamentalist views of biblical inerrancy over against the modernists and “higher critics.” What became distinctively Adventist about this story was that, as Knight puts it, they adopted fundamentalist “assumptions about the Bible and applied them to the

writings of Ellen White.” Where I qualify his argument is that, in my view, Adventists brought their own, earlier version of “fundamentalism” with them into the twentieth century. From their nineteenth-century origins as a church, a proto-fundamentalist view of Ellen White was in their DNA.

In the 1970s and early ’80s, the “wonderful world” went spinning off its axis. Knight’s care and thoroughness in dealing with Adventism’s historical revolution in this era does not surprise me. In his historical work he, at times, takes on the Adventist revisionists, but he always takes them seriously. Knight acknowledges Benjamin McArthur’s point that these historians had opened

a “Pandora’s box.” He also agrees with Eric Anderson that historians in the 1970s had introduced a “new orthodoxy.” Nothing had prepared the church for this historical revolution—not muted statements from the “enlightened” leadership in the nineteenth century, not Ellen White’s progressive comments on inspiration, and not the 1919 Conference (even if the minutes had not been buried). The histori-

ans of the 1970s and early ’80s raised a historical consciousness within the church for the first time. This was an altogether new challenge. It brought Ellen White into focus in a way she had never been before.⁹

Adventists were not used to seeing their tradition—especially their prophet—through the eyes of professional historians. They knew hagiography and expose. But in a sense J. N. Loughborough, an archconservative, and D. M. Canright, an arch-heretic, were two sides of the same coin. They had more in common with each other than they had with historians such as Numbers or McAdams or Knight. With professional historians on the scene, new historical questions were raised; new answers demanded. The ground had shifted under Adventist feet. The “first wave” was the tsunami. The “second wave” led to a rebuilding from the destruction. We now can expect a “third wave.” I like Knight’s comment on Ellen White: we “need to see her with new eyes.”

In the final analysis, she stayed out of “the daily” debate because it was too trivial: it was “not to be made a test question.” Her involvement would have elevated its importance.

Adventist historians from every place on the spectrum—from “liberal” to “conservative,” from academic to apologist, from icon-shattering to icon-building—will be in the “third wave.” But here I would offer a caveat: in reading their different perspectives, I think we should bury “bias” as a pejorative term. As a matter of fact, we too often call people “biased” only because they disagree with us. For the most part, however, so-called “bias” may be simply making an argument. And in the “third wave” we will hear arguments about Ellen White from a number of new perspectives. We will hear, too, from the non-Adventists who have begun to give White her due. Non-Adventists will see things about her from “thirty thousand feet” that Adventists have not seen at close range. But whatever wave historians or readers of history choose to ride—the first, second, or third wave—they should read Knight’s article on “Ellen White’s Afterlife.”

End Notes

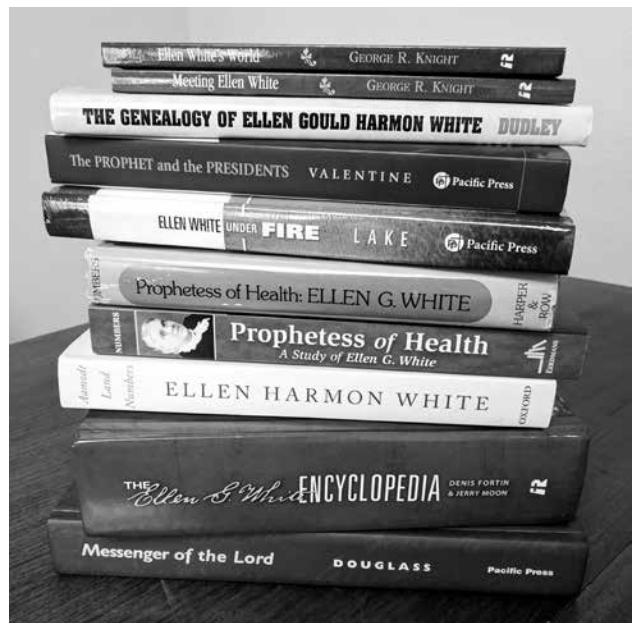
1. See my discussion of this historiographical development in, Jonathan M. Butler, “Seventh-Day Adventist Historiography: A Work in Progress,” *Church History* 87, No. 1 (March 2018): 149–166; in a study of Catholicism, Emily Clark writes, “Revisionism often preoccupies itself with what has been left out, and it usually rests on one of two strategies: examining the subject from the perspective of actors and evidence not considered in prior scholarship, or from the vantage point of a longer temporal perspective that uncovers developmental themes previously overlooked.” Both strategies occupy Adventist historians in the 1970s and early ’80s. The citation appears in Emily Clark, “Hail Mary Down By the Riverside,” in Catherine A. Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 91–107, quote on 92.

