

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

THE ELLEN G. WHITE WRITINGS

ARTHUR L. WHITE

The Ellen G. White Writings

Ellen G. White

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Overview

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About the Author

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

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By Arthur L. White

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A Few Words to the Reader

Through this volume I, the secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, pass to the readers my rather intimate knowledge of the operation of inspiration and the writing of the prophetic message as seen in the experience of Ellen G. White.

Some of this knowledge I gained from my father, William C. White, third son of James and Ellen G. White. I grew up in the environment of these things and worked with W. C. White in the Elmshaven office of the White Estate for nine years.

Most of what is presented here stems from a knowledge acquired in handling the Ellen G. White documents over a period of four decades.

This volume consists of five formal presentations made to groups of university and college teachers, administrators, and forum groups. The topics were assigned. The rather heavily documented papers were built upon the Ellen G. White documents themselves and the witness of Ellen G. White's contemporaries. Little reference is made to the works of scholars and theologians in the field of inspiration in general, for it was my intent to present the picture as I have seen it, working closely with the materials as found in the White Estate office records.

[10] Seventh-day Adventist ministers and teachers who were acquainted with these presentations urged their publication in order that they may serve in a much broader way than in oral rendering and in duplicated copies. An examination of the five papers as they were being prepared for publication revealed some overlapping. Repetition has been largely eliminated. Cross references are introduced to direct the reader to related materials as they appear here and there through the combined presentations. Some repetition, which if omitted would have marred the development of the topic presented, remains. Some additions have been made to round out and strengthen certain areas. Some sentences and phrases to which

particular attention is directed appear in italics to emphasize the point I wish the reader especially to note.

To say even after these many years that I understand all phases of Ellen G. White's experience and work would be to boast. To say that I have found answers to every question that may have arisen in my mind in the forty and more years I have been connected with this work would be to go beyond the facts. I have ever recognized that with our limited experience and with the possible absence of a knowledge of facts because documents were not available that would have presented the full story, not to speak of our shortsightedness, we dare not measure and pass judgment on the work clearly motivated by the Holy Spirit. All of this notwithstanding, I have found the weight of evidence so great that, not only can I not doubt, but I hold with the strongest confidence that Ellen G. White was what she claimed to be—the messenger of the Lord. She was indeed a true prophet of God. I am quite willing to hold suspended judgment on a few points until I find an answer here, and if not here, then when I meet and talk with Ellen White and our Saviour in the world made new.

My observation is that those who lived and worked most closely [11] with Ellen G. White had the strongest confidence in her call and work. This is my experience as I move in the closest contact with her documents—the letters, diaries, manuscripts, and published records. To these may be added the published and unpublished witness of her contemporaries.

That the observations presented here, which have been made in such close contact with the materials themselves and with William C. White, who traveled and worked with his mother for more than thirty years, may serve the church in keeping before it a factual image of the work of Ellen G. White is my intent and sincere wish.

Arthur L. White

Washington, D.C.

March 1, 1973

[12]

Chapter 1—Toward a Factual Concept of

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Inspiration ¹

Inspiration is a point of vital importance to Seventh-day Adventists in this day when there seems to be a waning of certainty concerning what have been understood to be God's revelations to man. Ellen G. White's statements concerning the Bible and her work indicate that the concept of verbal inspiration is without support in either the Bible writers' or her own word. This position was also clearly set forth at the General Conference session of 1883:

We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.—[The Review and Herald, November 27, 1883.](#)

In spite of this, there are some among Seventh-day Adventists who still hold, perhaps subconsciously, the concept that the original autographs of the Bible writers must have been “infallible” and “inerrant.”

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On the other hand, there are some who take the position that the Bible, not being verbally inspired, and evidently not being infallible in all its details, has only relative or partial accuracy. The essential purpose of the Bible, they assert, is to make men “wise unto salvation,” and this guarantees absolute reliability only thus far and no further. Consequently, Bible statements in such realms as history, chronology, geography, anthropology, geology, astronomy, botany, and so on, are beyond this realm and are considered quite inconsequential. It is suggested by those who hold such views that in these realms the Bible may disappoint or even mislead. This viewpoint leaves the Scriptures serving as a dependable guide only

¹This material was presented to university and college Bible teachers at Berrien Springs, Michigan, in June, 1966.

in the field of spiritual matters, and to go beyond this would be to impose tests on inspiration stronger than are warranted by the claims of the prophets. Obviously, not both can be right.

The position one takes on the inspiration of the Bible would most likely be the position he would hold toward the inspiration of the E. G. White writings. Indeed, we find that both views, in varying degrees, have been held through the years, and are held today, in regard to the Spirit of Prophecy writings.

When we approach the question of inspiration we step on holy ground, and this behooves caution. We may well consider the words of Ellen White commenting on a presentation made in the *Review and Herald* and at Battle Creek College:

In the college the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say that some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review* [January 15, 1884], neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college.

When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this.—[Letter 22, 1889](#) (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:23](#)).

[15]

These words should not preclude thoughtful, reverent study to understand how God communicates with man through His prophets, but they do alert us to the caution with which we should approach this topic. We believe that there is greater safety in arriving at conclusions based on facts than in depending on an approach largely theoretical and perhaps idealistic.

Adventists Uniquely Fortunate

Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely fortunate in approaching the question of the inspiration of the prophets. We are not left to find our way, drawing all our conclusions from writings of two thousand years and more ago that have come down to us through varied transcriptions and translations. With us it is an almost contemporary matter, for we have had a prophet in our midst. It is generally granted by the careful student of her works that the experience of Ellen G. White was not different from that of the prophets of old, and that the Spirit of God in His prophetic mission did not function differently in the experience of Ellen G. White from the way He functioned in the experience of the Bible prophets.

What is more, rather than having in our possession only relatively few chapters or a handful of letters, as is the case with the extant records of the Bible prophets, we have the full range of Ellen G. White writings penned through a period of seventy years, embodying her published books, her 4,600 periodical articles, her manuscripts, letters, diaries, and so on. We have also the testimony of her contemporaries, presenting the eyewitness accounts of those who lived and worked closely with her and were well able to judge her work.

[16] Both she and they discussed many points touching on the manner in which the light was imparted to her, and how she in turn conveyed the messages to those for whom they were intended—in other words, the operation of inspiration. Further, she wrote in the English language, so we are not confronted with problems of translation and only rarely with those of transcription.

Consequently, if we may accept Ellen White as an honest witness, then her observations concerning her work, her statements on inspiration, and her declaration as to the work of the prophets of old are particularly significant to us. These cumulative contemporary records, providing a report of the work of the prophet in action, can well form a basis for arriving at an accurate understanding of inspiration.

An examination of these practical records indicates to the careful observer that neither the first nor the second proposition concerning inspiration set forth at the outset is correct. The truth, it would seem, lies somewhere between the two. It is my purpose to set forth

appropriate exhibits, primarily from the writings and experience of Ellen G. White, and to draw conclusions therefrom that may be of service in reaching a factual conclusion. In so doing I shall traverse a good deal of familiar ground. This seems essential, for it is advantageous to have the facts well supported.

God and the Prophets

First of all, we should note that the Lord in His work of imparting light to the prophets does not follow any precise procedure. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” ([Hebrews 1:1, 2](#)). No one rule can be established or one uniform pattern delineated that will govern all the procedures in this matter of God’s giving His messages to man.

Second, the prophet is a normal human being with all the faculties possessed by an individual. The circumstances of his childhood days may have been different from those of another, and his educational background and occupational aptitude may vary, but he sees, hears, smells, meditates, reads, eats, sleeps, worships, speaks, travels, and so on, in the same manner as we all do. At the time of his call to the prophetic office he may be well informed in many lines of knowledge common to all men or he may not have been so well informed. All through his life subsequent to his call to the prophetic office, he may continue to gain information in matters common to all in the same manner in which we all obtain such information. Being called to the prophetic office does not blot from his mind information gained in past experiences, nor does it block his mental faculties from continuing to obtain information as he did before his call to the prophetic office.

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Being called in a unique manner to the service of the Lord as a prophet, he is, through visions, given special information imparted to him by God. This may be in the fields of theology and religious experience, with man’s relation to God and the plan of salvation in its fullness made clear. It may be in the field of history, recounting the special guidance of God for His people or for individuals, or warning of the perils incident to Satan’s determination to destroy the work of God or the hope of souls. It may be in the field of physiology,

nutrition, or hygiene. It may be in the realm of eschatology. It may be in the field of education or church administration. It may be in the opening up of hidden sins. The fields in which information may be imparted are without limit, for the work is in God's hands. This experience is uniquely that of the prophet. Although the Spirit of God may speak to the heart of each consecrated person, not all are or can be prophets. God alone selects the prophet. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" ([2 Peter 1:21](#)). The prophet does not choose his work, and he has no control in the matter of the visions either as to timing or content.

Visions and Bearing Testimony

The visions may have been given during the day accompanied by physical phenomenon or in the night season in a prophetic dream. The prophet did not write while in vision. He may have spoken a few words, indicating to any observers the nature of the revelation being received. While not in vision the prophet imparted to others what was intended for them, either orally, in interviews, or in writing.

Some of the information thus divinely received he may not have been at liberty to impart to others at once. Perhaps it had to be held until certain developments had taken place; or perhaps the light was given to fully orient the prophet, but he was not at liberty to disclose all that was revealed to him. Note this concerning Paul:

The great apostle had many visions. The Lord showed him many things that it is not lawful for a man to utter. Why could he not tell the believers what he had seen? Because they would have made a misapplication of the great truths presented. They would not have been able to comprehend these truths. And yet all that was shown to Paul moulded the messages that God gave him to bear to the churches.—[Letter 161, 1903](#).

On several occasions Ellen White stated that she was not at liberty to speak of what had been revealed to her until a certain time or until and unless there were certain developments. The vision might have been given just at the time certain information was

needed, or the prophet may have been given many visions opening up to him what would take place, so that when the events occurred he would understand them and be prepared to deal with the situation. Note again a reference to the experience of the apostle Paul:

The Lord had shown him the difficulties and dangers which would arise in the churches, that when they should develop he might know just how to treat them.—
[Testimonies for the Church 5:65](#).

[19]

The report of a church member led to the writing of instruction to the church at Corinth.

Now observe a paralleling E. G. White experience. She was in Australia, and certain matters were brought before her in a council meeting. Of them she wrote:

As my brethren read the selections from letters, I knew what to say to them; for this matter has been presented to me again and again.... I have not felt at liberty to write out the matter until now.... The light that the Lord has given me at different times ...—*Southern Work*, p. 72 (1966 printing).

How the Light Came to the Prophet

The many different ways in which the light was imparted to the prophet is a study having a bearing on this presentation, but is too extended for this book, except for one later allusion. See *Messenger to the Remnant*, pages 9-11, for illustrations.

A summary of this chapter reveals that light came to Ellen White—

1. In visions in which she was seemingly present and participating in the events she was viewing.
2. In broad panoramic views such as when the events of history past and future passed before her.
3. Viewing events with the angel standing by her side explaining the significance of the scenes.

4. As seemingly she visited institutions, meetings in session, and families in their homes, hearing all that was said and seeing all that was done.

[20] 5. As she was shown institutional buildings which had not yet been erected and then was given instruction covering the work to be done in these institutions.

6. In symbolic representations, usually explained by the angel.

7. In contrasting views in which two situations were opened to her, neither of which had taken place, with an explanation of the results in each case.

So much for the vision—the process, first, by which the prophet received from God light through which his mind was enlightened.

The second process was the bearing of testimony of what had been revealed in vision. Having been received, the message must be imparted by the prophet in the best way and with the most accurate language at the prophet's command in an attempt to create in the mind of the recipient the thought, the idea, the picture contained in the message.

The prophet at one time might use certain words and at another time employ other words in conveying the same message. He might have at ready command words that would convey the message satisfactorily, or he might find it necessary to study diligently to find words adequate to convey the message correctly and impressively. While writing *The Desire of Ages*, Mrs. White declared: "I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words." [Letter 40, 1892](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 59). The transmission of the message might suffer some impairment because of the inadequacy of the prophet. Note this comment by Ellen G. White:

The Bible ... was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its *different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers*. The truths revealed are all "*given by inspiration of God*" ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)); yet they *are expressed in the words of men*. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the

truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language....

Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another....

[21]

As presented through different individuals, the truth is brought out in its varied aspects. *One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase* of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation; *another seizes upon a different phase*; and each, *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents* what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all. And the truths thus revealed unite to form a perfect whole, adapted to meet the wants of men in all the circumstances and experiences of life.—[The Great Controversy, v, vi.](#)

Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Attention should be given to the expression “Each, *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind.” Although the prophet must draw upon his facilities of expression in presenting his message, the work of the Holy Spirit must not be overlooked. This is a vital point. Ellen White put it this way:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an

angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.—
[The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#) (quoted in
[Selected Messages 1:37](#)).

In 1860, in answering certain questions, she also touched on this point:

[22] Sometimes the things which I have seen are hid from me after I come out of vision, and I cannot call them to mind until I am brought before a company where that vision applies, then the things which I have seen come to my mind with force. *I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision.* It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that He is pleased to have me relate or write them.—[Spiritual Gifts 2:292, 293](#) (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:36, 37](#)).

The thought is again emphasized:

Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold.—[Letter 53, 1900](#) (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:22](#)).

The prophet, then, received his message through the visions while totally under the influence of the Spirit of God. He bore his *testimony* under the influence of the Spirit of God, but not to the point of mechanical control, or in a forced mold. Rather, he communicated the message in the best manner consistent with his background and facility of expression. On certain rare occasions the very words to be used were called to his mind by the Spirit of God. Note this from Ellen White. In a letter of admonition, after dealing with certain situations, she stated:

I am trying to catch the very words and expressions that were made in reference to this matter, and as my

pen hesitates a moment, the appropriate words come to my mind.—[Letter 123, 1904](#).

Another statement reads:

While I am writing out important matter, He [the Holy Spirit] is beside me helping me ... and when I am puzzled for a fit word with which to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind.—[Letter 127, 1902](#).

The Revelation Infallible—Vehicles of Thought Finite and Imperfect

Ellen White declares of the Bible:

The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will.... “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof” ...[The Great Controversy, vii](#).

[23]

She does not state that the wording of the Scriptures is infallible. But the Scriptures provide an infallible revelation. The revelation of God’s will is authoritative and infallible, but the language used in imparting it to mankind is not infallible.

Declares Ellen White: “God and heaven alone are infallible.”[Selected Messages 1:37](#). And again in speaking of her work she says: “In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible.” *Ibid*. She further illuminates this point, saying:

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

people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, *though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths* of higher education.—[Selected Messages 1:22](#).

Sources of the Prophet's Information

The fields of presentation of the inspired writers are broad and diverse. As already observed, the prophet is in possession of many lines of common knowledge, and his mind has been illuminated by the revelations received from God. To a large degree he carries the responsibility, under the impress of the Spirit of God, for the choice of the time and place and content of presentation. He exercises great care that his message shall not be influenced in its basic concepts by his own opinions or the thinking of his contemporaries, yet in its presentation he may use some items of information that are matters of common knowledge, such as the distance between places, the location of a given happening, or the time of a commonly known event.

It is at this point that an understanding of the manner in which information often was given to the prophet is vital. We pause to review. The description of the vision of Moses just before his death is very illuminating:

And now a panoramic view of the Land of Promise was presented to him. Every part of the country was spread out before him, not faint and uncertain in the dim distance, but standing out clear, distinct, and beautiful to his delighted vision. In this scene it was presented, not as it then appeared, but as it would become, with God's blessing upon it, in the possession of Israel. He seemed to be looking upon a second Eden. There were mountains clothed with cedars of Lebanon, hills gray with olives and fragrant with the odor of the vine, wide green plains bright with flowers and rich in fruitfulness, here the palm trees of the tropics, there waving fields of wheat and barley, sunny valleys musical with the

ripple of brooks and the song of birds, goodly cities and fair gardens, lakes rich in “the abundance of the seas,” grazing flocks upon the hillsides, and even amid the rocks the wild bee’s hoarded treasures....

Moses saw the chosen people established in Canaan, each of the tribes in its own possession. He had a view of their history after the settlement of the Promised Land; the long, sad story of their apostasy and its punishment was spread out before him. He saw them, because of their sins, dispersed among the heathen, the glory departed from Israel, her beautiful city in ruins, and her people captives in strange lands. He saw them restored to the land of their fathers, and at last brought under the dominion of Rome.

He was permitted to look down the stream of time and behold the first advent of our Saviour. He saw Jesus as a babe in Bethlehem. He heard the voices of the angelic host break forth in the glad song of praise to God and peace on earth.... He beheld Christ’s humble life in Nazareth, His ministry of love and sympathy and healing, His rejection by a proud, unbelieving nation. Amazed he listened to their boastful exaltation of the law of God, while they despised and rejected Him by whom the law was given. He saw Jesus upon Olivet as with weeping He bade farewell to the city of His love....

He followed the Saviour to Gethsemane, and beheld the agony in the garden, the betrayal, the mockery and scourging—the crucifixion.... He heard Christ’s agonizing cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” He saw Him lying in Joseph’s new tomb. The darkness of hopeless despair seemed to enshroud the world. But he looked again, and beheld Him coming forth a conqueror, and ascending to heaven escorted by adoring angels and leading a multitude of captives. He saw the shining gates open to receive Him, and the host of heaven with songs of triumph welcoming their Commander. And it was there revealed to him that he

[25]

himself would be one who should attend the Saviour, and open to Him the everlasting gates.—[Patriarchs and Prophets, 472-476.](#)

The dramatic picture continues, but we need go no further. Enthralled, Moses watched the events take place, seeing, hearing, and participating, and in receiving the message even the sense of smell came into play. In this vivid manner the history of the future was opened up to the prophet. It is very unlikely that dates were revealed to him. It is not likely that all the cities he saw were named. Those were inconsequential details, not of primary importance to the unfolding theme.

Ellen White Views History

It was doubtless in just this manner that history past and future was presented to Ellen White, history on which was woven the tapestry of the great controversy theme. Thus she declares in her introduction to her book *The Great Controversy*:

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the Author of our salvation, and Satan, the prince of evil, the author of sin, the first transgressor of God's holy law.—Page x.

And again:

[26]

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.—[The Great Controversy, xi.](#)

But was she shown in each instance in minute detail all of the names of the places and the dates of the events which she beheld? The evidence is that she was not. She saw events occur. The significant events as a part of the controversy story were the important part, the *basic concept*. Minor details and incidental references not basic to the account were of much less importance. Some of this information could be ascertained from the sacred writings, some from common sources of knowledge, some from reliable historians. Apparently God in His providence did not consider it essential to impart these minutiae through vision. This leads us to the point of just how much we are justified in demanding of divine revelation.