2. Arthur L. White, “The Authority of Ellen G. White Writings,” <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/egww/EGWWc02>, (last accessed January 7, 2018); see also his *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969), 12–17.

3. H. J. Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

4. On the Messenger Party, see Theodore N. Levterov, “Messenger Party,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013), 974–976; on Haskell’s views of inspiration and his relationship to White, see Gerald Wheeler, *S. N. Haskell: Adventist Pioneer, Evangelist, Missionary, and Editor* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016), 186–203, 250–266.

5. W. C. White to S. N. Haskell, Oct. 31, 1912.; on Prescott’s typing of his own letter, see Gilbert M. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott:*



Forgotten Giant of Adventism’s Second Generation (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2005), 264–265.

6. See, for examples, Knight’s notes 2 and 7: Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958, 1980), Book One, 21; this reference initially appeared as Ms. 24, 1886 and was not published until *ibid.*; Knight’s note 15: *ibid.*, 164, originally was Ms. 11, 1910. It did surface in White’s lifetime, but it is not clear how widely it was circulated; see Ellen G. White, “Our Attitude Toward Doctrinal Controversy,” in *A Call to the Watchman (Sanitarium, CA: pamphlet, 1910)*, 5–10. My thanks to Ronald Graybill for tracking down these references for me.

7. For James and Ellen White and how the shut-door was handled in print, see Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 56–57; 71–74; for an overview of the literary life of *The Great Controversy*, see Denis Fortin, “The Great Controversy,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Fortin and Moon, 847–850; on the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy*, see Valentine, *W. W. Prescott* (2005), 258–265; on “the daily,” Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, 164.

8. Benjamin McArthur, *A. G. Daniells: Shaper of Twentieth-Century Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2015), 386–413.

9. Donald R. McAdams, “Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s,” *Spectrum* 10, No. 2 (March 1980): 27–41; Benjamin McArthur, “Where Are the Historians Taking the Church?” *Spectrum* 10, No. 3 (November 1979): 9; Eric Anderson, “Ellen White and Reformation Historians,” *Spectrum* 9, No. 2 (July 1978): 24.



Since retirement from teaching, JONATHAN BUTLER has been researching and writing on Adventist history, and he and his wife Marianne spend as much time as possible with their grandchildren.

KEYWORDS: 1919 Bible Conference, Testimonies, nature of inspiration, infallibility, A. G. Daniels

B. L. House *J. N. Anderson* *G. B. Thompson*
T. M. French *C. P. Ballman* *C. L. Taylor* *C. M. Sorenson* *D. A. Parsons* *Brother Waldorf*



A. G. Daniels



F. M. Wilcox



W. E. Howell



W. W. Prescott

C. L. Benson *W. G. Wirth* *E. F. Albertsworth* *Mrs. Williams*
L. L. Caviness *C. A. Skull* *W. H. Wakeham* *M. E. Kern* *H. C. Lacey*

THE *Bible Conference* OF 1919

INTRODUCTION BY MOLLEURUS COUPERUS
 REPRINTED FROM *SPECTRUM*, VOL. 10, NO. 1, 1978

Nearly all Protestant churches have had at least one outstanding leader whose dedication to what he considered his divinely ordained work and message was apparent to all. In spite of the fact that these men made mistakes and erred, their grateful and admiring followers awarded them a place of unusual authority in their church, particularly in matters of biblical interpretation and doctrine. This was especially true of Luther and Calvin. Martin Luther, for instance, was called “an instrument of God,” “a prophet of the Almighty,” and an “apostle of freedom.” Luther also applied the title of prophet to himself occasionally. His prophecies were gathered together by Johannes Lapäus and published by him in 1578 under the title *True Prophecies of the Dear Prophet and Holy Man of God Dr. Martin Luther*. This book was republished in 1846. Hans Preuss in 1933 wrote a scholarly volume entitled *Martin Luther the Prophet*, in which he lists the prominent theologians who

called Luther a prophet, both before and after the Enlightenment. During the last century, Luther was more often called apostle or reformer. As time went on after Luther’s death, and scholars were able to study and compare the astounding size of Luther’s writings (his published works fill more than sixty volumes), a critical evaluation was possible of the nature and extent of his contribution to the Christian church. In all this, he has remained the Reformer, the great Man of God.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been blessed by the great devotion and leadership of many individuals, both during its early history and its later development. Among these, none has had a greater influence on this church than Ellen G. White, from shortly after the Disappointment of 1844 until the present, long after her death on July 16, 1915.

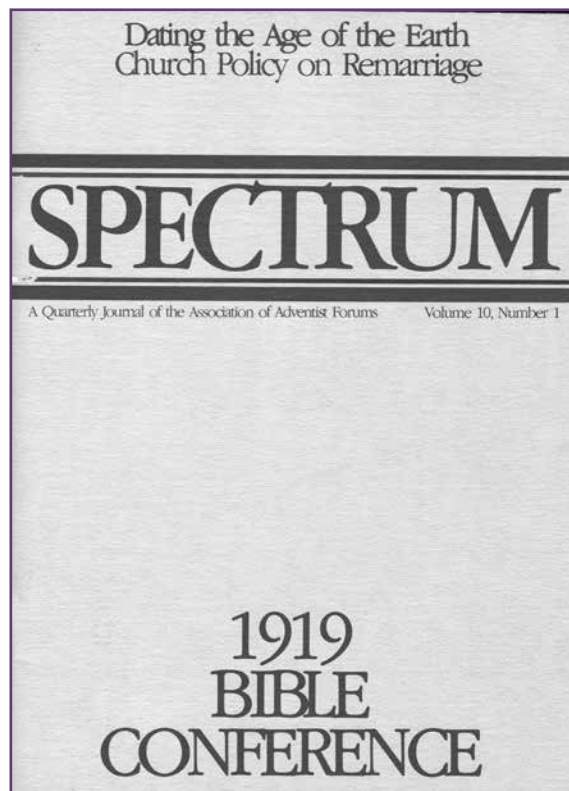
In spite of her limited formal education, Ellen (Harmon) White developed into a person of profound insight

and spiritual stature, a wise counselor and leader, a deep Bible student and commentator. All of these characteristics are reflected in the voluminous written material that came from her pen, which has continued to extend her influence and authority in her church until the present.

As early as December 1844, when she was only seventeen years of age, she had a vision in which she saw the Advent people on their journey to the Holy City. This was the first of many visions, dreams and messages which she communicated to the church, nearly all of which were related to the beliefs, work, and organization of her church, while others were for counsel to individual members. As Ellen White matured, she saw herself increasingly active in preaching, and traveled widely, including to Australia and Europe, to aid in the development of her church. She also became more involved in writing articles for various church periodicals and in publishing large books, even sets of books, such as the five-volume *Conflict of the Ages* series. To aid her in this demanding part of her work, she was able to secure the help of a number of very capable literary assistants and secretaries, one of whom, Marian Davis, worked with her for some twenty-five years.

Soon after her visions first appeared and were publicized, questions naturally arose concerning the nature of these visions, their authority, and a little later, their relationship to the Bible. This latter question has remained a subject for discussion and even controversy in the church ever since. Ellen's husband, James, became fully aware of this problem soon after her first visions, and discussed it at some length as early as April 21, 1851, in the *Review and Herald*. He stated:

Every Christian is, therefore, in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position. The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom, from which to learn duty in "all good works." But if a portion of the church err from the truths of the Bible, and become



weak, and sickly, and the flock become scattered, so that it seems necessary for God to employ the gifts of the Spirit to correct, revive and heal the erring, we should let him work.

In a second article in the same issue, James White wrote:

God's Word is an everlasting rock. On that we can stand with confidence at all times. Though the Lord gives dreams, designed generally for the individuals who have them, to comfort, correct, or to instruct in extreme trials or dangers, yet to suppose that he designs to guide in general duties by dreams, is unscriptural, and very dangerous. The Word and Spirit are given to guide us.

Four years later, on October 16, 1855, he wrote again in the *Review and Herald* on the same subject:

There is a class of persons who are determined to have it that the *Review* and its conductors make the view of Mrs. White a Test of doctrine and Christian fellowship. What has the *Review* to do with Mrs.

W.'s views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the *Review* has ever referred to them as authority on any point. The *Review* for five years has not published one of them. Its motto has been, "The Bible and the Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty."

As the years passed by, some in the church claimed verbal inspiration for the writings of Ellen White, a position rejected by James White and officially by the church. Others claimed infallibility, and many called her a prophet. Both of these she denied, but felt that her work was more than that of a prophet, calling herself a messenger. On infallibility, she stated: "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible." (Selected Messages I: 37). In spite of these statements, from time to time some authors in the church have claimed various degrees of infallibility for her writings. Roderick Owen, in a reprint article in the *Review and Herald* of June 3, 1971, assigned infallible interpretation of Scripture to her. The official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been that our beliefs are solely based on Scripture, and that by Scripture all claims for religious truth must ultimately be tested. Believing that Ellen White was used by God to help guide the infant church as a spiritual leader does not imply that one can ascribe to her infallibility in her work, words, or writings. Her son, W. C. White, who worked closely with his mother for many years, and for the Ellen G. White Estate after her death, wrote regarding her statements on history: "Mother has never claimed to be authority on history" (W. C. White, in *The Great Controversy*, 1911 Edition, 4; quoted by Arthur L. White in *The Ellen G. White Writings*, 1973).