Regarding Details of Minor Consequence

Henry Alford, the highly appreciated British theologian, in his *New Testament for English Readers* in discussing “the inspiration of the evangelists and other New Testament writers” under point 11 suggests that the leading of the minds of the apostles by the Holy Spirit in their reconstruction of the gospel story “admits of much variety in points of minor consequence,”² and he points out:

Two men may be equally led by the Holy Spirit to record the events of our Lord’s life for our edification, though one may believe and record, that the visit to the Gadarenes took place before the calling of Matthew, while the other places it after that event; though one in narrating it speaks of two demoniacs,—the other, only of one.

[27]

In dealing with points of insignificance or minor consequence Alford continues:

14. And not only of the *arrangement* of the Evangelic history are these remarks to be understood. There are certain minor points of accuracy or inaccuracy, of

²Note: This statement, long known to the workers in Mrs. White’s office at Elmshaven, was considered by them and their successors as summing up the subject factually in full harmony with what they had observed in their close association with Ellen G. White and her writings. See Appendix B for Alford’s full statement.

which human research suffices to inform men, and on which, from want of that research, it is often the practice to speak vaguely and inexactly. Such are sometimes the conventionally received distances from place to place; such are the common accounts of phenomena in natural history, etc. Now in matters of this kind, the Evangelists and Apostles were not supernaturally informed, but left, in common with others, to the guidance of their natural faculties.

In describing the walk to Emmaus, Luke informs us, as presented in the K.J.V., that this town “was from Jerusalem *about* threescore furlongs.” In [Testimonies for the Church 9:173](#), Ellen White describes Loma Linda as “*about* four miles from Redlands.” We may properly ask, Did the Holy Spirit impart this detailed information on “the conventionally received distances” between the cities named, or did the prophetic writers draw this incidental and unimportant but descriptive information from the common source of knowledge available to anyone?

In discussing the number of rooms in Paradise Valley Sanitarium and the fact that in a letter she had described the building as having 40 rooms when in reality it had only 38, she stated:

[28] The information given concerning the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium was given, not as a revelation from the Lord, but simply as a human opinion. There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know. In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord and am stating it as such....

When the Holy Spirit reveals anything regarding the institutions connected with the Lord’s work, or concerning the work of God upon human hearts and minds, as He has revealed these things through me in the past, the

message given is to be regarded as light given of God for those who need it. But for one to mix the sacred with the common is a great mistake. In a tendency to do this we may see the working of the enemy to destroy souls.—[Selected Messages 1:38](#).

The point is so clear that further comment is uncalled for.

To return to the Alford statement on the inspiration of the New Testament writers:

15. The same may be said of citations and dates from history. In the last apology of Stephen, in which he spoke, being full of the Holy Ghost, and with divine influence beaming from his countenance, we have at least two demonstrable inaccuracies in points of minor detail. And the occurrence of similar ones in the gospels would not in any way affect the inspiration or the veracity of the Evangelists.

Stephen in his address in an incidental reference to the people who went down into Egypt, puts the number at “threescore and fifteen souls” ([Acts 7:14](#)). The Genesis record in presenting the history, a basic account in the historical setting, states, “All the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten” ([Genesis 46:27](#)). This record makes it clear that this number included “the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt.”

The Genesis record is the detailed historical account; the reference in Stephen’s defense is but an incidental reference. Would we require that the Holy Spirit in this crisis presentation should supernaturally guide Stephen’s mind on an inconsequential point of information that at least in its general features was a matter of common knowledge to all Jews? Would we use Stephen’s statement to correct the basic historical record? In other words, would we make Stephen on this incidental point an “authority on history”? If we do not choose to do so, does this impair his reliability as an inspired witness?

History and the Details of History

Elder W. C. White, addressing the General Conference Autumn Council on October 30, 1911, declared: “Mother has never claimed to be authority on history.” Ellen G. White endorsed this statement. Her son was explaining the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy* to the council in a statement that, when transcribed, filled six full single-spaced pages.³

This sentence has become a classical exhibit in some discussions and in certain statements touching on the inspiration of the E. G. White writings. It is a factor that not infrequently leads some individuals to take the position that little reliance can be placed on the historical areas of the E. G. White writings. This is akin to Ellen White’s statement, “I did not claim to be a prophetess,” made in the Battle Creek Tabernacle on October 2, 1904 (see [Selected Messages 1:31-35](#)). These words, standing alone, can be quite misleading. They have frequently been quoted out of context. But taken in the setting of her life experience, her many allusions to her prophetic work, and her own explanation, the matter becomes clear. Two statements from Ellen White read:

[30] During the discourse, I said that I did not claim to be a prophetess. Some were surprised at this statement, and as much is being said in regard to it, I will make an explanation. Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself. Those who boldly assume that they are prophets in this our day are often a reproach to the cause of Christ.—[Letter 55, 1905](#) (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:36](#)).

My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend.—[Letter 244, 1906](#) (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:36](#)).

Likewise, the E. G. White-approved statement by W. C. White, “Mother has never claimed to be authority on history,” is rightly

³See Appendix C.

employed only in the light of the full W. C. White declaration of 1911, other statements made by him, and Ellen White's own statements.

The issues were: (1) Was it proper and right to revise *The Great Controversy*, an inspired book, even though the work was done by Mrs. White herself, or under her eye? (2) Did the E. G. White use of historical quotations as a part of her record impart inspiration or a seal of inerrancy to the statements quoted? (3) Inasmuch as *The Great Controversy* was an inspired book, would not the minute detail of historical account embodied therein settle in the minds of Seventh-day Adventists any differences that might occur in the records of various historians? In other words, would not Mrs. White's writing of history serve to correct history in all its minor details?

If we held to verbal inspiration, this should be so. The point made by W. C. White in saying, "Mother has never claimed to be authority on history," was his attempt to prevent an unwarranted use of the E. G. White writings as settling the minor points of difference between historians. With his knowledge of the manner in which the light came to his mother, he felt that the course followed by some was unjustified. Perhaps an illustration will be in place.

[31]

Ellen White described her procedure in moving toward the revision of *The Great Controversy* in a letter to the editor of the *Review and Herald* on July 25, 1911:

When I learned that *Great Controversy* must be re-set, I determined that we would have everything closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages.

As a result of the thorough examination by our most experienced workers, some changing in the wording has been proposed. These changes I have carefully examined, and approved.—[Letter 56, 1911](#). (See Appendix C.)

An Illustration

One of the points called to Ellen White's attention in response to her call for an examination of the book referred to in her letter just quoted involved her account of St. Bartholomew's massacre. *The Great Controversy*, 1888 edition, states on page 272:

The great bell of the palace, tolling at the dead of night, was a signal for the slaughter.

She was now informed that historians differed on the point of which bell actually gave the signal, (1) the bell of the palace, (2) the bell of the Palace of Justice, or (3) the bell of the church of St. Germain. All three were within a radius of approximately a city block. The plan was that the bell of the palace would give the signal, and certain reliable historians state that it did. Others differed. Here is some of the documentation taken from our files having to do with the 1911 revision:

Criticism:

[32]

All the histories dealing with the French Revolution which I have been able to consult, state that it was the original plan to toll the bell of the palace as the signal, but owing to special circumstances, the signal was given by the ringing of the bell of the church of St. Germain.

Wylie's Account:

It was now eleven o'clock of Saturday night, and the massacre was to begin at daybreak.... The signal for the massacre was to be the tolling of the great *bell of the Palace of Justice*.... The Queen-mother feeling the suspense unbearable, or else afraid, as Maimbourg suggests, that Charles, "greatly disturbed by the idea of the horrible butchery, would revoke the order he had given for it," anticipated the signal by sending one at two o'clock of the morning to ring the bell of St. Germain l' Auxerois, which was nearer than that of the Palace of Justice.

Scarcely had its first peal startled the silence of the night when a pistol-shot was heard. The king started to his feet, and summoning an attendant he bade him go and stop the massacre. It was too late; the bloody work had begun. The great bell of the Palace had now begun to toll; another moment and every steeple in Paris was sending forth its peal; a hundred tocsins sounded at once.—*History of Protestantism*, vol. 2, p. 600.

“*Eyewitness Account*: As soon as they had caused the bell of the palace clock to ring, on every side arose the cry, ‘To arms! and the people ran,’ etc.” Account of the Massacre by “the statesman and fair-minded historian, De Thou (1553-1617), who as a young man witnessed the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.” Quoted in J. H. Robinson’s *Readings of European History*, chap. 28, sec. 6 (No. 286), pp. 180-182.

“*New International Encyclopedia*: From the tower of the royal palace the signal was given for a carnival of blood.” Art. “Bartholomew.”

Ellen White in vision saw and heard what took place. She heard the tolling of a bell, giving the signal, and she saw what followed. Did the angel give her minute information as to which bell tolled? Would not this point be what Henry Alford describes as “certain minor points of accuracy or inaccuracy, of which human research suffices to inform men”? She accepted the record of a reliable historian who indicated that it was the palace bell. When she learned that was uncertain, she reworded the statement to read: “A bell, tolling at the dead of night, was a signal for the slaughter.”—[The Great Controversy, 1911 ed., 272.](#)

[33]

The point being of no real significance, she removed from *The Great Controversy* the temptation that might come to some to employ the book to settle this disputed but inconsequential point.

And note the paragraph bearing the W. C. White statement:

Mother has never claimed to be authority on history. The things which she has written out, are descriptions of flash-light pictures and other representations given

her regarding the actions of men, and the influence of these actions upon the work of God for the salvation of men, with views of past, present, and future history in its relation to this work. 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. When I was a mere boy, I heard her read D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation* to my father. She read to him a large part, if not the whole, of the five volumes. She has read other histories of the Reformation. This has helped her to locate and describe many of the events and the movements presented to her in vision. This is somewhat similar to the way in which the study of the Bible helps her to locate and describe the many figurative representations given to her regarding the development of the great controversy in our day between truth and error.—W. C. White in [The Great Controversy, 1911 Edition, 4](#). (See Appendix C.)

Pursuing this matter a little further, and enlarging it to include chronology, we turn to a rather enlightening W. C. White statement written a few months later:

Regarding Mother's writings and their use as 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. The great truths revealed to Mother regarding the controversy between good and evil, light and darkness, have been given to her in various ways, but chiefly as flash-light views of great events in the lives of individuals and in the experiences of churches, of bands of reformers, and of nations. What has thus been revealed to her she has written out first briefly in the *Early Writings*, then more fully as in *Spiritual Gifts* and in *Spirit of Prophecy*, and finally in the *Great Controversy* series.

When writing out the experiences of reformers in the time of the Reformation and in the great Advent Movement of 1844, Mother often gave at first a partial description of some scene presented to her. Later on she would write it out more fully, and again still more fully. I have known her to write upon one subject four or five times, and then mourn because she could not command language to describe the matter more perfectly.

When writing out the chapters for *Great Controversy*, she sometimes gave a partial description of an important historical event, and when her copyist who was preparing the manuscripts for the printer, made inquiry regarding time and place, Mother would say that those things are recorded by conscientious historians. Let the dates used by those historians be inserted. At other times in writing out what had been presented to her, 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.

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. Mother regards with great respect the work of those faithful historians who devoted years of time to the study of God's great plan as presented in the prophecy, and the outworking of that plan as recorded in history.—*W. C. White Letter to W. W. Eastman*, Nov. 4, 1912.

How Far Can We Depend on Mrs. White?

Just how far, then, can we depend on Mrs. White? Where do we set the bounds? There were other points in *The Great Controversy* in the historical account, which even when challenged Ellen White, because of the visions, refused to surrender. Note the *W. C. White*

statement in the same document and on the same page as the much-used “Mother has never claimed to be authority on history“:

[35]

On pages 50, 563-564, 580, 581, and in a few other places where there were statements regarding the papacy which are strongly disputed by Roman Catholics, and which are difficult to prove from accessible histories, the wording in the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily obtainable.

Regarding these and similar passages, which might stir up bitter and unprofitable controversies, Mother has often said: “What I have written regarding the arrogance and the assumptions of the papacy, is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to Catholics and others, and that needless controversies may be avoided, it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy stated so moderately as to be easily and clearly proved from accepted histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students.”

Here in a historical area was a *basic concept* brought to Ellen White by vision. Any modification in the account was made by Ellen White for reasons quite different from *inconsequential details* concerning which she made no claim for “authority.”

The Ellen G. White declaration that historical evidence has been destroyed is well sustained by the purging of libraries and the combing of secondhand bookstores. Andrews University holds some of the rarest of volumes, dating back to the beginnings of printing and having to do with the persecutions by the Catholic Church. They are in our possession today only because the director of a large public library in Minnesota placed these priceless works from its rare book room in the hands of Elder Christian Edwardson, with the suggestion that he check them out and not bring them back, for, said the director, “I have orders to get rid of them.” The author personally

saw these books in the Edwardson study as he related how he came into possession of them. They are now in the university's Heritage Room.

The reader will find further discussion of *The Great Controversy* in Chapter 4, "Ellen G. White as a Historian."

E. G. White Appraisal of History Presented by the Prophetic Writers [36]

A few quotations suffice to remind us of Mrs. White's evaluation of history as presented by the Bible prophets:

The Bible is a history that tells us of the creation of the world, and opens to us past centuries. Without it we should have been left to conjecture and fable in regard to the occurrences of the remote past.—[Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students](#), 421.

The Bible is the most instructive and comprehensive history that has ever been given to the world. Its sacred pages contain the only authentic account of the creation. Here we behold the power that "stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth." Here we have a truthful history of the human race, one that is unmarred by human prejudice or human pride.—[Fundamentals of Christian Education](#), 84, 85.

The divine mind and hand have preserved through the ages the record of creation in its purity. It is the word of God alone that gives to us an authentic account of the creation of our world.—[Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students](#), 13.

We are dependent on the Bible for a knowledge of the early history of our world, of the creation of man, and of his fall. Remove the word of God, and what can we expect than to be left to fables and conjectures, and to that enfeebling of the intellect which is the sure result of entertaining error. We need the authentic history of the origin of the earth, of the fall of the covering cherub, and of the introduction of sin into our world.

Without the Bible, we should be bewildered by false theories. The mind would be subjected to the tyranny of superstition and falsehood. But having in our possession an authentic history of the beginning of our world, we need not hamper ourselves with human conjectures and unreliable theories.—[Medical Ministry, 89](#).

Ellen White saw the Bible as an inspired reliable history. Concerning its first records she states:

[37] The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses.... This work continued ... from Moses, the historian of creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel.—[The Great Controversy, v](#).

Concerning the history of the life of our Lord as recorded by the apostles, she declared:

The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to exalt the Lord alone, and guided the pens of the sacred historians.—[Gospel Workers, 286](#).

Of the record of the lives and work of the apostles, she refers to it as “history, written under the direction of the Holy Spirit” ([The Acts of the Apostles, 593](#)).

Chronological Problems

Granted there are some chronological problems. The verbal inspiration concept on the basis of such problems would force us to abandon confidence in the authenticity of the Bible history. With a factual understanding of how the Lord imparted light to the prophets, do we need to permit such problems to discount the value of the record? Is the validity of the historical account bound up entirely with the chronology? Is there not some danger of our attaching too much weight to these problems?

On this point W. C. White, who for years worked closely with Ellen White, observed in his November, 1912, letter to W. W. Eastman, a leader in Seventh-day Adventist publishing work:

It seems to me there is a danger of placing altogether too much stress upon chronology. If it had been essential to the salvation of man that he should have a clear and harmonious understanding of the chronology of the world, the Lord would not have permitted the disagreements and discrepancies which we find in the writings of the Bible historians, and it seems to me that in these last days there ought not to be so much controversy regarding dates.

Considerable chronology appears in the Ellen G. White writings. It is worthy of examination. In the *Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, under “Chronology and Time Relationships,” eight pages (543-551) are devoted to an enumeration of such references in the current Ellen G. White books. It will be observed that there are items of direct and precise treatment and there are a few references to incidental statements often couched in very general terms, as “a thousand years,” “fifteen hundred years,” and so forth. [38]

Statements in the Field of Science and Geology

Ellen White kept before the church and the world the fact that “since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony.” [Education](#), 128. Her concepts of the reliability of the Word of God in the field of science are revealed in such statements as:

There should be a settled faith in the divinity of God’s holy word. The Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard. When the Bible makes statements of facts in nature, science may be compared with the written word, and a correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony. One does not contradict the other. All truth, whether in nature or revelation, agrees.—[The Signs of the Times](#), March 13, 1884.

See Chapter 2 for more similar statements.

Many points in the field of science were revealed to Ellen White. Those of particular interest at the moment are largely in the area of physiology and nutrition. Just now, at a time of intensive research, her declarations of 70, 80, and even 100 years ago and more are being verified with such precision that little room is left for question or doubt.

Similarity of Concepts No Indication of Source

[39] Because Ellen White in her writings presents some points of historical interest found elsewhere only in tradition, or in dealing with the subjects of health and education her counsels parallel views set forth by some of her predecessors or contemporaries, it has been assumed by some that tradition or the writings of her contemporaries constituted the source of her information. This is a subtle pitfall and not in harmony with the facts. Jude, a New Testament writer, informs us of views given to Enoch. There is no mention of them in the Old Testament. Because there is reference to this fact in certain writings of questionable source does not mean that Jude was dependent upon this source for his information.

Neither Ellen White nor well-informed Adventists have taken the position that on many points stressed in the E. G. White writings she was the first to speak or write. If a historical event is correctly reported in tradition and if Ellen White viewed this history in vision, her account would be bound to harmonize with such points in tradition. The apostle John being placed in a caldron of boiling oil is an illustration. If careful men in their research discover the laws of nature manifest in physiology and nutrition, what was shown by God to Ellen White in this field would be bound to harmonize, because God is the author of those laws. *It is neither correct nor in harmony with the facts to assume that similarity of views indicates that Ellen White gained her information from men, instead of from God.*

An early statement on this point is worthy of note. J. H. Waggoner, a prominent minister in our ranks, wrote as we were opening our first medical institution:

We do not profess to be pioneers in the general principles of health reform. The facts on which this movement is based have been elaborated, in a great measure, by reformers, physicians, and writers on physiology and hygiene, and so may be found scattered through the land. But we do claim that by the method of God's choice it has been more clearly and powerfully unfolded, and is thereby producing an effect which we could not have looked for from any other means.—[The Review and Herald, August 7, 1866.](#)

The same might be said in the field of education and perhaps [40] other areas. But Ellen White disclaims the writings of others as the source of her information:

As I introduced the subject of health to friends ... and spoke against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air, and a proper diet, the reply was often made, “You speak very nearly the opinions taught in the *Laws of Life* and other publications, by Doctors Trall, Jackson, and others. Have you read that paper and those works?” My reply was that I had not, neither should I read them till I had fully written out my views, lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health from physicians, and not from the Lord.—[The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867.](#)

Her earliest writing in the field of health filled the first half of a 64-page pamphlet entitled “An Appeal to Mothers” dealing with masturbation. Her statement was followed by material on the same subject from men in the medical field. The publishers in introducing the material from the scientific world inserted this illuminating note:

Further Testimony

We have thought proper to add to the foregoing the following Testimonies from men of high standing and authority in the medical world, corroborative of the views presented in the preceding pages. And in justice

to the Writer of those pages, we would say that she had read nothing from the authors here quoted, and had read no other works on this subject, previous to putting into our hands what she has written. She is not, therefore, a copyist, although she has stated important truths to which men who are entitled to our highest confidence, have borne testimony. *Trustees.*

There is ample evidence that she carefully avoided presenting her own personal views and that she was not influenced by her contemporaries or that her writings but reflected the concepts of the times. (See Chapter 3, “Integrity of the E. G. White Writings.”)

[41]

Recalled by the Aid of the Spirit

Obviously the prophet could not accurately remember all that had been revealed in vision. An outstanding case in point is the vision given to the 17-year-old Ellen Harmon in the late summer of 1845. At family worship a vision was given to her in which a card was held up before her on which were written “in letters of gold” the chapter and verse of 50 texts of Scripture. (See [Early Writings, 22-31](#).) After the vision she took the large family Bible and turned to all the texts that she had seen on the card. She jotted them down also as the Spirit recalled them to her mind, for they are listed in *Early Writings* and elsewhere. What normal individual, let alone a frail teen-age girl with three years of schooling, could unaided recall 50 texts seen in a list on a card? A few years later she wrote:

After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen, and the matter is not so clear before me until I write, then the scene rises before me as was presented in vision, and I can write with freedom. I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that he is pleased to have me relate or write them.—[Spiritual Gifts 2:292](#).

In dealing with the apostles, Henry Alford names as one of the gifts bestowed upon them the ability of “recalling by the Holy Spirit of those things which the Lord had said to them” (*op. cit.*, par. 8). And he hastens to point out that “this was his own formal promise, recorded in [John 14:26](#).” The Gospels were written at a point many years after the events took place. The sayings and acts of the Lord are recorded. Even though they were eyewitnesses, without the Holy Spirit’s recalling these facts to the mind the Gospel writers would have been involved in hopeless garbling.

Of their experience Ellen White wrote:

When the apostles of Christ were to bear His gospel to the world and to record it for all future ages, they were especially endowed with the enlightenment of the Spirit.—[The Great Controversy](#), ix.

[42]

Three of the Gospel writers were disciples continuously with Jesus. The fourth, Luke, was not so favored. He asserts that he diligently traced down from the first the account of all things. In other words, as Alford puts it, he was “a faithful and honest compiler” (*op. cit.*, par. 12). But this work he must have done under the leading of the Holy Spirit. The same must be said of Matthew as he presents the story of the birth of our Lord.

In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White writing of Nicodemus’ night visit with Jesus informs us that “Nicodemus related to John the story of that interview, and by his pen it was recorded for the instruction of millions” (page 177). As John records the incident and conversation in his Gospel some sixty years after the event, the Holy Spirit must have fulfilled His mission in recalling the words of conversation to the apostle’s mind.

The Holy Spirit frequently recalled to Ellen White’s mind what years earlier was revealed in vision, as when she visited publishing houses in Switzerland and Norway in 1885 and recognized printing presses shown to her ten years before and delivered appropriate messages of correction and reproof to employees imparted to her a decade before the plants were established. The experience was repeated in Australia six years later as she recalled instruction given her for publishing-house employees sixteen years before.

[43] Frequently people would come to Ellen White for counsel, and she would respond immediately, presenting a message that both she and the person who approached her would consider inspired. Any question on this point is easily dissipated if the relationship to the testimony Ellen White presented to the vision in which information was imparted to her is clearly understood.

The Relation of the Testimony to the Visions

The testimony that Ellen White bore was related to the visions in four different ways. First the testimony she bore might be (a) *a direct account of a single vision*. For instance, she says, “August 24, 1850, I saw,” and then she tells what she saw.

It might be (b) *a composite account of many visions* given over a period of many years, as is true of the Conflict of the Ages series. In her introduction to *The Great Controversy* she explains this:

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the Author of our salvation, and Satan, the prince of evil, the author of sin.—Page x.

Mrs. White here informs us that from time to time she saw parts of the history transpire and then she put it together as one great composite account as we have it in the Conflict of the Ages series. This was increasingly so as she amplified the account.

The third relationship would be (c) that Ellen White is giving *counsel based on one specific vision*. Note: “In the night of March 2, 1907, many things were revealed to me regarding the value of our publications.” [Testimonies for the Church 9:65](#). Then she gives counsel, but she doesn’t tell just what she was shown. The counsel was based on that vision.

Or it might be (d) *counsel based upon many visions*. She writes, “God has given me a testimony of reproof for parents who treat their children as you do your little one.” *Ellen G. White Letter 1, 1877*.

The Lord is sparing of miracles. He did not give a vision for each family, but she had been given a vision with light for parents who treated their children a certain way. When she found other parents treating their children the same way, what she had been shown regarding a similar case would fit their experience, too. She had a message for them. [44]

Here is another illustration:

This matter has been brought before my mind, in other cases, where individuals have claimed to have messages for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of a similar character, and the word has been given me, “Believe them not.” [Selected Messages 2:63, 64.](#)

As we understand these four ways in which the testimony that Ellen White bore is related to the visions we can see how people could come and talk with Sister White and she would give an answer to questions that was accepted as a message from God. Her answer was based on the visions—perhaps one given recently or on many given over a period of years. On the other hand, she might be strangely silent, conversing pleasantly, but having nothing to say on the point—no answer to the questions. She did not dare project herself, setting forth her own ideas.

In the Ralph Mackin case of 1908 she listened patiently, made discreet inquiries, but could give no positive word till God a few days after the interview gave her specific light that his experience of speaking in tongues was not inspired by Him.

The Question of What Is Inspired

The question is asked, How can we know which of Sister White’s writings are inspired and which are not inspired?

If Ellen White set forth her own ideas in her books, presenting them as counsel to the church, we would be in a difficult place.

Would we not quite naturally take the position that what we agreed with came from God, what cuts across our pathway was Sister White’s idea, the idea of those who influenced her in reaching that conclusion? We should be honest with ourselves. If we were [45]

required to differentiate, would we not tend to use that criterion? In doing so, we would bring the Spirit of Prophecy down below the level of our intelligence.

But you may ask, “Did not Ellen White think her own thoughts, make free to express her own thoughts? Didn’t she write about ordinary subjects?” Of course she could and did. If you were in her home you would visit with her and talk about the weather. She read the headlines of the paper and knew what was going on in the world, and you would talk about world events. You would visit about the advancement of the cause of God. You would talk of people you knew and a lot of such things. There would be no special significance in what was said. Then you might say, “Sister White, in Chicago in my work there is a certain problem,” and she might launch into a line of counsel for you. Both she and you would know that this counsel was based not on her ideas but upon light God had given her in vision.

She wrote letters to old friends such as Elder and Mrs. Haskell. She might say that the weather had been bad; it was raining and the prune crop was spoiled. She might say, “Next Tuesday I’m going to go down to Mountain View and then on down to Los Angeles. My granddaughter, Grace, the other day fell out of the wagon and broke her arm,” and so forth. Neither Sister White nor Brother Haskell would place any particular significance in those words. But she might go on and say, “Brother Haskell, in your work in Chicago,” so and so, and so and so, as she did in just such a letter. Both she and he would understand that this part of the message was based on the light that God had given her.

[46] Ellen White drew the line between the sacred and the common. That is where we draw the line today.

Ellen G. White Biographical Writings

In her preface to *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 2, a biographical work entitled “My Christian Experience, Views and Labors,” Ellen White states:

In preparing the following pages, I have labored under great disadvantages, as I have had to depend in

many instances, on memory, having kept no journal till within a few years. In several instances I have sent the manuscripts to friends who were present when the circumstances related occurred, for their examination before they were put in print. I have taken great care, and have spent much time, in endeavoring to state the simple facts as correctly as possible.

I have, however, been much assisted in arriving at dates by the many letters which I wrote.—Page iii.

The appendix appearing in the first 400 copies carried this statement:

A special request is made that if any find incorrect statements in this book they will immediately inform me. The edition will be completed about the first of October; therefore send before that time.

These statements at times have been drawn upon as an indication of the pains taken by Ellen G. White in preparing her writings, and incidentally revealing the sources of her information. Such information is used rightfully only as explaining the preparation of *biographical* material. To apply it to her work in general is unwarranted and misleading.

We have but to turn to the preceding volume, *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, which appeared within six months of the great controversy vision of March 14, 1858. It embodies the expressions, “I saw,” “I was shown,” and so forth, more than once for each page of the book. Or we may turn to the third volume of the series, published in 1864, and read in the preface:

Since the great facts of faith, connected with the history of holy men of old, have been opened to me in vision ...

[47]

In the biographical account she does not say, “*I was shown* that at the age of nine years an accident happened to me which was to affect my whole life.” This information she got from her mother and from her memory.

But in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, subtitled *Important Facts of Faith in Connection With the History of Holy Men of Old* she states, “I was then carried back to creation, and was shown ...”

In none of the score or more books issued during her life did she include words of the character that appeared in the Preface of her biography of 1860, for the writing was in a different field.

A factual approach, then, to the question of inspiration helps us to see that the prophet could think ordinary thoughts and could converse on ordinary topics. He refrained from confusing the sacred with the common. He was careful not to set forth in his teachings his own opinions or conclusions, nor were his messages molded by the current philosophies or concepts, even though the messages may be couched in the phraseology of the times and deal with local conditions or situations. It was his task to correctly present the message God entrusted to him.

At times this was in marked contrast to current concepts. In presenting truths as revealed he was aided by the Spirit of God. In his presentation there was the basic concept, at times embellished by points drawn from his mind enriched and molded by the visions, and when dealing with certain subjects, with some details drawn from sources of common knowledge—places, distances, dates, and so forth. The prophet’s inspired message could embody an inaccuracy in a minor detail not consequential to the *basic* concept or on a minor point in the field of common knowledge, the “accuracy or inaccuracy, of which human research suffices to inform men.” This does not in any measure diminish the weight or the authority of the statement as a whole.

Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.—[Selected Messages 1:21](#).

Chapter 2—The Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings ⁴

[49]

As we enter upon the discussion of the authority of the Ellen G. White writings it will be well to define our terms at the outset. As defined by Webster, *authority* is “a right to command or to act; power exercised by a person in virtue of his office or trust.” Thus, for example: “By what authority doest thou these things?” ([Matthew 21:23](#)). Bernard Ramm in his book *The Pattern of Authority* (Eerdmans, 1957), in applying the term to the Word of God defines authority in the following manner:

Authority itself means that right or power to command action or compliance, or to determine belief or customs, expecting obedience from those under authority, and in turn giving responsible account for the claim to right or power.—Page 10.

Because the Ellen G. White writings come to us from a prophetic pen, this definition seems appropriate for our work.

Position of Seventh-day Adventists on the Word of God

[50]

From our earliest existence we have taken a firm stand on God’s Word. We have defined our position in an official statement of “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” as follows:

1. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice. [2 Timothy 3:15-17](#).

⁴This material was presented to the Seventh-day Adventist graduate-student group at Harvard University, February 18, 1967.

Ellen White declares:

We are to receive God's word as supreme authority.—[Testimonies for the Church 6:402](#).

In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.—[The Great Controversy, vii](#)

That this does not preclude manifestations of the prophetic gift beyond the canon of Scripture is made clear as Ellen White continues:

Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings.—*Ibid.*

This thought she reiterates.

In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit. There was never a time when God instructed His people more earnestly than He instructs them now concerning His will and the course that He would have them pursue.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:661](#).

[51]

Ellen G. White Statements Bearing on Authority

At this juncture it is proper to examine several statements made by Mrs. White herself that bear on the question of authority. We present first one that appeared on a broadside dated January 31, 1849:

I saw the state of some who stood on present truth, but disregarded the visions—the way God had chosen to teach in some cases, those who erred from Bible truth. I saw that in striking against the visions they did not strike against the worm—the feeble instrument that God spake through—but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God. I saw if they were in error and God chose to show them their errors through visions, and they disregarded the teachings of God through visions, they would be left to take their own way, and run in the way of error, and think they were right, until they would find it out too late.—[Selected Messages 1:40](#).

In 1875 she published a challenging statement bearing on this point:

God is either teaching His church, reproving their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or He is not. This work is of God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work ... bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The *Testimonies* are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil.—[Testimonies for the Church 4:230](#).

Here is still another statement bearing the date of 1903:

Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her lifework God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servant to be given to the world.—[The Review and Herald, January 20, 1903](#) (quoted in [Colporteur Ministry, 125](#)).

Illuminating remarks may be added to these, such as:

Make known to others what I have revealed to you.—[Early Writings, 20](#).

[52]

I speak that which I have seen, and which I know to be true.—[Letter 4, 1896](#) (quoted in *Notes and Papers Concerning Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy*,⁵ p. 89).

Permit me to express my mind, and yet not my mind, but the word of the Lord.—[Counsels to Writers and Editors](#), 112.

Ellen White informs us that she was instructed by God:

In all your communications, speak as one to whom the Lord has spoken. He is your authority.—[Letter 186, 1902](#) (quoted in *Notes and Papers*, p. 89).

What the Church Claims for Ellen G. White

At the General Conference held in November, 1855, the Sabbath-keeping Adventist faced a major problem. As the way had opened in the early 1850's for the distribution of their one journal, the *Review and Herald*, beyond their ranks, it took on overtones of a missionary paper, and it was thought best, because of the possibility of their prejudicial nature, to leave out all visions from its pages. Plans were announced to reach the believers through other means. This step, however, resulted in a lessened appreciation of the visions on the part of the believers, and the church suffered. This the leaders sensed, and at the 1855 conference action was taken “that Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell be appointed to address the saints in behalf of the conference on the gifts of the church” ([The Review and Herald, December 4, 1855](#)).

The position taken appears in the heart of the address in these words:

[53]

While we hold these views [as presented in the visions] as emanating from the divine mind, we would confess the inconsistency (which we believe has been displeasing to God) of professedly regarding them as messages from God, and really putting them on a level

⁵A teaching document provided for the Seminary class in prophetic guidance.

with the inventions of men. We fear that this has resulted from an unwillingness to bear the reproach of Christ (which is indeed greater riches than the treasures of earth), and a desire to conciliate the feelings of our opponents; but the Word and our own experience have taught us that God is not honored, nor His cause advanced, by such a course.

While we regard them as coming from God, and entirely harmonizing with His written word, we must acknowledge ourselves under obligation to abide by their teachings, and be corrected by their admonitions. To say that they are of God, and yet we will not be tested by them, is to say that God's will is not a test of rule for Christians, which is inconsistent and absurd.—[The Review and Herald, December 4, 1855](#). (For the recital of the experience of 1855 see *Messenger to the Remnant*, pp. 51-53.)

Heaven's recognition and approval of the wholehearted confession and declaration of acceptance of the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy messenger are reflected in the vision given at the close of the conference and in the following words penned by Ellen White shortly afterward:

At our late conference at Battle Creek, in November, God wrought for us. The minds of the servants of God were exercised as to the gifts of the church, and if God's frown had been brought upon His people because the gifts had been slighted and neglected, there was a pleasing prospect that His smiles would again be upon us, and He would graciously and mercifully revive the gifts again, and they would live in the church, to encourage the desponding and fainting soul, and to correct and reprove the erring.—[The Review and Herald, January 10, 1856](#).

It became the custom from time to time in the General Conference sessions to go on record in regard to the Spirit of Prophecy,

its value to the church, and the relation of the church to it. At the session of 1870 this action was taken:

Resolved, That we recognize the wisdom of God in the “Testimonies to the Church,” and that it is dangerous and destructive to disregard or neglect their instructions.—[The Review and Herald, March 22, 1870.](#)

And three years later, the resolution was worded in this manner:

[54]

We hereby request our Executive Committee to prepare or cause to be prepared a work giving our reasons for believing the testimonies of Sister White to be the teachings of the Holy Spirit.—[The Review and Herald, November 25, 1873.](#)

The Justification for This Position

Some of the conference resolutions disclosed what were considered sound reasons for accepting the E. G. White writings as authoritative. We note the following two:

Resolved, That we re-affirm our abiding confidence in the Testimonies of Sr. White to the church, as the teaching of the Spirit of God, and that we have each year continual and growing evidence that they are such.—[The Review and Herald, February 14, 1871.](#)

That we hereby express our continued conviction that we are largely indebted to the gift of prophecy, as manifested through Sister White, for the harmony and unity which this people enjoy.—[The Review and Herald, October 4, 1877.](#)

Elder George I. Butler while president of the General Conference had occasion at times to speak through the *Review and Herald* concerning the Spirit of Prophecy in the church. In one article he freely expressed the justification for giving full acceptance to Mrs. White’s claims:

They [the visions] have always been held in high esteem by the most zealous and humble among our people. They have exerted a leading influence among us from the start. They have first called attention to every important move we have made in advance. Our publishing work, the health and temperance movement, the College, and the cause of advanced education, the missionary enterprise, and many other important points, have owed their efficiency largely to this influence. We have found in a long, varied, and in some instances, sad experience, the value of their counsel. When we have heeded them, we have prospered; when we have slighted them, we have suffered a great loss....

The majority of our people believe these visions to be a genuine manifestation of spiritual gifts, and as such to be entitled to respect.... We believe them, because the Bible teaches that such manifestations will be seen in the last church, because every rule given in the Bible to test spiritual manifestations by proves them to be genuine, and because in all our experience we have found them to be of great value to us in every important point in our history. When we have Scripture and uniform experience in their favor, we have a strong case.—*Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, pp. 11, 12.

[55]

Looking back in 1921 near the close of his long life and his close connection with the church, Elder J. N. Loughborough in answer to a question on degrees of inspiration wrote of the uniform acceptance of the Spirit of Prophecy:

This idea of “degrees of inspiration” is a new idea to me. I never heard of any such position held by those in the work in early times. Those believing the truth, and joining in the work from the first were in accord with Sister White’s testimonies and received them as direct instruction from the Lord. If there were any that thought there were “degrees” in the testimonies, it was those who objected, and took liberty to refuse the light,

and left the truth.—*J. N. Loughborough Letter to E. E. Andross*, Sept. 25, 1921.