Regarding Mother's writings and their use as an authority on points of history and chronology Mother has never wished our brethren to treat them as authority regarding details of history or historical dates. . . . When *Controversy* was written, Mother never thought that the readers would take it as authority on historical dates or use it to settle controversy regarding details of history, and she does not now feel that it should be used in that way (Letter from W. C. White to

W. W. Eastman, Nov. 4, 1912; quoted in *The Ellen G. White Writings*, by Arthur L. White, 33, 34).

By what standards then should the writings of Ellen G. White be judged? First of all, according to her own words and those of James White: by Scripture. All other statements, historical, medical, scientific, like the statements of any other mortal, must be able to pass historical or scientific research—the test of truth, as I believe Ellen White would have it. Then her message, so greatly confined to her own church by the unwarranted attitude of those who advocated infallibility for her writings, would become acceptable also for devotional and Biblical study outside her own church, which has been accused for so many years of having "an addition to or above Scripture."

The struggle that has been present in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to come to an acceptable and honest decision about the place which the writings of Ellen White should have for our church and those in other churches is illustrated by the discussions which took place at the Bible Conference in Takoma Park, from July 1–21, 1919, and which was followed immediately by a three-weeks long meeting of the Bible and History Teachers Council. In the *Review and Herald* of August 14, 1919, W. E. Howell lists twenty-two delegates from our colleges attending the Bible and History Teachers Council, and other evidence indicates that the total number attending the Bible Conference was over fifty. The president of the General Conference at that time, Arthur G. Daniells, reported on the Bible Conference in the *Review and Herald* of August 21, 1919, and informs us that the meeting was attended "by editors, Bible and history teachers from our colleges and seminaries, and members of the General Conference Committee." Among those present at the Bible Conference, besides A. G. Daniells, were G. B. Thompson, field secretary of the General Conference; F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*; M. E. Kern, formerly president of the Foreign Mission Seminary (Columbia Union College); W. W. Prescott, formerly editor of the *Review and Herald* and then a field secretary of the General Conference (who had a major part in the revision of the book *The Great Controversy* in 1911); H. C. Lacey, religion teacher at the Foreign Mission Seminary; W. E. Howell, editor of the *Christian Educator*; W. G. Wirth, a religion teacher at Pacific Union College, and later at the College of

Medical Evangelists; M. C. Wilcox, book editor for the Pacific Press; A. O. Tait, editor of the *Signs of the Times*; C. M. Sorenson, history teacher at Emmanuel Missionary College; C. S. Longacre, secretary of the Religious Liberty Association; W. H. Wakeham, Bible teacher at Emmanuel Missionary College; J. N. Anderson, Bible teacher at the Washington Foreign Mission Seminary; C. L. Taylor, head of the Bible Department, Canadian Junior College; L. L. Caviness, associate editor of the *Review and Herald*; and T. M. French, head of the school of theology at Emmanuel Missionary College.

In his report of the Bible Conference, Elder Daniells emphasized the importance of continued and deeper study of the Scriptures by our church. He stated, "The one great object of this conference is to unite in definite, practical, spiritual study of the Word of God." He then quotes at length from Ellen G. White where she counsels the church to a diligent study of the Scriptures, and includes the following:

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people, should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. V, 706, 707).

Elder Daniells also reported the actions that were taken at the conference, and from this we quote:

We therefore express our appreciation of the following definite features which have marked the sessions of this Bible Conference:

5. For the incentive to more earnest Bible Study which the conference has aroused. . . . We recognize, however, that there are still many mines of truth in the Holy Scriptures, and that these will yield their treasure to the earnest, prayerful, humble seeker after right. . .

6. We believe that the blessings and benefits which result from Bible conferences such as we have enjoyed, should be perpetuated in the future. . . . We therefore earnestly request the General Conference Committee to arrange for another conference of this character in 1920. . .

Such a conference, however, was not held.

The record of the 1919 Bible Conference was lost until December 1974, when Dr. F. Donald Yost found two packages wrapped in paper at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Takoma Park. The packages contained some 2,400 pages of typewritten material, transcribed from steno-

graphic notes taken at the Conference. It seems a tragedy that this material was not made available to Adventist teachers and ministers after the Bible Conference, and that the message which the participants in that Conference wanted to share with the church membership never was transmitted.

Following, we present the transcribed record of the meetings of the Bible Conference of 1919 on July 30 and August 1, which dealt especially with the Spirit of Prophecy. The discussions were open and frank, but reflect great sensitivity. There were other meetings in which this subject was discussed, but the meetings here reported were the longest and most comprehensive. In them, a number of individuals participated who had worked personally with Ellen White for many years. Because of their great historical significance, the transcripts are published complete and unedited, so that the participants of the two meetings may speak for themselves.

By what standards then should the writings of Ellen G. White be judged? First of all, according to her own words and those of James White: by Scripture.