Relation of the Spirit of Prophecy to the Bible

The position of the denomination on the relation of E. G. White writings to the Bible has been stated many times and in many ways. James White, in his initial 1847 declaration on the Spirit of Prophecy, spoke clearly. Nor did he ever find occasion to move from this position.

The Bible is a perfect and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice. But this is no reason why God may not show the past, present, and future fulfillment of His word, in these last days, by dreams and visions; according to Peter's testimony. True visions are given to lead us to God, and His written word.—[A Word to the Little Flock](#), 13.

Four years later Ellen White in the closing words of her first book penned:

[56] I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the “*last days*”: not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.—[Early Writings](#), 78.

And George I. Butler in 1883 speaking for the denomination declared:

We do not hold them [Ellen G. White's writings] to be superior to the Bible, or in one sense equal to it. The Scriptures are our rule to test everything by, the visions as well as all other things. That rule, therefore, is of the highest authority; the standard is higher than the thing tested by it. If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would

stand, and the visions would be given up. This shows plainly that we hold the Bible the highest, our enemies to the contrary, notwithstanding.—*Review and Herald Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883.

An Examination of Areas of Authoritative Writings

It has been suggested by some that the areas in which the prophet should be considered an authority may be limited. The Ellen White writings dealt with interests and activities in many areas. In how many of these was she an authority? It may be profitable to examine the evidence.

To Comfort and Correct Those Who Err From Bible Truth. At the outset of her work the visions made clear to the early believers that God had led them in their experience and would continue to lead them if they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus. Within weeks of her call she was commissioned by God to go into the field and meet fanaticism. This is hardly the work the church would choose for a maiden of 17 years. Reporting the experience, she relates:

I pleaded with God to spare me from this—to send by some other one. The Spirit of the Lord again came upon me, and I was shown my faith would be tested, my courage and obedience tried. I must go. God would give me words to speak at the right time.... I waited no longer, but went trusting in God. I saw most of the brethren and sisters. As I warned them of their dangers, some were rejoiced that God had sent me; others refused to listen to my testimony.—[Letter 2, 1874](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 32).

[57]

In the Fields of Doctrine and Eschatology. While during the period of joint study, in which the *leading* doctrines of the church were dug from the Word of God and united in a body of truth, Ellen White's mind "was locked as it were"⁶ and she could not understand the meaning of the scriptures under examination, she was used of God in a unique manner. Of this she wrote in 1906:

⁶Her mind was unlocked in the winter of 1850-1851.

When they came to the point in their study where they said, “We can do nothing more,” the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.—*Special Testimonies*, No. 2, p. 57 (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:206, 207](#)).

We should note several statements from Ellen White on the point of doctrine:

I believed the truth upon the Sabbath question before I had seen anything in vision in reference to the Sabbath. It was months after I had commenced keeping the Sabbath before I was shown its importance and its place in the third angel’s message.—[Letter 2, 1874](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 34).

The Lord showed me in vision, more than one year ago, that Brother Crosier had the true light on the cleansing of the sanctuary, et cetera, and that it was His will that Brother Crosier should write out the view which he gave us in the *Day-Star Extra*, February 7, 1846. I feel fully authorized by the Lord to recommend that *Extra* to every saint.—[A Word to the Little Flock, 12](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 37).

[58]

At an early date the visions given to Mrs. White, although not leading in the development of doctrine initially, sparked Bible study. Note this from James White:

At this time, a few days before the new time set in 1845, Ellen was with the band at Carver, Massachusetts,

where she saw in vision that we should be disappointed, and that the saints must pass through the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” which was future. Her view of Jacob’s trouble was entirely new to us, as well as herself.—[A Word to the Little Flock, 22.](#)

It was not long after this that she was dealing with views of coming events, basing her acceptance or rejection of points made by Eli Curtis on the light given her in vision. From her communication of April 21, 1847, in *A Word to the Little Flock*, we quote:

I beg leave to state ... what I have seen in vision relative to these things on which you have written.

I fully agree with you, that there will be two literal resurrections, 1000 years apart.

I also agree with you, that the new heavens, and the new earth, will not appear till after the wicked dead are raised, and destroyed, at the end of the 1000 years....

You think that those who worship before the saints’ feet ([Revelation 3:9](#)) will at last be saved.

Here I must differ with you; for God showed me that this class were professed Adventists.... In the “hour of temptation”... they will know that they are forever lost; and overwhelmed with anguish of spirit, they will bow at the saints’ feet.

You also think that Michael stood up, and the time of trouble commenced, in the spring of 1844.

The Lord has shown me ... that ... Michael’s standing up ([Daniel 12:1](#)) to deliver His people, is in the future.—Pages 11, 12.

Fifteen months later we find the light given to her correcting the doctrinal views of David Arnold and others at the Volney, New York, conference. The enlightening record is worth observing: [59]

Our first conference was at Volney in Bro. Arnold’s barn [August 27-28, 1848]. There were about thirty-five present, all that could be collected in that part of the

State. There were hardly two agreed. Each was strenuous for his views, declaring that they were according to the Bible.... Bro. Arnold held that the 1000 years of [Revelation 20](#) were in the past, and that the 144,000 were those raised at Christ's resurrection....

And as we had the emblem of our dying Lord before us, and was [*sic.*] about to commemorate His sufferings, Bro. Arnold arose and said he had no faith in what we were about to do; that the Sacrament was a continuation of the Passover, to be observed but once a year.

These strange differences of opinion rolled a heavy weight upon me, especially as Bro. Arnold spoke of the 1000 years being in the past. I knew he was in error, and great grief pressed my spirits.... The light of Heaven rested upon me. I was soon lost to earthly things.

My accompanying angel presented before me some of the errors of those present, and also the truth in contrast with their errors. That these discordant views, which they claimed to be according to the Bible, were only according to their opinion of the Bible, and that their errors must be yielded, and they unite upon the third angel's message.

Our meeting ended victoriously. Truth gained the victory.—[Spiritual Gifts 2:97-99](#).

What would have become of the emerging church, the object of Satan's wrath, if the counsels touching the field of doctrine did not carry authority? Let her review the manner in which the messages made clear what was truth and what was error:

At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. Sometimes whole nights would be devoted to searching the Scriptures, and earnestly asking God for guidance. Companies of devoted men and women assembled for this purpose. The power of God would come upon me,

and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.

As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me. I was given illustrations of heavenly things, and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays.—[Gospel Workers](#), 302.

Little wonder the pioneers averred: “We have the truth. We know it” ([Letter 18, 1850](#)). Nor did God’s leading in this line diminish as the years came and went. The limits of time preclude a detailed enumeration. The pantheistic crisis stood out as the most critical of them all. In the midst of this experience Ellen White told of the commission that came to her in regard to this insidious teaching that she declared would do away with God. Nothing less than the authority of her messages on this doctrinal point could have saved the church.

I am instructed to speak plainly. “Meet it” is the word spoken to me. “Meet it firmly, and without delay.” But it is not to be met by our taking our working forces from the field to investigate doctrines and points of difference. We have no such investigation to make. In the book *Living Temple* there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.—*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 2, p. 50 (quoted in [Selected Messages 1:200](#)).

No long investigation was necessary, nor was it to be undertaken. The Lord spoke through His servant, and the authoritative word saved the church.

Lest any should think that Ellen White was ever eager to press in her views on doctrine, it should be noted that when she had no light she was silent. She was greatly perturbed at the divisive influence

of the teachings concerning the “daily” that were pressed hard by some of the leading brethren.

[61] For a few years up to 1910 some were attempting to draw her writings in to settle the question. On July 31, 1910, she called a halt. She urged her brethren to cease pressing a point that had been shown to her to be of no vital importance, and of which she declared: “I have had no instruction on the point under discussion.” [Selected Messages 1:164](#).

As there was brought to her in 1914 a fine point as to just who would constitute the 144,000, she dictated the following significant statement:

I have no light on the subject.... Please tell my brethren that I have nothing presented before me regarding the circumstances concerning which they write, and I can set before them only that which has been presented to me.—Reported by C. C. Crisler, her secretary, in a letter to Elder E. E. Andross, president of the Pacific Union Conference, Dec. 8, 1914 (quoted in *Notes and Papers*, p. 90).

For many years the “Eastern question” raged, but she was silent, for she had no light from God on this.

One point was clear in Ellen White’s mind. The truths firmly established under the influence of the Spirit of God were immovable. Observe these comments on this point:

When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained.—[Selected Messages 1:161](#).

Those who passed over the ground step by step in the past history of our experience, seeing the chain of truth in the prophecies, were prepared to accept and obey every ray of light. They were praying, fasting, searching, digging for the truth as for hidden treasures, and the Holy Spirit, we know, was teaching and guiding us.

Many theories were advanced, bearing a semblance of truth, but so mingled with misinterpreted and misapplied scriptures, that they led to dangerous errors. Very well do we know how every point of truth was established, and the seal was set upon it by the Holy Spirit of God. And all the time voices were heard, "Here is the truth," "I have the truth; follow me." But the warnings came, "Go not ye after them. I have not sent them, but they ran." (See [Jeremiah 23:21](#).)

The leadings of the Lord were marked, and most wonderful were His revelations of what is truth. Point after point was established by the Lord God of heaven. That which was truth *then*, is truth today.—[Selected Messages 2:103, 104](#).

[62]

The continuing value of the messages presenting the light God had given to her was clearly seen by Ellen White as she neared the close of her ministry. On a November morning in 1910 she wrote:

The Lord has given me much light that I want the people to have; for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for His people. It is light that they should have, line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth. The Lord has revealed many things pointing out the truth, thus saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.—[Letter 127, 1910](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 82).

Other Fields of Counsel. And so it was also with the Ellen G. White counsels in the fields of church administration, education, health, and the personal messages to individuals concerning their work and their lives. When she spoke her messages were based on the light God gave to her, and she spoke with authority. When she had no light on a subject she usually was silent or made it known that what she spoke was on her own responsibility so that none would be confused. A few quotations will illustrate the point:

Her Testimony Letters.—Weak and trembling, I arose at three o'clock in the morning to write to you. God was speaking through clay. You might say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your minds things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:67](#).

[63]

Told by One Who Does Not Falsify.—Unbelief is expressed by the words, “Who has written these things to Sister White?” But I know of no one who knows them as they are, and no one could write that which he does not suppose has an existence. Some one has told me,—He who does not falsify, misjudge, or exaggerate any case.—Special Instruction Relating to the Review and Herald Office, and the Work in Battle Creek, p. 16 (1896).

Ignorance of the Counsels Will Not Excuse Us.—I am instructed to say to our churches, Study the Testimonies. They are written for our admonition and encouragement upon whom the ends of the world are come. If God's people will not study these messages that are sent to them from time to time, they are guilty of rejecting light.

Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, God is sending instruction to His people. Heed the instruction; follow the light. The Lord has a controversy with His people because in the past they have not heeded His instruction and followed His guidance.—[Letter 292, 1907](#).

The Holy Ghost Is the Author of the Messages

I am so sorry that notwithstanding the warnings that for years God has been giving you, you should act in the oppressive way that worldings act....

The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy. These are not to be twisted and turned to mean what man may want them to mean.—[Letter 92, 1900](#).

When Mrs. White Had No Light. Giving strength to the whole structure are statements made by Mrs. White concerning matters on which she was given no light. Here is a significant illustration she wrote to a minister seeking guidance in the course he should pursue:

I am not at liberty to write to our brethren concerning your future work.... I have received no instruction regarding the place where you should locate.... If the Lord gives me definite instruction concerning you, I will give it to you; but I cannot take upon myself responsibilities that the Lord does not give me to bear.—[Letter 96, 1909](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 116).

Here is another. She writes of an experience in Australia, when the General Conference president sought counsel:

He [Elder G. A. Irwin] has with him a little notebook in which he has noted down perplexing questions which he brings before me, and if I have any light upon these points, I write it out for the benefit of our people, not only in America, but in this country.—[Letter 96, 1899](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 117).

[64]

The suggestion is made at times that Ellen White may have been influenced by her contemporaries and predecessors. We may dismiss this idea with one quotation and reference to Chapter 3, “The Integrity of the Prophetic Message.” The matter is summed up in these words:

You think individuals have prejudiced my mind. If I am in this state, I am not fitted to be entrusted with the work of God.—[Selected Messages 2:63](#).

Counsels in the Field of Science. To some there appears to be a strange gap or even contradiction between the message of the prophet and the discoveries and pronouncements of science. The result is that the laws of nature discovered in scientific study, which were designed by God, are thought to be in conflict with the declarations of the prophets who we grant spoke as they were “moved by the Holy Ghost.” It has even been suggested that the prophet was beyond his depth or his commission when he touched science.

In contesting such a philosophy Ellen White wrote:

Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony.—[Education, 128](#).

Her concepts of the reliability of the Word of God in the field of science are revealed in such statements as these:

There should be a settled faith in the divinity of God’s holy word. The Bible is not to be tested by men’s ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard. When the Bible makes statements of facts in nature, science may be compared with the written word, and a correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony. One does not contradict the other. All truth, whether in nature or revelation, agrees.—*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884.

[65]

I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing.—[Spiritual Gifts 3:93](#).

Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and a correct theory of geology will never claim discoveries that cannot be reconciled with his statements.—*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884.

A scrutiny of the Ellen G. White writings discloses that God revealed to her in vision many points in the field of science. There is no clue that would justify our placing these statements of fact and counsel in a category by themselves. Her attitude toward the

dependability of the scientific statements in the Bible indicates that she drew no line of distinction.

True, a current interpretation of scientific data may be or may appear to be in conflict with the Spirit of Prophecy, but it is remarkable how many times men of science given a little time reverse themselves only to figuratively step over to the side of Ellen White and say, “You were right.”

Ellen White’s pronouncements and counsels usually had relevance to our work and experience. Many of the scientific counsels which she gave were in the area of physiology and nutrition.

Writings in the Field of History. Both the Bible writers and Ellen White wrote much in the field of history. What was the source of their information? Of early world history Ellen White informs us:

The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses.... From Moses, the historian of creation and the law.—[The Great Controversy, v.](#)

Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God.—*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884.

The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess. It came fresh from the Fountain of eternal truth; and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research seeks in vain to penetrate. In God’s word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens.

Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice.—[Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, 52.](#)

The Holy Spirit ... guided the pens of the sacred historians, that the record of the words and works of Christ might be given to the world.—[Gospel Workers, 286.](#)

And in her experience history past, present, and future passed before her in vision. Writing of certain revelations, she exclaimed:

[66]

Scenes of such thrilling, solemn interest passed before me as no language is adequate to describe. It was all a living reality to me.—[Selected Messages 1:76](#).

In her introduction to *The Great Controversy* she relates:

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.—[The Great Controversy, xi](#).

This statement was written and published in 1888. Thirty years earlier she published a book, *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, which she titled, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*. In this little work of 219 pages, which spans the whole conflict story, she continually reminds the reader that what she is presenting she saw transpire in vision, by employing the expressions “I saw,” “I was shown,” and so forth.

In her preface to *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, published in 1864 and subtitled *Important Facts of Faith in Connection With the History of Holy Men of Old*, she indicates the source of this historical information:

I am comforted with the conviction that the Lord has made me His humble instrument in shedding some rays of precious light upon the past.... Since the great facts of faith, connected with the history of holy men of old, have been opened to me in vision ...

[67] The presentations of this volume read like the descriptions of an eyewitness, and in a sense they were.

Factors That Tend to Undermine Acceptance of Authority

But there are situations and problems that lead some people to think that full dependence may not be placed on the writings of the

prophets in all the areas in which they wrote. Thus, some think that the Bible is undependable in its statements on science and unreliable in its history. Similarly, some assert that Mrs. White was mistaken in some of her statements in the fields of history and science, that in these areas we cannot accept her as “authority.” Notice what Bernard Ramm says regarding prophetic authority:

Nothing could be more foolish in religion than the rejection of an authority which contained the truth of the living God; and nothing could be more tragic than the substitution of the voice of man for the voice of God.

How can we avoid the folly of rejecting a truth from God? How can we avoid the tragedy of mistaking the voice of man for the voice of God?—*The Pattern of Authority*, p. 16.

Before looking at a few factors that may tend to undermine confidence in the minds of some in the authority of the E. G. White writings, let us consider two points:

1. The concept of inspiration that we entertain may lead us to demand more of Ellen White than we would of the Bible prophets or to demand of prophets generally more than the pattern in which God speaks to man would justify. Attention is called to a documented discussion of this matter in Chapter 1, “Toward a Factual Concept of Inspiration.”

2. The Lord does not remove an opportunity for doubt, either with His Word or with the Spirit of Prophecy. Indeed, Ellen White declares that “faith grows by conflicts with doubts.” *The Youth’s Instructor*, April, 1873 (quoted in *Sons and Daughters of God*, 191). In the light of this declaration consider two other statements made by Ellen White:

[68]

Concerning the Word of God

While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them. And those who refuse to accept and obey God’s word until every objection has been removed, and there is no longer an opportunity for doubt, will never come to the light.

Distrust of God is the natural outgrowth of the un-renewed heart, which is at enmity with Him. But faith is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it will flourish only as it is cherished. No man can become strong in faith without a determined effort. Unbelief strengthens as it is encouraged; and if men, instead of dwelling upon the evidences which God has given to sustain their faith, permit themselves to question and cavil, they will find their doubts constantly becoming more confirmed.—[The Great Controversy, 527.](#)

Concerning the Testimonies

“Satan has ability to suggest doubts and to devise objections to the pointed testimony that God sends, and many think it a virtue, a mark of intelligence in them, to be unbelieving and to question and quibble. Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.” “God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe; but he who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things which he cannot make plain to his finite understanding will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith.” [Testimonies for the Church 5:675, 676.](#)

Does the Evidence Justify the Claim to Authority?

[69] Ramm in his definition of “authority” declares that the one who makes such a claim must in turn give a “responsible account for the claim to right or power.” Ellen White puts it a little differently:

“God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe.” “He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit,

and all should decide from the weight of evidence.”
[Testimonies for the Church 5:675.](#)

It may be well to pause occasionally to recount these evidences:
What is the nature and influence of these writings—their relationship to the Bible?

What have the Spirit of Prophecy counsels done for those who accept them and let them guide in their lives?

What has been the influence of Ellen White’s voice in the development of the church and in its work? Have the counsels led to success or to disappointment and failure?

What has been the influence of the counsels in meeting crises? Has not the church been saved in every instance? And what of those who have veered away, certain that they had new and great light for the people? If you are personally acquainted with some such, examine for a moment their state of mind and their relationship to their fellow men, and if they are now deceased, what of their last days?

Can one instance be cited where the church or its members—when the counsels have been followed sincerely, rationally, and faithfully—have been misled by the Spirit of Prophecy? Has it let us down at any point?

So marked was Ellen White’s influence that when she passed to her rest in the summer of 1915 a then widely read journal, *The Independent*, editorialized her and Seventh-day Adventists:

“Her revelations were in the nature of instructions to their disciples, mostly aimed at their spiritual life, not forgetting to forbid the sins of custom and fashion.... Saturday was the Sabbath; and the Lord’s coming was close at hand....

“Of course, these teachings were based on the strictest doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures. Seventh-day Adventism could be got in no other way. And the gift of prophecy was to be expected as promised to the ‘remnant church’ who had held fast to the truth. This faith gave great purity of life and incessant zeal. No

body of Christians excels them in moral character and religious earnestness.... And in all this Ellen G. White has been the inspiration and guide.” *The Independent*, Aug. 23, 1915. Quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 126.

And what of her counsels in the area of science? She had three years of formal schoolwork. She was a busy housewife and a person called upon to travel and engage in public labor. In the 1860’s and subsequently her counsels embodied much that dealt with the fields of physiology and nutrition. Anything less than divine guidance would have led her to make pronouncements that in a few years would have been ridiculous. But what are the facts?

The facts are that declarations made 70, 80, and even 100 years ago and more, many of which seemed quite out of line at the time, are being verified with such precision that little room is left for question or doubt. And E. G. White statements—which in the 1930’s, 40’s, and 50’s were by some confidently declared to be in conflict with “the facts” and at times used as examples of the unreliability of the Spirit of Prophecy in the field of science—now stand out as strong exhibits of its certainty and reliability. We might call attention to prenatal influence, the subtle harmful effects of tobacco, the perils of hypnosis, cancer germs, and alcohol and drugs as potent factors in giving rise to birth defects.

[71] How is it that the writings of a person unschooled in the fields of science penned so long ago are now enjoying the support of the most painstaking scientific investigations? Is it so with the works of science of that day or even a decade or two ago? How is it that a number of investigations conducted painstakingly by scientists reveal that the incidence of several serious diseases is lower among Seventh-day Adventists than among the population as a whole? Also that on the average Adventists live longer? “Adventist advantage” is the way *Time* magazine ⁷ designates this fact as it reports on a five-year survey. Moreover, in certain nutritional circles it is declared that Seventh-day Adventists are the find of the century!

⁷Time, Oct. 28, 1966.

What weight do these accumulated evidences carry? Do they give a responsible account for the one through whom the counsels came to us?

Factors That May Tend to Undermine Confidence

But there are factors that may tend to undermine confidence in the authority of the E. G. White writings. These we cannot ignore. To some people these factors may be the “hooks” upon which doubts may be hung. We are assured that we may find them if we seek them, for God has not removed their existence.

1. In historical account, there may be discrepancies in minor and inconsequential points.

Some people may call to mind the often-quoted W. C. White statement, “Mother has never claimed to be authority on history,” referred to in Chapter I. A knowledge of the manner in which the light came to the prophets is very helpful in the consideration of this point. The W. C. White statement taken alone and out of context may seem to justify the dismissal of history delineated by Ellen White as without authority. The conscientious student is not likely to find it so as he studies the internal evidence and takes into account the full W. C. White statement and other similar statements, as well as Ellen White’s own statements. See the paragraph in question in Chapter 1 and Appendix C.

[72]

In other statements quoted in Chapter 1, W. C. White emphasizes that it is not the basic historical account on which Ellen White desired that her writings not be taken as authority but minor inconsequential details that some might take to settle points of difference among historians.

2. The question of the relevancy of certain counsels given long ago and our attitude toward such counsels.

True, the counsel given by Ellen White was often couched in the framework of the current situation. So it was with Paul. Mrs. White counseled that girls should “learn to harness and drive a horse” ([Education](#), 216, 217); that the “bicycle craze” in Battle Creek in the mid 1890’s was detrimental to those involved (see [Testimonies for the Church](#) 8:51, 52); and that the nurses in 1906 at Loma Linda should shorten their skirts.

She also wrote:

Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered.—[Selected Messages 1:57](#).

Behind the specific counsels that the lapse of time may have seemed to antiquate, there are principles. Principles do not change, although their application may change. This fact is discussed in Chapter 5, “Hermeneutical Principles in the E. G. White Writings.”

In such cases, looking beyond a word or phrase, we may easily focus on the guiding principles and thus find “the instruction that was given in the early days of the message,” to be “safe instruction to follow in these its closing days” ([Selected Messages 1:41](#)).

[73] It should be noted that there are relatively few specific counsels that fall into the category of circumstances which have demonstrably changed.

3. It has been suggested that Ellen White may have been influenced by her contemporaries or predecessors.

On the surface, this charge may seem valid. However, if Mrs. White only reflected the thinking of those about her, the Spirit of Prophecy messages would carry little or no authority. The facts are that she was not influenced, and she took pains to prevent either being influenced or giving rise to the suggestion that she may have been influenced by others. Ellen White specifically refuted this charge when she wrote to a brother who thought she was influenced by others. She said: “You think individuals have prejudiced my mind. If I am in this state, I am not fitted to be entrusted with the work of God.” [Selected Messages 2:63](#). This matter is explained in detail in Chapter 3, “The Integrity of the Prophetic Message.”

4. The use of Scripture in a manner not in keeping with commonly accepted exegetical procedures.

The manner in which Ellen White used Scripture reveals a keen insight and a source of information in common with the Bible prophets. It is true, however, that at times she employed texts homiletically in a manner that the text itself might not support. In doing this she is simply doing what the gospel writers and the apostle Paul did. This practice might be termed “the prophet’s exegesis.”

Being a diligent student of the Word of God and intimately familiar with Bible terminology, it is altogether understandable that she in her thinking, speaking, and writing in an easy manner often partook of Bible phraseology, and as a matter of convenience at times employed scripture phraseology in her writing with little regard for context, couching what she wished to say in the phraseology of the familiar King James Version even though such use was known to her to have no direct bearing on the intent of the text from which she drew the words.

[74]

An illustration of this usage may be found in *Education* on page 198 in the chapter titled “Physical Culture,” where she wrote:

Among the first things to be aimed at should be a correct position, both in sitting and in standing. God made man upright, and He desires him to possess not only the physical but the mental and moral benefit ... which an erect bearing so greatly tends to promote.

In this sentence she clearly couched what she wished to say in the words of [Ecclesiastes 7:29](#). Elsewhere in her books she uses the phrase in proper context, such as in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 49:

God made man upright; He gave him noble traits of character, with no bias toward evil.

Careful students of the original Bible languages have often observed that the insights the visions gave to Ellen White led her again and again to catch meanings more in keeping with the original text than is reflected in the King James Version, which she constantly used. Her acceptance of the newer translations as they became available supports this point.

5. There are statements in the field of science yet seemingly unsustained by accepted evidence. A pertinent illustration is her statement on the age of the earth.

As this information is considered we must take into account the basic nature of her first declaration in 1864 in which she discusses special revelation and natural revelation, recognizing that geologists

[75] “reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself that the world has existed tens of thousands of years” ([Spiritual Gifts 3:91, 92](#)). Scientists generally, without regard to the Word of God and its account of Creation and the Flood, base their conclusions on an interpretation of their findings seen in the light of uniformitarianism. However, the Seventh-day Adventist Christian will await patiently evidences in support of the clear-cut statement that he accepts by faith.

As he does so, he will not overlook the manner in which highly respected scientists at times reverse their conclusions. For instance, in the late 1930's the world's leading scientists reported that their studies demonstrated beyond all possibility of doubt that cancer was not germ caused, and, therefore, was not an infectious disease.

This report was in direct conflict with Ellen White's “cancer germ” statement in *The Ministry of Healing* in 1905. Some of our physicians considered the findings of science justification for the declaration that Ellen White was mistaken. Then in the mid 1950's the break came. Most cancer research is now in the field of a virus—“a miniature germ.”

Again, we cannot overlook the fact that in the mid 1930's the American public was urged in large full-page advertisements to take a yeast cake a day as a good source of vitamin B. This was in direct conflict with the E. G. White statement in *The Ministry of Healing* that loaves of bread should be small and well baked, “that, so far as possible, the yeast germs shall be destroyed.” Questions difficult to answer were raised by some of our church members. Not so now. No advertisements appear urging the consumption of live yeast. Why not? Because live yeast is now known to be positively devastating, actually robbing the body of vitamin B. ⁸

[76] Perhaps one more example will suffice. In 1955 some people in our ranks were perturbed because the General Conference Committee on the basis of the Spirit of Prophecy counsels went on record in Fall Council action denouncing hypnosis in the treatment of disease. This was at a time when hypnosis was accepted in medical circles and a strong effort was being made to sell it to the American public.

⁸Note: Live yeast is not to be confused with “brewers' yeast,” a recognized helpful food supplement.

Have we been embarrassed for our action taken daringly in the face of scientific acceptance of the moment? No, and no one reads articles in the national journals today giving acclaim to hypnosis as a helpful adjunct in treating the sick.

Something that we should always remember when we are faced with perplexing questions in the field of science is that although “the idea largely prevails that He [God] is bounded and restricted by His own laws” men do not realize “that the Author of nature’s laws can work above those laws” (*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884).

In view of the foregoing facts, Seventh-day Adventists should be slow to accept so-called “scientific evidence” that seemingly runs counter to plain statements in the field of science by Ellen White. Patience may be called for; we may have to wait awhile for some answers. Some answers we may never get until Jesus Christ, the Author of the laws of science, gives us the explanation, but this is no reason to lose confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy.

6. A natural resistance to and a hesitancy to accept counsels touching personal life that seem unreasonable, such as: (a) sacrificial giving; (b) the dietetic counsels; and (c) recreation.

It is quite natural when certain counsels touch our personal lives for us to feel uneasy, and we are inclined to resist. This is a natural human tendency. However, is not this question one of conversion and of our willingness to accept what the Lord has made plain to us as affecting our lives physically, mentally, and spiritually? Some people in an attempt to escape just condemnation dismiss such counsels as being the opinion of the prophet. Ellen White wrote to one man who did this:

[77]

You have talked over matters as you viewed them, that the communications from Sister White are not all from the Lord, but a portion is her own mind, her own judgment, which is no better than anybody else’s judgment and ideas. This is one of Satan’s hooks to hang your doubts upon to deceive your soul and the souls of others who will dare to draw the line in this matter and say, this portion which pleases me is from God, but that portion which points out and condemns my course of conduct is from Sister White alone, and bears not

the holy signet. You have in this way virtually rejected the whole of the messages, which God in His tender, pitying love has sent to you....

God presents to you His will and ways which are in marked contrast, in just that way which your case requires, and you are hereby tested whether you will accept the reproof, fall on the Rock and be broken, or will you become vexed over plain statements that come close to your soul, because it is the truth and condemns you, and then you feel at enmity with me. [Hebrews 4:12](#). There is one back of me which is the Lord, who has prompted the message, which you now reject, and disregard, and dishonor. By tempting God you have unnerved yourselves, and confusion and blindness of mind have been the result.—[Letter 16, 1888](#).

Of those who follow this course, Ellen White asks:

What reserve power has the Lord with which to reach those who have cast aside His warnings and reproofs, and have accredited the testimonies of the Spirit of God to no higher source than human wisdom? In the judgment what can you who have done this offer to God as an excuse for turning from the evidences He has given you that God was in the work?—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 466](#).

It has meant something to Seventh-day Adventists to have had a prophet in their midst. It means something to us today to have the benefit of the abundant counsel provided by a loving God, that we might enjoy this life and be better prepared for the life to come.

Chapter 3—The Integrity of the Prophetic Message, [78] ⁹ or “Who Told Sister White?” [79]

It is sometimes suggested that in certain positions taken by Ellen G. White she was influenced by the thinking of the times, that her statements reflected the ideas of those about her, and that we must take this into account when we evaluate her writings and use them today. Akin to this was the early-day suggestion that the visions resulted from natural causes, mesmerism, spiritism, or physical injury. In later years the shift was to the suggestion that most likely she was influenced by her associates.

Early in her experience, hypnosis was much in the public eye and it was suggested to Ellen Harmon that, when the visions were given to her she was mesmerized. Some asserted, “She is a weak woman, easily influenced and therefore a good subject for mesmerism.” This troubled her and she went into the woods to pray, and while alone in the woods, visions would be given to her. When she told the people of this, they declared, “You mesmerize yourself.”

Ellen pondered, has it come to this? The next time she discerned [80] that a vision was about to be given to her, she resisted it. “I’ll not have it,” she said to herself. “It is mesmerism!” Like Zacharias of old, who was stricken dumb for his doubts, she was stricken dumb because she doubted. She was taken off in vision, and in the vision she was shown that never again should she question, never again should she doubt, and that in less than twenty-four hours she again would be able to speak. She reached for a slate and wrote concerning her experience and her condition. The next day she was able again to speak, but never again did she question or doubt her experience. See *Early Writings*, pages 22-24.

⁹This material was presented at the North American Academy Principals’ Council held at Blue Mountain Academy, Hamburg, Pennsylvania, June 27, 1965.

Dr. Brown and the Visions

As our preachers went into Parkville, Michigan, some thirty miles southwest of Battle Creek, in 1860, and held evangelistic meetings, the people were told, among other things, about the visions given to Mrs. White. A spiritualist physician lived there, a certain Dr. Brown. He had boasted that he could explain it all in terms of spiritualism. He asserted that the visions that were given to Ellen White were just a form of spirit-mediumship, and that if he should ever be present when she was in a vision, he could bring her out of it in just one minute. That's all the time he would need.

[81] An Adventist church building was erected in Parkville in 1860 and was dedicated on Sabbath, January 12, 1861. Elder and Mrs. White, Elder J. N. Loughborough, Elder Uriah Smith, and some others went down from Battle Creek to be present for the service. In connection with the afternoon meeting, Ellen White was taken off in vision. Elder White always gave ample opportunity for any who wished to examine Ellen White while in vision to do so, and this time was no exception. He asked whether there was a physician who could be called who could examine Mrs. White while in vision and report to the people as to her condition. Remembering his boast, the people urged Dr. Brown, who happened to be present, to respond and conduct the examination.

Dr. Brown began to examine Ellen White but soon turned deathly pale and began to shake all over. Elder White asked, "Will the physician please report to the congregation concerning his findings?"

"Oh," he said, "she does not breathe," and he started for the door. When he got near the door, the brethren blocked it and said, "Go back and do like you said you would. You said you could stop the vision in one minute." "Oh no," he replied. "Well, what is it?" they asked. "God only knows," he replied. "Let me out of this house." He jerked the door open and ran.

Charged With Being Influenced by the Brethren

The visions given to Ellen White could not be controlled by herself or by others. She could not have a vision if she wished to, nor could she refrain from having a vision if she did not wish to

have it. It was entirely in the hands of God, entirely beyond any human influence about her. But as I have mentioned, in later years it was suggested, perhaps kindly, "You know, Sister White is not too strong, and she is surrounded by men of strong intellect and character. There is her own husband, James White, George I. Butler, Dr. John Kellogg." In later years, they talked of W. C. White, and of her being influenced by him.

If the messages borne by Mrs. E. G. White had their origin in surrounding minds or influences, then the Spirit of Prophecy has no claims on our allegiance. If the messages on organization can be traced to the ideas of James White or G. I. Butler; if the counsels on health have their origin in the minds of Drs. Kellogg, Jackson, or Trall; if the instruction which came on education was based upon the ideas of G. H. Bell or W. W. Prescott; if the high standards upheld in the Spirit of Prophecy counsels were inspired by the strong men of the cause, then the Spirit of Prophecy can mean no more to you or to me than good ideas and helpful advice.

[82]

The Bible Prophets and the Question of Influence

The suggestion that the prophets were influenced by others is nothing new in the history of inspiration. The scriptures in [Jeremiah 43:1-3](#) bring to us just such a picture. Jeremiah was the Lord's messenger to Judah. He had borne a solemn message to the leaders of Judah.

Note the words: "And it came to pass when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words, then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: but Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans."

Jeremiah had borne Heaven's message to the people. One of the leaders got up and said, "Jeremiah, you are a liar. Baruch, your secretary, wanted you to say that, and you said it. God never gave you the message." History, however, made clear that the message came from God.

[83] There is another interesting story that has a bearing on this topic, found in [2 Chronicles 18](#). We find Jehoshaphat was king of Judah and Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was a man of God, Ahab was not. A marriage between the families had taken place, and an alliance between the two kingdoms was formed. Jehoshaphat should not have permitted this, but he had. There came a day when there was to be a family reunion in Samaria, and Jehoshaphat took his family and went over to Samaria, and took part of his army along for review and all that goes with kingly visits.

Ahab thought this would be a good time to go out and fight his enemies, for with Jehoshaphat in Samaria, he had some reinforcements. He proposed to Jehoshaphat that they go up and fight his enemies. Without first seeking divine guidance, Jehoshaphat replied, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war."

But then Jehoshaphat thought better of it and said to Ahab: "Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to day" ([verse 4](#)). So Ahab called in his 400 prophets. They knew what kind of answer Ahab wanted, and they said, "Go up; for God will deliver it [Ramoath-gilead] into the king's hand."

Jehoshaphat knew that these men were false prophets, so he turned to Ahab and said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?" ([verse 6](#)). And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so." Jehoshaphat evidently made it clear to Ahab that he would get nowhere with his enterprise without hearing from Micaiah first. So an officer was called and sent to Micaiah's home to summon him to come and prophesy concerning the proposed expedition.

[84] The messenger who went to call Micaiah knew the answer that had been given by the 400 false prophets. He knew his master, and he knew that if Micaiah was unwise enough to prophesy disaster to Ahab's enterprise, he would probably lose his head. Thinking to do Micaiah a kindness, the officer advised him to give Ahab a favorable reply. But Micaiah fearlessly replied, "As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak" ([verse 13](#)).

It made no difference to Micaiah what his reply might mean to him personally. There was only one answer he could give when he went before the king. There were a few bantering words of introduction, and then Micaiah predicted disaster to the enterprise and death to King Ahab. At this Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "Didn't I tell you he would prophesy evil and not good? Officer, take Micaiah. Put him in the dungeon, feed him bread and water till I come back victorious." But Ahab never came back. He died on the battlefield that day. The point is, God's prophets were not influenced.

Ellen G. White on the Question of Influence

In 1893, one of our brethren wrote to Sister White. He thought she did not understand a certain matter, and he was going to straighten her out. She wrote back to him and said, "You think individuals have prejudiced my mind. If I am in this state, I am not fitted to be entrusted with the work of God." [Selected Messages 2:63](#).

On one occasion back in 1850, one of our sisters told Sister White about one of the ministers and some of the things he had done that he should not have done. It was not long after she related these facts to Ellen White that a testimony arrived for this minister. When the sister who had reported to Sister White heard about this testimony she felt chagrined and said to herself, "I shouldn't have told Sister White those things." She then sat down and wrote a letter to Ellen White and told her she was sorry she had said anything and thought she shouldn't have told her all those things.

[85]

Ellen White wrote as follows:

What if you had said ever so much, would that affect the visions, that God gives me? If so, then the visions are nothing.... God has shown me the true state of Brother-----[the erring minister]. I know from the vision that his influence has been bad. ... What you or anyone else has said is nothing at all. God has taken the matter in hand.... What you have said, Sister-----, influenced me not at all. My opinion has nothing to

do with what God has shown me in vision.—[Letter 1, 1851](#).

The Question of Influence and the Early Books

The great controversy vision was given to Ellen White at Lovett's Grove, Ohio, on March 14, 1858. Shortly thereafter at meetings in Battle Creek over a weekend, she told the high points of what had been shown to her in that vision. Elder J. N. Andrews happened to be in Battle Creek at the time, and he was very much interested in what Ellen White related. After one of the meetings he came to her and said, "Sister White, some of the things you have told us sound to me quite a bit like a book I have read." Then he asked, "Have you ever read *Paradise Lost*?" She said, "No." "Well," he said, "I think you would be interested in it."

She forgot about the conversation, but a few days later Brother Andrews came to the White home with a copy of *Paradise Lost* and left it with Ellen White. She was busily engaged in writing out what had been shown to her, and she took the book, hardly knowing just what to do with it, looked at it, but didn't open it. She took it to the kitchen and put it up on a high shelf, determined that if there was anything in that book similar to what God had revealed to her in vision she was not going to read it until she had first written out what the Lord had revealed to her. Her subsequent writings indicate that later she did read at least portions of *Paradise Lost*. Thus, for example, one phrase from this work is quoted in *Education*.

But to go back. Ellen White proceeded with the writing out of the great controversy story as she did in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1 (now available in a facsimile reprint), without first reading *Paradise Lost*. This volume of *Spiritual Gifts* is a little book consisting of 219 pages. It merely touches the high points of the great controversy story as we have it now in the last part of *Early Writings*. The vision created in her mind a deep interest in the history of the Reformation. After completing *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, within six months of the time of the vision, she turned to some of the histories. In the vision she had seen essential portions of this history. The vision brought to her new light on the whole matter of the conflict between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil. With that interest,

the White family read for worship in the next several months most of D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation*. They observed with interest those things that were in harmony with what had been shown to her.

So when in 1884 she was rewriting the great controversy story more fully as it was presented in *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4, and then later was carried into *The Great Controversy*, she quoted from some of these historians. She tells us that she did so not because she was dependent upon them for the information which is there presented but because their presentation afforded "a ready and forcible presentation." As a matter of convenience she had made use of such quotations. She explains this in the third from the last paragraph in her introduction to *The Great Controversy*.

When the health reform vision was given to Ellen White on June 6, 1863, she began to tell the people about what had been shown to her. Of this she wrote in 1867:

As I introduced the subject of health to friends ... and spoke against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air, and a proper diet, the reply was often made, "You speak very nearly the opinions taught in the *Laws of Life*, and other publications, by Doctors Trall, Jackson, and others. Have you read that paper and those works?" My reply was that I had not, neither should I read them until I had fully written out my views, lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health from physicians and not from the Lord.... I did not read any works upon health until I had written *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3 and 4, and *Appeal to Mothers*, and had sketched out most of my six articles in the six numbers of *How to Live*.—[The Review and Herald, October 8, 1867](#).

[87]

If you are familiar with these publications, you will recognize them as the basic early writings on the subject of health. The six articles in *How to Live* are now in the Appendix of *Selected Messages*, book 2.

After having written out the basic presentation as it was made to her, Ellen White and her husband read with interest what had been written by physicians who were pioneering in the field of physiology and nutrition, and they measured what they read by the light given to Ellen White. Some things they could accept, because it was in harmony with what had been shown to her; other things they could not accept.

It should be pointed out that the Lord did not show Ellen White how to give fomentations, but the Lord did make it clear to her that water was a very important agency to be employed in the recovery of the sick. The Lord never gave the visions to take the place of initiative, of study, of hard work, or of faith. The principles were set forth in vision. The Spirit of Prophecy pointed the way. Then they studied what others were doing in health lines to find out in a detailed way how to apply these principles.

[88] Ellen White in her books does not tell how to give fomentations. The Whites did apply in their own personal experience what they learned from others in these matters. In 1867 she wrote, speaking of the subject of health, “My views were written independent of books, or the opinions of others” (MS. 7, 1867). Either this statement is true or it is not. If it is true, as Seventh-day Adventists believe, Ellen White’s teachings on health were not derived from doctors, but came from God.

In this connection it should be pointed out that God is the Author of the laws of nature, and if men through their painstaking research and experimentation discover those laws or if God reveals them through vision through His servant, there is bound to be harmony. Both came from the same source. So we need not be dismayed if we find some similarity between the writings of Ellen White and of physicians leading out in reforms.

The Visions Give Significance

As noted in Chapter 1, Seventh-day Adventists have never claimed to be the originators of all the principles of health reform they hold. This was acknowledged in the article appearing in the [The Review and Herald, August 7, 1866](#), written by Elder J. H. Waggoner and quoted in [The Story of Our Health Message, 79, 80](#).

(See pages 39, 40.) Waggoner points out that there are others who are working in the field of reform in health, but when the Lord calls these things to our attention in the visions given to Ellen White, they take on special significance to us, "to be received with the blessing of God, or rejected at our peril."

What is said concerning this in the field of health reform might also be said in the field of education. It is well known that there were those in a few places who were leading out in educational reforms in advance of Ellen White. However, it was the visions given to her that drew our attention to these things and the importance of these things that made them a part of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy and working program. We have valued highly the work that others have done, but these things take on significance to us because of the visions given to Ellen White.

[89]

Some people have been perplexed about this fact. They have said, "Yes, it isn't new, and so how do we know that Ellen White got it from God?" To those who might say Ellen White was influenced by those about her, let's bring in a little illustration.

Salt Provides an Illustration

The Whites had great respect for Dr. R. T. Trall, a physician in New Jersey who was leading out in reforms in the matter of diet, the care of the sick, and so forth. He was not a Seventh-day Adventist. John Kellogg went over in 1872 to take medical training at Dr. Trall's. He spent six months there. In those days medical training was largely apprenticeship rather than study. Then Dr. Kellogg went on from there to New York, to Bellevue, at the expense of James and Ellen White, and got the best and most thorough medical education that could be had in North America. James and Ellen White were determined that if we were entering the medical field, our work must stand at the very top. They felt that a religious body of four or five thousand people could not afford to enter the field of medicine unless they had a work of high quality. It would have been natural, if Ellen White was influenced by those who were about her, to have been influenced by Dr. Trall, because of her high regard for him, but not so.

[90] In the *Health Reformer* (our monthly health journal) of July, 1869, there is a page or two given over to questions and answers provided by Dr. Trall. One question was “Is it all right to eat a little salt?” Dr. Trall, a scientist, gave the answer: “Salt being a poison should not be used at all.” That was the counsel that went out in our medical journal. But what did Ellen White write?

I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 344.](#)

Here Ellen White tells us that the Lord gave her instruction in regard to salt. It is essential to the blood. Of course anyone today who understands blood chemistry knows why it is essential for good health. This was not understood in Ellen White’s day, and she frankly acknowledged: “I don’t know why, but I am giving to you that which God has given to me.” That was the basis of the position she took in opposition to the view that was held by one who was influencing many Seventh-day Adventists.

Since salt is essential to good health, shall we eat a lot of it? No. In 1884 in the *Review and Herald* she wrote, “Do not eat largely of salt.” (See [The Ministry of Healing, 305.](#)) Why not? Probably the reason was not revealed to her. She simply sounded a caution.

Now note the scientific confirmation:

In 1956 at Brookhaven National Laboratory, scientists checked on fellow employees, and found that of 135 who never added salt to their food, only one had unexplained high blood pressure; of 630 who added salt sometimes after tasting food, 43 had the disease; among 581 who always added salt without bothering to taste, 61 had it.—[The Signs of the Times, April 30, 1956.](#)

Who told Ellen White about salt years and years in advance of the discoveries of nutritionists and physiologists? Was it Dr. Trall?

Or was it the Lord? The answer seems evident—Ellen White was not influenced by the erroneous opinions of others.

Attempts to Influence Ellen G. White

[91]

Although Ellen White was not influenced by the erroneous opinions of others, there were some of her brethren who nevertheless tried to influence her. For example, there was a leader in Europe who when she visited Europe in 1885-1887 was heading up our work in the Scandinavian countries. Ellen White, visiting Stockholm, Sweden, wrote in her diary:

Brother ----- [the leader's name] suggests that it would please the people if I speak less about duty and more in regard to the love of Jesus. But I wish to speak as the Spirit of the Lord shall impress me. The Lord knows best what this people needs. I spoke in the forenoon from [Isaiah 58](#). I did not round the corners at all.—[Manuscript 26, 1885](#).

In 1892 while Ellen White was in Australia, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg wrote a letter to her in which he expressed his observations concerning the question of influence:

There are so many who are ready to say that Sister White has been influenced to do or to say this or that. I often hesitate about writing to you concerning things I would like to write to you about, so that in case remarks of that sort are made I can say with the utmost of confidence that there had been no possible opportunity for you to be influenced by me at any rate. It has been to me a source of more confidence and satisfaction than I can express to you, that I have often seen in my acquaintance with you and your work, wrong set to right through the special leading of your mind by the Lord.

I used often to make a test in my mind, saying nothing to anybody. I would say to myself, Now here's an evident wrong. Sister White knows nothing about it, or if she knows anything about it, the circumstances are

such as would produce a personal prejudice in favor of the wrong rather than against it. If the Lord leads her to denounce and correct this evil, I shall know that she is being especially led. In not a single, single instance did the test fail, and so my confidence grew. I mention these facts very often to those whom I find doubting.—*J. H. Kellogg Letter to Ellen G. White, September 9, 1892.*

[92] Within the next ten years, Dr. Kellogg lost his way in pantheistic philosophy. He lost his way in the concept of the medical missionary work as it related to Seventh-day Adventist work as a whole. Medical missionary work had been set before us as the right arm of the message, but Dr. Kellogg began to envision it as the whole body and he the head. He, in spite of his earlier declarations, also seemed to forget that Ellen White was not influenced by his opinions or the opinions of others.

In 1902 Dr. Kellogg thought he had an opportunity to influence Ellen White, and he set out to do just that. If there was any man in this denomination who could have influenced Ellen White, John Harvey Kellogg was the man. The White family and the Kellogg family grew up together. James and Ellen White had sent John to medical school. He stood firm for the principles of health reform as set before her and as she had set them before the world. He led out in our medical work.

In 1901 Arthur G. Daniells was elected leader of the church. The next year Daniells planned a council in Europe, and Dr. Kellogg was asked to attend. After the council Kellogg began to look around in England for property for a sanitarium. He had been leading out in establishing some sanitariums here and there. Sister White had called for the establishment of small medical institutions, and he felt the time had come to begin in England. He found a very acceptable property and cabled Elder Daniells, who was in Germany, to come and look at it. Soon after, Elder Daniells came over and looked the property over. He was pleased with it. It could be purchased for some thirty or forty thousand dollars. Daniells told Kellogg that he was pleased with the property, and he asked, “Where will you get the money?” “Oh,” Kellogg replied, “I’ll get the money from the General Conference.”

Now at that time the General Conference was virtually bankrupt. [93] It had more obligations than it had assets. Up to this time, our work had not been operated on a budget. We had borrowed money to send missionaries overseas. Heretofore Dr. Kellogg had been particularly skillful in persuading the General Conference Association to assume large indebtednesses on the sanitariums that he began around the United States. However, when Daniells came into a position of leadership, he declared that the church could not continue to operate on a deficit program and that we must have the money before we spent it. He was determined to bring to a stop the procedures that resulted in ever-mounting debt.

With this in mind Daniells told Kellogg that the General Conference did not have the money. He said, "Doctor, when you find the money I am willing that you should move forward and purchase this institution." Dr. Kellogg replied, "We will get the money from the General Conference." Elder Daniells said, "No, John, the General Conference does not have the money, and we cannot go on into debt. When you find the money, you can go ahead." Kellogg replied, "I'll get the money from the General Conference and I'll show you!" Soon afterward the two men parted, not in the best of spirits. Elder Daniells went back to Germany, and Dr. Kellogg took the boat for New York and from there went by train to Battle Creek.

On the way Kellogg planned his strategy. He knew, of course, of Ellen White's burden for the medical missionary work and of her many appeals for this kind of service. He determined he would get her on his side. He would write a letter to her and in the strongest possible light place before her the wonderful opportunities that lay ahead of us if we only purchased the property in England, and pointing out that the only thing standing in the way of availing ourselves of this golden opportunity was Daniells' stubbornness.

When Dr. Kellogg got to Battle Creek he called in his secretary [94] and began dictating a letter to Ellen White. When he got to ten pages he was only nicely started. On page 20 he was well into his subject. Finally on page 71 (the letter was double spaced) he signed his name and sent the letter to Ellen White, who was at Elmshaven in California. He left nothing out that would influence her to favor what he was planning and to see Daniells' unreasonableness and narrow-mindedness.

In due time Elder Daniells returned from Europe, and when he got to the General Conference office in Battle Creek, his secretary, who happened to be a close friend of Dr. Kellogg's secretary, told him about the 71-page letter that had been written to Ellen White and what was in it. As Elder Daniells related the story to me he said, "I could just feel the blood pressure rising." He declared to himself, "That's not fair, that's not right, that's not just."

At the close of the day he went home, and after supper he took some sheets of paper saying to himself, "I must give Sister White my side of the story." And he wrote a page, and a second page, and he was beginning the third page when he thought, What am I doing? If Ellen White is God's prophet, I don't need to tell her anything about this. He tore the sheets to bits and threw them in the wastebasket. He said nothing to anyone, but in his heart he pondered, How will Sister White receive me when I see her at Oakland in California at the General Conference session a few weeks from now?

[95] The time came to go to the session. Elder Daniells crossed the continent to Oakland and went to the Pacific Press, then in Oakland, to pull things together for the opening of the conference the next day. (We held no precouncils in those days.) As night drew on, the burden of the meeting rolled upon his heart. There were great issues at stake. He knelt to pray there in the Pacific Press office room. As the burden of the cause swept over his heart he agonized with God. The next thing he knew he was prostrate on the floor clutching at the floor boards pleading with God to save His cause. All night he prayed. Then as the beams of the sun shone through the window in the morning, the impression swept over him as clearly as if a voice had spoken to him, "If you stand by my servant till her sun sets your sun will not set in obscurity."

Elder Daniells arose, went to his room, cleaned up, got ready for the session, and then went to greet Ellen White, welcoming her to the conference. He knew she was in Oakland, and he knew where she was staying—in a cottage she had rented not far from the church where the session would be held. It was a beautiful spring day. The door to her cottage was open, and as he stepped up on the porch he noticed that Ellen White was in the kitchen at the end of the hallway, so he opened the screen door and walked down through the hallway. She heard him coming. She got up and came into the hall, saw who

it was, and reached out her hand warmly and grasped his hand, and said, "Elder Daniells, we are in a crisis. Every man must stand true to principle. We can't concede now."

This was enough for Elder Daniells. He knew by her firm handshake and the tone of her voice that Ellen White had not been influenced one whit by Kellogg's letter. At the conference Elder Daniells received her steadfast support.

At that conference Kellogg, angered, told Daniells, "You think you've got a General Conference. You come back to Battle Creek and I'll show you who has a General Conference." Soon afterward Kellogg did call a great medical missionary congress, with about three times the number of delegates as had attended the General Conference of 1903. But as for his letter influencing Ellen White to support his position, all his arguments had not moved her by one hair's breadth. W. C. White, her son, observed this fact also.

[96]

Ellen G. White Refrained From Certain Reading

No, Ellen White was not influenced. She was careful not to read certain things. In a letter written in 1887, she declared:

I have not been in the habit of reading any doctrinal articles in the paper, that my mind should not have any understanding of anyone's ideas and views, so that not a mould of any man's theories should have any connection with that which I write.—[Letter 37, 1887](#).

Again, from another letter:

Sara [McEnterfer, Ellen White's traveling companion and private secretary] tells me that she has a letter for me from you, but I tell her not to give it to me yet; for I have something to write to you before I see your letter. You will understand this.—[Letter 172, 1902](#).

Another such experience is recorded in 1905. Writing to a brother she said:

You may blame me for not reading your package of writings. I did not read them, neither did I read the letters that Dr. Kellogg sent. I had a message of stern rebuke for the publishing house, and I knew that if I read the communications sent to me, later on, when the testimony came out, you and Dr. Kellogg would be tempted to say, "I gave her that inspiration." [Letter 301, 1905](#).

This experience makes it clear that Ellen White refrained from reading what might be thought to influence her.

In *Special Testimonies to the Review and Herald Office* she wrote in 1896:

[97]

Unbelief is expressed by the words "Who has written these things to Sister White?" But I know of no one who knows them as they are, and no one could write that which he does not suppose has an existence. Some one has told me,—He who does not falsify, misjudge, or exaggerate any case.—Page 16.

Again in 1903 she wrote:

Some, in their self-confidence, have dared to turn from that which they knew to be truth, with the words, "Who has told Sister White?" These words show the measure of their faith and confidence in the work the Lord has given me to do.—[The Review and Herald, May 19, 1903](#).

At another time she wrote:

Some are ready to inquire: Who told Sister White these things? They have even put the question to me: Did anyone tell you these things? I could answer them: Yes; yes, the angel of God has spoken to me. But what they mean is: Have the brethren and sisters been exposing their faults?—[Testimonies for the Church 3:314, 315](#).

A Significant Experience in Australia

My father in his long association with Ellen White usually refrained from telling his mother certain things. He was a member of the General Conference Committee from 1884 to the close of his life in 1937, with the exception of four years while in Australia. He knew what was going on in the cause, but he seldom told her about the problems that existed. He would bring to her the good reports, the encouraging things, but seldom the problems.

He reasoned that if he brought the problems to her and the Lord then gave her light on that point and she wrote it out, some would say, "W. C. White tells his mother, and she has a vision, and writes a testimony." It was his custom, therefore, not to tell Ellen White the problems that confronted the cause. In the late 1890's Ellen White and her son were in Australia, starting the college at Cooranbong. Times were very hard financially. During one crisis the problems were so large that the school board met over a period of several days.

W. C. White was chairman of the board, and he knew that often when leading men were wrestling with problems in committees the Lord would open up those matters to Ellen White in vision. Each morning before walking over to the college to meet with the board W. C. White would stop at his mother's home, ask about her health, and hope that she had some message of guidance for him.

[98]

The second or third morning she inquired, "Willie, how are you getting on?" He replied in general terms, "Quite well, Mother." She said, "Willie, what are your problems, what are you dealing with?" "Oh," he said, "Mother, I shall not tell you. If the Lord wants you to know He'll tell you." She said, "Willie, I want you to tell me what you are doing on the board." He said, "No, Mother, I shall not tell you. If God wants you to know, God will tell you."

Then she took him by the lapels of his coat as a mother would a little boy and pulling him close she said, "Willie White, I want you to tell me what you are doing at the board meeting." He said, "Mother, why do you ask?" She replied, "I have been shown that when you get to a certain place in your deliberations, I am to come in and bear my testimony. I want to know where you stand." He told her briefly, and she said, "Today isn't the day. I will come in a little later." She recognized that by the next day or two they would get to

the point where her message should be given. At the right time she went in and bore her testimony.

[99] This kind of situation placed W. C. White in a difficult position. He had to be very careful. Often before Ellen White had had time to write out a vision she would tell those about her what she had been shown. At times many months were involved in writing what was shown in a single vision. But frequently after a vision she would bring out in conversation certain principles that had been revealed to her. Often it would happen that a little later my father would be in a committee meeting where the church leaders would be facing the same kind of problems as Ellen White had seen in vision. How could he do otherwise than let his influence be felt along the line concerning which he had heard his mother speak? Yet when she wrote out the testimony, frequently some said, “Willie White said that in committee, and now his mother comes out with a testimony. She gets her inspiration from him.” This situation was not easy to explain to those who wished to doubt.

Mrs. White’s Literary Assistants

There were others who were prone to say, “Well, Sister White has her editors. How can we be sure of what she did write?”

It is true that Ellen White did have literary assistants. She valued their help highly. She wrote in a statement now in [Selected Messages 1:50](#):

While my husband lived, he acted as a helper and counselor in the sending out of the messages that were given to me. We traveled extensively. Sometimes light would be given to me in the night season, sometimes in the daytime before large congregations. The instruction I received in vision was faithfully written out by me, as I had time and strength for the work. Afterward we examined the matter together, my husband correcting grammatical errors and eliminating needless repetition. Then it was carefully copied for the persons addressed, or for the printers.

Then of subsequent years she said:

As the work grew, others assisted me in the preparation of matter for publication. After my husband's death, faithful helpers joined me, who labored untiringly in the work of copying the testimonies and preparing articles for publication.

But the reports that are circulated, that any of my helpers are permitted to add matter or change the meaning of the messages I write out, are not true.—*Ibid.*

One faithful helper who assisted her for 25 years was Marian Davis, a sister-in-law of Will K. Kellogg of corn flake fame. On this question of the work of her assistants in helping her with preparation of her books Ellen White wrote: [100]

The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do.—[Letter 61a, 1900](#) (quoted in *Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 60).

One of Mrs. White's secretaries, Fannie Bolton, declared in 1901:

The editors in no wise change Sister White's expression if it is grammatically correct, and is an evident expression of the evident thought. Sister White as human instrumentality has a pronounced style of her own, which is preserved all through her books and articles, that stamps the matter with her individuality. Many times her manuscript does not need any editing, often but slight editing, and again a great deal of literary work; but article or chapter, whatever has been done upon it, is passed back into her hands by the editor.—*Messenger to the Remnant*, p. 60.

It would have been an unprofitable use of Ellen White's time were she to attempt to do all the painstaking work of a copy editor. Ellen White had three years in school. The Lord did not miraculously

instruct her in all the rules of writing, teaching her spelling and telling her where to put in all the commas, and so forth. She valued highly the help of skilled literary assistants, who were instructed closely as to what their work was. They would copy the material, and if they found a misspelled word it would be corrected. If they found an imperfection in grammar they would correct it. Ellen White one time said that there is no salvation in misspelled words and poor grammar.

[101] If there was repetition, the statements would be brought to one place. If there was redundancy of words, a synonym might be used. But the copied material would come back to Ellen White triple spaced, and she would read it over carefully and edit it. She often added a bit here, strengthened a statement there, put in quotation marks the copyist left out, corrected a word the copyist had misspelled, and so on. Then it would go back to the copyist to be recopied. It would come back to Mrs. White, and she would look it over carefully and sign it. She might even edit it further, and it would be copied again. She was ever endeavoring to find the best and clearest way of setting forth the truths that had been opened to her mind, that they might reach the people in a way that would accomplish their work effectively.

Ellen White was instructed as to whom she could trust as literary assistants and whom she could not trust. Two individuals who worked for her were dismissed, one of them three times, when Ellen White in vision was warned that they were tempted to change the writings as they passed through their hands. God was controlling the work—not a mechanical control, but His hand was over it. I have heard my father say that Mrs. White’s secretaries would as soon put their right hand in the fire and have it burned off as they would think of changing the messages that passed through their hands as they went from Ellen White to the people. Ellen White had no ghost writers. She was fully responsible for what went out under her name.

Does the Expression “I Saw” Give a Clue?

In her earlier writings Ellen White frequently employed the words “I saw” or “I was shown,” and she continued to do so until her death. Some readers would evaluate the writings as inspired or

uninspired, depending on the use of such phrases. As pointed out elsewhere, Ellen White deliberately chose to omit such phrases in her books that would come before the general public lest the reader unfamiliar with her call and work be distracted from the message she was presenting.

Inasmuch as her writings were based on the visions God gave her and she assumed that everyone understood this fact, she frequently presented light and instruction without employing such phrases. We present an illustration: [102]

Dores Robinson was a young man 21 years of age. His father was the president of the Australasian Union Conference. A physician in South Africa where Dores had previously resided had promised to put him through the medical course at Edinburgh, and he had studied there a couple of years. Then the doctor's finances failed, and he had to withdraw his help from Dores. So in 1900 Dores was in Australia doing secretarial work for Ellen White. His first work was copying the manuscript of *Christ's Object Lessons*.

His uncle, Elder E. W. Farnsworth, working in Australia, proposed: "Dores, we have no children. You have started the medical course. If you want to go on, my wife and I will see you through."

What a generous offer that was! Dores went to talk with Ellen White about it. Would it be the wise course to follow? He visited with her for half an hour and then walked out of the room with absolutely no intimation from her as to whether he should or should not go on with the medical course. He was right where he was when he went in to see her.

Consequently, he made up his mind to accept his uncle's offer. On Wednesday he went down to Sydney and made his booking to go the next week to Europe. He was back at Sister White's office on Thursday. Friday was to be his last day. As he went in he picked up from the typewriter a long envelope addressed "Dores Robinson." He opened and read it. It began, "You asked me at one time what I thought in regard to your becoming a physician. I would say that the most useful lessons for you to learn will not now be found in taking a medical course of study." She went on to point out that with his physical stamina, with his mental frame of mind, to pursue the medical course would leave him a physical and mental wreck. She [103]

pointed out that he should choose a lifework of a different nature entirely.

What should he do? He looked carefully all the way through that letter to see whether he could find some such expression as “I saw” or “I was shown.” He could not find one. There was nothing to indicate special light from God.

“Well,” he said, “this is good counsel. I should get exercise. I will get some exercisers and I’ll exercise and I’ll walk.” But in his heart he was not at all clear. He decided to make a test of the matter. As he prayed about it he made up his mind that he would go back down to Sydney, and if he could get his travel money back, all of it, he would take that as a sign that he should not go on with the medical course. On Monday morning he took the train and rode three hours to Sydney. He went directly to the booking office, and as he approached the counter he said, “My name is Robinson.” “Oh, Mr. Robinson,” the clerk replied, “we’re sorry, we had to cancel your booking. The British Government has commandeered the boat for troop movement to the Boer War. We think we can get you on a later boat, or we can give your money back.” He replied, “I’ll take my money back.”

Now Ellen White told his father, Elder Asa T. Robinson, that in vision she saw an angel standing by the side of Dores saying to him what she said in that letter. But in the letter there wasn’t an intimation that there was any special illumination. However, he knew, when he talked with her a few days earlier that she had no counsel to give and now the letter did contain counsel. This testimony, part of which may be found in *Medical Ministry*, changed his lifework. ¹⁰

[104] But what if she had no light? Did she speak or was she silent?

For example, Dr. B. E. Fullmer, who resided in southern California, had some new ideas about the 144,000. In the year 1914 he was teaching that the 144,000 would all be from America and none from any other country. The union conference president, Elder Elmer E. Andross, wanted to know whether there was anything that Ellen White had written that would help the conference in dealing with this teaching. He wrote to Sister White’s Elmshaven office and

¹⁰Note: Dores Robinson taught church school; served many years as one of Mrs. White’s secretaries; married her eldest granddaughter; served in school, publishing, and mission work; and then until his retirement served in the White Estate.

made inquiry. Elder Clarence C. Crisler, the secretary in charge, took the matter to Sister White. Her comments were taken down stenographically. "I have no light on the subject," she declared.

Please tell my brethren I have nothing presented before me regarding the circumstances concerning which they write, and I can set before them only that which has been presented to me.—*C. C. Crisler Letter to E. E. Andross*, Dec. 8, 1914.

This is a significant statement. We would expect her to slap down the foolish teaching. Instead she said, "I have no light on the subject, and I can set before them [her brethren] only that which has been presented to me."

Ellen White's Acknowledgment

I can assure you that when you read the counsels, when you read Ellen White's books, you may know, except for the purely biographical material, that what she has there set forth was based on the visions that God gave her. She said once in connection with the question of who told Sister White:

There are those who say "Someone manipulates the writings." I acknowledge the charge. It is One who is mighty in counsel, One who presents before me the condition of things.... I have an Elder Brother on the throne, who has paid an infinite price to redeem the human race from the curse of sin.—[Letter 52, 1906](#).

[105]

"Yes," Ellen White declared, "there are those who say that I am influenced; I acknowledge the charge. It is true. The one who influences me is Jesus Christ."

[106]

Chapter 4—Ellen G. White as a Historian ¹¹

[107]

A look at the dictionary leads us to define a historian as a writer of a narrative of events, or one who sets forth a systematic account of events. It is as Ellen White served in this role that we shall now observe her. Although she was not commissioned primarily as a historian, in the aggregate E. G. White writings we find a considerable amount of what would come under the heading of history. There comes to mind first and foremost her depiction of events paralleling Bible history but going beyond its scope to deal with historical events from the time of the apostles to the present and reaching into the future to the earth made new. This is one kind of history which Ellen White wrote.

[108]

Then there is what we may call denominational history—an account of events relating to the inception and development of the church cropping out here and there in her writings. Closely akin to this account are her autobiographical materials. We will concern ourselves mainly with her depiction of events as set forth in her repeated presentation of the great controversy between Christ and His angels and Satan and his angels as illustrated in the affairs of mankind.

The writing in this field occupied a sizable portion of Ellen White's time between 1858 and the close of her life fifty-seven years later. The 1858 presentation, based on the March 14 great controversy vision, is the little *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, of 219 pages. The last of her writings in this field and any field, for that matter, was *Prophets and Kings*, rounding out in 1915 her work on the five-volume set of the Conflict of the Ages series.

We turn now to the field of coverage of the little 1858 volume, and find that it touches the high points of the inception of sin, the fall of man, and the plan of salvation; it then skips to the life of Jesus, His ministry and sacrifice. From that point it treats in brief form

¹¹This material was presented to the university and college history teachers at the Quadrennial Council for Higher Education held at Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1968.

the work of the apostles, the apostasy in the Christian church, the Reformation, the Advent Movement, and the succession of events to the Second Advent and the earth made new. The full content became in 1882 the last part of *Early Writings* (pp. 133-295). In 1944 the original volume (*Spiritual Gifts*) was reproduced in a facsimile reprint, and it is currently available.

It is indeed a historical work presenting in vivid language the account of the conflict between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil, portrayed in almost digest form on the background of ancient and modern history. As Ellen White wrote she employed the terms “I saw,” “I was shown,” and so forth, more than once for each page of the book:

I saw that the holy angels often visited the garden.—
Page 20.

I saw the Roman guard, as the angelic host passed
back to heaven.—Page 68.

I saw that Luther was ardent and zealous, fearless
and bold.—Page 122.

I saw Satan and his angels seeking to shut this divine
light from the people of God.—Page 156.

I saw the saints suffering great mental anguish.—
Page 202.

I then saw Jesus leading the redeemed host to the
tree of life.—Page 210.

But this was only the beginning of her portrayals of the great controversy on the background of history. Within five years Mrs. White was diligently at work presenting the story of events that transpired between Creation and the first advent of Christ. The detailed account fills *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, and the first half of volume 4, under the subtitle of *Important Facts of Faith in Connection With the History of Holy Men of Old*, both to appear in 1864. These with *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, completed a brief coverage of the theme from the fall of Lucifer to the establishment of the new earth.

In her “Preface” to volume 3, devoted so fully to the historical account, she indicates the source of the information presented:

I am comforted with the conviction that the Lord has made me His humble instrument in shedding some rays of precious light upon the past.... Since the great facts of faith, connected with the history of holy men of old, have been opened to me in vision....—Page v.

From time to time the reader of volumes 3 and 4 is reminded of this fact by such expressions as:

“I saw a sadness come over the countenance of Adam.” Page 42.

“I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week....” Page 90.

[110] Concerning the source of information of the historical writings of prophets and apostles and of Ellen White herself, she has given us these facts:

The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses.... From Moses, the historian of creation and the law. ...—[The Great Controversy](#), v.

Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God.—*Signs of the Times*, March 13, 1884.

The Holy Spirit... guided the pens of the sacred historians, that the record of the words and works of Christ might be given to the world.—[Gospel Workers](#), 286.

And of her experience she declared, “Wonderful representations are given me of past, present, and future” ([Letter 86, 1906](#)).

Writing of certain of these revelations she exclaimed:

Scenes of such thrilling, solemn interest passed before me as no language is adequate to describe. It was all a living reality to me.—[Selected Messages 1:76](#).

Ellen White in her early experience was given historical insights by revelation. These insights she related as need arose in discourses and writings, bringing out the high lights of the great scenes of the conflict from its inception to its close. It was but natural that she and her husband, James White, should be stirred to a deep interest in the reading of historical writings covering certain eras of the past,

which had been presented to her in vision, especially the history of the Reformation.

William C. White, my father, reports that when he was a mere boy he heard his mother read D' Aubigné's *History of the Reformation* to his father. She read to him a large part of the five volumes. She also read from other histories of the Reformation, and often, on the basis of the visions, she commented on the account given by the historian. Her reading helped her to locate and identify many of the events presented to her in vision.

Although she saw the events take place as a part of the enactment [111] of the great controversy, she was not always informed as to just where and when the events transpired.

History Recounted in the Four-Volume Great Controversy Series

In Ellen White's experience the Lord often gave her an initial vision devoted largely to one important topic, comprehensive in scope, but without fullness of detail. Then in succeeding years as the more detailed information would prove of service and could be absorbed, more detailed views were received in repeated visions. This was especially so in views given to her relating to the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In the 1870's and the 1880's Ellen White undertook to rewrite the presentation of the conflict story in four volumes of about 400 pages each. She had expected to bring them out in quick succession, but her travels and other labors prevented this accomplishment and extended the work of preparing the manuscripts over a period of 15 years. Each of the four books bore the general title for the series—"Spirit of Prophecy" and the subtitle *The Great Controversy*. An additional subtitle indicated which portion of the great controversy the particular volume dealt with. Thus:

1. *Spirit of Prophecy. The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels.* Vol. I. 414 pages. Published in 1870.

This volume, largely a reprint of the 1864 *Spiritual Gifts*, volumes 3 and 4, opens with the fall of Lucifer and deals with Biblical

history to Solomon, with a chapter bridging to the Messiah. This volume was later amplified to become *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890, which replaced this volume.

2. *Spirit of Prophecy. The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan. Life, Teachings and Miracles of Our Lord Jesus Christ.* Vol. II. 396 pages. Published in 1877.

[112] This book treats the life of Christ from His birth to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem; later amplified by Ellen G. White to become the first 62 chapters of *The Desire of Ages* (1898).

3. *Spirit of Prophecy. The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan. The Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ.* Vol. III. 392 pages. Published in 1878.

This book contained 20 chapters dealing with the last days of the ministry of Christ and 11 chapters touching on the life and work of the apostles; eventually amplified to become the last part of *The Desire of Ages* (1898) and *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911), volumes that replaced this work.

4. *Spirit of Prophecy. The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of the Controversy.* Vol. IV. 506 pages. Published in 1884.

The coverage is described in the title. Actually we would consider this the first edition of the book well known today as *The Great Controversy*, amplified in 1888 to become *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*.

These four books were written essentially for Seventh-day Adventists, who understood Ellen White's call and work; but it was expected that they would be among volumes lent by Seventh-day Adventists to their non-Adventist neighbors and friends, and that our evangelists would use them in connection with their ministry. Some printings were bound in covers bearing the title *Spirit of Prophecy*,

volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4, and some covers were stamped *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4. But the running titles on all the chapters in all four of the books read: “The Great Controversy,” and to Ellen White the four volumes told the great controversy story.

The three volumes paralleling the Bible story provide many insights, draw lessons from the events, and in general greatly enrich our concept of the narrative. The fourth volume—*The Great Controversy*—although a part of the continuing story, in a way enters a new field. Ellen White was instructed in vision to begin the account with the destruction of Jerusalem, which she did, and then she continues the historical narrative to the Advent awakening, the point at which she comes into the picture, and carries it to our day, then in prophetic forecast through the events leading to establishment of the new earth.

[113]

In chronicling events in historical narrative she makes no attempt to be complete or exhaustive, but rather is selective, drawing in those events that form the background of the great controversy theme. She did not write essentially as a historian. Moreover, in all her writings the details of history were always subordinated to the great theme of the conflict. Even where the facts of the Bible or of secular history are introduced, there is usually a characteristic background of the invisible contending forces of good and evil such as no other writer has attempted. Her view of the place of history as exemplified in her own writings is well expressed in the following words:

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.—[Prophets and Kings](#), 499, 500.

We are to see in history the fulfillment of prophecy, to study the workings of Providence in the great reformatory movements, and to understand the progress of

events in the marshaling of the nations for the final conflict of the great controversy.—[The Ministry of Healing](#), 441, 442.

[114] In connection with writing these views of the events of ancient and modern history, especially the history of the great reformation of the sixteenth century, her reading of D'Aubigné, Wiley, and others proved to be helpful. She sometimes drew on them for clear historical statements to help make plain to the reader the things she was endeavoring to present. Also by thus corroborating with well-accepted historical evidence what had been revealed to her, she would win the confidence of the general reader in the truths she was presenting.

Just as her study of the Bible helped her to locate and describe the many figurative representations given her regarding the development of the controversy, so the reading of the history of the Reformation helped her to locate and describe events presented to her in the visions. (See Appendix C, "*The 1911 Edition of Great Controversy*.")

When *Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4, came from the press and our ministers and members began to read it, they discovered that Mrs. White had employed a number of historical quotations, and this use led to some questions. Why had she done so? Did she gain her information on the phases of history these quotations touched on from historians, or did she receive the information from God? Did her use of the quotations place them in the category of inspiration? She replied that what she had presented had been opened to her by God in vision, but she found the historical accounts of service in locating and describing certain of these events. The question having been raised, she in the 1888 edition of the book dealt with the question in her author's "Introduction." Of this I shall soon speak.

The Colporteur Edition of The Great Controversy

[115] As the 1884 book was running through the press, Seventh-day Adventists having just launched the plan of distributing message-filled books through literature evangelists in door-to-door selling, the publishers thought that this E. G. White book might be sold in this manner. Illustrations were added and a thicker sheet of

paper was employed in issuing from the same printing plates a literature-evangelist edition of the book. It caught on immediately. Ten printings rolled from the presses, producing some 50,000 copies of the book. These books were sold largely to the general public by literature evangelists.

In 1885 just as this first colporteur edition of volume 4 was coming from the press Ellen White responded to an invitation to visit Europe and assist in the work opening in the old world. She spent two full years there, living in Switzerland and traveling to points in many countries where our work was becoming established. Knowing of the successful distribution of volume 4 in the United States, leaders in Europe began to plan with her for its translation and publication in some of the main languages.

But at this point Ellen White, sensing that her reading audience had changed from largely Seventh-day Adventist to largely non-Adventist and wishing to present the story in greater detail, asked the brethren to wait until she could enlarge the book and make such adjustments as were appropriate now that it was to serve both the church and the general public. Out of this idea came the long-range plan to rewrite and enlarge the content of the four volumes of the Spirit of Prophecy-Great Controversy series to produce four much larger volumes written for non-Adventists as well as Adventists. This plan was later expanded to include five books of our present Conflict of the Ages Series, namely, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*.

In her public ministry Ellen White had always shown an ability to select from the storehouse of truth material adapted to the needs of the congregation before her; and she also recognized that in the choice of subjects for publication in her books, sound judgment should be shown in selecting what was best suited to the needs of those who would read them. Therefore, as she undertook in 1886-1888 to present the great controversy story in a volume for the church and the world, she not only enlarged the presentation but employed phraseology adapted to her readers, and in some cases she left out some presentations. An example of this is seen in the familiar chapter entitled "The Snares of Satan" in *The Great Controversy* (pages 518-530 in current printings). The first four pages of this

chapter as printed in the 1884 book (*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 337-340 ¹²) dealt with the manner in which Satan employs Protestant ministers to carry out his objectives in depreciating the seventh-day Sabbath. This subject could be understood by Seventh-day Adventists, but inasmuch as the presentation was now to go to non-Adventists, Ellen White thought that the pages dealing with this should be dropped out of the new and larger book. In 1923 the omitted portions of this chapter were reprinted in *Testimonies to Ministers*, bringing them back for Adventist reading.

In planning this series of books she decided to leave out of the text proper all such phrases as “I saw,” “I was shown,” and so forth, lest the reader unfamiliar with her call and work might have his attention directed from the message of the books.

Work Done in Europe

[117] Ellen White’s contact in Europe with the environs of the Reformation aided her in making more vivid descriptions of Reformation history. It should also be noted that while she was in these environs, many of the scenes were repeated to her in vision. Of this experience she wrote:

While writing the manuscript of *Great Controversy* I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God. And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind.—*E. G. White Letter 56, 1911*,.

The work of revising and enlarging the book was carried well along while she was in Europe. Her access to Elder J. N. Andrews’ library was helpful to her, for in presenting historical description she at times drew quotations from well-known authors. Not until she was back in her home in Healdsburg, California, however, was she able to bring to completion her work on this volume. Her enlightening “Author’s Preface” carries the date April, 1888.

¹²Note: The four original volumes of *Spirit of Prophecy* have been issued by the publisher in facsimile reprints, and they may be secured at Adventist Book Centers.

The new volume bore the title *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*. The words “Revised and Enlarged” appear on the title page. The text extended to page 678 in place of the 492 pages of the earlier book. The page size was enlarged. The 1888 printing contained 26 full-page illustrations, and the appendix materials were expanded from 14 pages to 26 pages. This became the book known so well as *The Great Controversy*. Its pagination is standard today. At the outset several sets of printing plates were made, which were put into use in the United States and overseas. This edition of *The Great Controversy* was used until 1911, when a revision took its place.

How the Light Came to Ellen White

Numerous references have been made to the visions as the basis for Ellen White’s writing in the field of history. A knowledge of how this light came to her helps us to understand certain features of her work and provide answers to some questions that naturally emerge, especially in regard to the sources of her knowledge of the things concerning which she wrote, sometimes referred to as “Mrs. White’s sources.” [118]

As an eyewitness she seemingly viewed the transpiring of the events of history. This experience must have been much in the manner Moses just before his death was permitted to view in advance the history and fortunes of Israel referred to in Chapter 1. The quotation is taken from [Patriarchs and Prophets, 472-476](#).

Enthralled, Moses watched the events take place, seemingly seeing, hearing, and participating. In this vivid manner the history of the future was opened to him. Probably dates were not given him. It is not likely that all the cities he saw were named. Those were inconsequential details, not essential to the unfolding theme. (See pages 24, 25 for description.)

The records would indicate that in just this manner history past and future was presented to Ellen White, history on which was woven the tapestry of the great controversy theme. Because of the deep interest in the sources of Ellen White’s information in historical lines we will probe the subject quite thoroughly and in detail.

World History as First Portrayed to Ellen White—"I Saw"

[119] In the 1858 great controversy vision, as noted earlier, the high points of world history pertaining to the contest between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil were opened up to Ellen White often in panoramic views of transpiring events and at times in symbolic representations. The written account penned within weeks after the vision as *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, opens with the words "The Lord has shown me." The main part of the account deals with the life and work of Jesus, the early Christian church, the period of time to the Advent Movement, and then events to the new earth. The book carries the reader in one broad panoramic sweep as Ellen White presents the high lights of what she viewed in that vision of the passing events of history. But the account is brief and sketchy, with those features emphasized that had to do with the central theme, the contest between right and wrong, between Christ and Satan, but as exemplified in historical developments largely on earth.

The span of centuries between the apostles and the Advent Movement, the point of focus in historic studies, is encompassed in 21 small pages. Nonetheless the reader easily detects that the author is describing events as Ellen White in vision witnessed them transpiring. At times symbolic representations spanned and summarized the events of important periods. Chapter 17 of *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, entitled "The Great Apostasy," opens with the words:

I was carried forward to the time when the heathen idolators cruelly persecuted the Christians, and killed them.—Page 103.

It was presented before me in the following manner: A large company of heathen idolators bore a black banner upon which were figures of the sun, moon and stars. The company seemed to be very fierce and angry.

I was then shown another company bearing a pure white banner, and upon it was written Purity, and Holiness unto the Lord. Their countenances were marked with firmness and heavenly resignation. I saw the heathen idolators approach them, and there was a great

slaughter. The Christians melted away before them.—
Page 105.

The next chapter, “Mystery of Iniquity,” continues in the same vein, with the events of centuries reduced to a few scenes and some symbolic representations.

There is a five-page chapter titled “The Reformation,” with Martin Luther and Melancthon introduced (page 120) and other Reformers alluded to.

Luther was chosen to breast the storm, and stand up against the ire of a fallen church, and strengthen the few who were faithful to their holy profession. He was ever fearful of offending God.—Page 120.

[120]

I saw that Luther was ardent and zealous, fearless and bold in reproving sin, and advocating the truth.... Luther possessed fire, zeal, courage and boldness, and at times might go too far; but God raised up Melancthon, who was just the opposite in character, to aid Luther, and carry on the work of reformation.... I was shown the wisdom of God in choosing these two men, of different characters to carry on the work of reformation.

I was then carried back to the days of the apostles, and saw that God chose as companions an ardent and zealous Peter, and a mild, patient, meek John.—Pages 122, 123.

Coming to the Advent Movement, Ellen White opens the chapter titled “William Miller” with the words:

I saw that God sent his angel to move upon the heart of a farmer who had not believed the Bible, and led him to search the prophecies. Angels of God repeatedly visited that chosen one, and guided his mind, and opened his understanding to prophecies which had ever been dark to God’s people.—Page 128.

The internal evidence is clear. Ellen White in vision was shown events taking place and at the same time was taken “behind the

scenes,” so to speak, to gain a perception of the deeper meanings involved in what she saw. There is no evidence that there was imparted to her the whole of world history, or even all the events of the history of the periods that passed before her in panoramic view. But that she did see the transpiring of historical events involving the Christian church and the Reformation cannot be denied when one reads this initial E. G. White account thoughtfully. Later visions were to open up this historical background more fully and Ellen White was to write more fully on the history shown her. This fact is clear from a number of corroborating statements from her pen and the pen of her son, who worked closely with her.

[121] **The Consistent Witness of Ellen G. White on Sources**

Ellen White in her introduction to the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy* speaks quite clearly of the sources of her information and refers both to the visions and to her reference to historical works. To get the full picture calls for quite an extensive quotation from the statement signed April, 1888. After discussing how God communicated with His people through prophets, she carries the reader to the prophecy of Joel and the prediction relating to the last days, then introduces herself as one to whom God had given visions:

This prophecy [[Joel 2:28](#)] received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel....

When the apostles of Christ were to bear His gospel to the world and to record it for all future ages, they were especially endowed with the enlightenment of the Spirit.... At this time the special endowment of divine grace and power is not less needful to the church than in apostolic days.

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the work-

ing, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the Author of our salvation, and Satan, the prince of evil, the author of sin, the first transgressor of God's holy law....

The same hatred of the principles of God's law, the same policy of deception, by which error is made to appear as truth ... may be traced in all the history of the past. Satan's efforts to misrepresent the character of God, to cause men to cherish a false conception of the Creator, and thus to regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love; ... and his persecution of those who dare to resist his deceptions, have been steadfastly pursued in all ages. They may be traced in the history of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, of martyrs and reformers....

[122]

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future. In pursuance of this purpose, I have endeavored to select and group together events in the history of the church in such a manner as to trace the unfolding of the great testing truths that at different periods have been given to the world, that have excited the wrath of Satan, and the enmity of a world-loving church....

In these records we may see a foreshadowing of the conflict before us. Regarding them in the light of God's word, and by the illumination of His Spirit, we may see unveiled the devices of the wicked one, and the dangers which they must shun who would be found "without fault" before the Lord at His coming.

The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I

have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. In some cases 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 in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works.

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. Yet viewed as a part of the controversy between the forces of light and darkness, all these records of the past are seen to have a new significance; and through them a light is cast upon the future.—[The Great Controversy, ix to xii.](#)

[123] With modesty Ellen White could hardly speak more plainly to the world concerning her work—the visions and products of her pen.

Events of Reformation History Presented in Vision

In subsequent statements Ellen White was to refer to the visions in which the history of the Reformation was presented to her. Note the following illuminating excerpt from a letter to Wolcott H. Littlejohn, an Adventist author, written in 1894:

The banner of the ruler of the synagogue of Satan was lifted high, and error apparently marched in triumph, and the reformers, through the grace given them

of God, waged a successful warfare against the hosts of darkness. Events in the history of the reformers have been presented before me. I know that the Lord Jesus and His angels have with intense interest watched the battle against the power of Satan, who combined his hosts with evil men, for the purpose of extinguishing the divine light, the fire of God's kingdom. They suffered for Christ's sake scorn, derision, and the hatred of men who knew not God. They were maligned and persecuted even unto death, because they would not renounce their faith.—[Letter 48, 1894](#).

Ellen G. White Approved W. C. White Statements

With the issuance of the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy*, Elder W. C. White, son of Ellen G. White and her assistant following the death of James White in 1881, issued two formal statements regarding the writing of *The Great Controversy*, the aspects of the book dealing with historical matter, the sources of the information she presented, and the revision of the book. Ellen White read these, gave her endorsement, and declared that in these statements W. C. White had correctly portrayed the facts. We give here his statement [124] regarding "Ellen White's Sources":

The things which she has written out, are descriptions of flashlight pictures and other representations given her regarding the actions of men, and the influence of these actions upon the work of God for the salvation of men, with views of past, present, and future history in its relation to this work.—*W. C. White statement in his letter of July 24, 1911, read by him to the General Conference Committee at the Autumn Council, October 30, 1911.*

Continuing, he speaks of the reference Ellen White made to historical writings of others:

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. When I was a mere boy, I heard her read D'Aubigné's "History of the Reformation" to my father. She read to him a large part, if not the whole, of the five volumes. She has read other histories of the Reformation.—*Ibid.*

He then explained the relationship of this reading to her writing *The Great Controversy*:

This has helped her to locate and describe many of the events and the movements presented to her in vision. This is somewhat similar to the way in which the study of the Bible helps her to locate and describe the many figurative representations given to her regarding the development of the great controversy in our day between truth and error.—*Ibid.*

In his 1911 statement, he makes also another reference to the many visions given Ellen White relating to the history of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation:

Mother's contact with European people had brought to her mind scores of things that had been presented to her in vision during past years, some of them two or three times, and other scenes many times. Her seeing of historic places and her contact with the people refreshed her memory with reference to these things, and so she desired to add much material to the book. This was done.—*Ibid.*

[125] Just as in her introduction to the 1888 *Great Controversy*, the 1911 explanation on "Ellen G. White Sources" explains that the visions come ahead of the reading of history. The reading of history helped her in presenting these matters to others. And then there was a repeating of some of the scenes, with visions given in connection with the writing.

Further W. C. White Statements Bearing on “Mrs. White’s Sources”

In 1912 as W. C. White writing to a church leader referred to the sources of Ellen White’s information as presented in *The Great Controversy*, he declared:

Regarding Mother’s writings, I have overwhelming evidence and conviction that they are the description and delineation of what God has revealed to her in vision.—
W. C. White to W. W. Eastman, Nov. 4, 1912.

In a letter to Elder L. E. Froom, answering some questions, W. C. White wrote of his personal attitude toward the question of what are said to be “the E. G. White sources.” Perhaps his first hand observation of the operation of inspiration in his mother’s experience led to his attitude. He wrote:

It is a fact that during my 30 or more years of association with Ellen White I had the utmost confidence in her ministry. I know that she received revelations from God which were of untold value to the church and to the world. I did not enter as fully as some of our brethren wish to do in an analysis of the sources of information which enabled her to write her books.—*W. C. White to L. E. Froom, Dec. 13, 1934.*

Then he explains:

The framework of the great temple of truth sustained by her writings was presented to her clearly in vision. In some features of this work, information was given in detail. Regarding some features of the revelation, such as the features of prophetic chronology, as regards the ministration in the sanctuary and the changes that took place in 1844, the matter was presented to her many times and in detail many times, and this enabled her to speak very clearly and very positively regarding the foundation pillars of our faith.

In some of the historical matters such as are brought out in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, and in *Acts of the Apostles*, and in *Great Controversy*, the main outlines were made very clear and plain to her, and when she came to write up these topics, she was left to study the Bible and history to get dates and geographical relations and to perfect her description of details.—*Ibid.*

This makes clear that just as Moses watched history in advance so did Ellen White in vision watch history develop, both past and future, and she was commissioned “to trace this history.” This she did, often in the first draft writing much more fully than what the finished chapters might contain.

Through many experiences William White’s mind was made clear on the matter of “Mrs. White’s sources.” One such he recounted to the workers and believers in Takoma Park, Maryland, on Sunday, December 17, 1905:

One Sabbath, at Basel, as I was reading Wylie’s “History of Protestantism,” telling about the experience of the Roman armies coming against the Hungarians [Bohemians], and how a large body of persecutors would see a little body of Protestants, and become frightened, and beat a hasty retreat. As I read it to Mother, she interrupted me, and told me a lot of things in the pages ahead, and told me many things not in the book at all. She said, “I never read about it, but that scene has been presented to me over and over again. I have seen the papal armies, and sometimes before they had come in sight of the Protestants, the angels of God would give them a representation of large armies, that would make them flee.”

I said, “Why did you not put it into your book?” [*Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4.] She said, “I did not know where to put it.” *W. C. White Talk at Takoma Hall, Takoma Park, Md., Dec. 17, 1905.*

In this connection the account in [The Great Controversy, 116 , 117](#), will be read with interest.

Her visit to Zurich, Switzerland, in 1887 provided just one more instance of corroborative evidence. Wrote her son:

I was with Mother when we visited Zurich and I well remember how thoroughly her mind was aroused by seeing the old cathedral and the market place and she spoke of them as they were in the days of Zwingli.

[127]

During her two years residence in Basel, she visited many places where events of special importance occurred in the Reformation days. This refreshed her memory as to what she had been shown and this led to important enlargement in those portions of the book dealing with the Reformation days.—*W. C. White to L. E. Froom*, Dec. 13, 1934.

Regardless of how W. C. White approached the matter of Ellen White's sources, all statements are in agreement, namely, that the basic concepts came to her in vision. Her reading of history aided her in presenting the matters to others. In early Battle Creek days she was given a corner in the Review and Herald library where she could study and write and at times refer to books on the shelves. The matter of her reading is brought out further in W. C. White's letter to L. E. Froom:

Ellen White was a rapid reader and had a very retentive memory. The revelations which she had received enabled her to grip subjects regarding which she read in a vigorous way. This enabled her to select and appropriate that which was true and to discard that which was erroneous or doubtful.—*Ibid.*

It was remarkable that in her reading and scanning of books that her mind was directed to the most helpful books and to the most helpful passages contained in those books. Occasionally, she would mention to father and in my presence, her experience in being led to examine a book which she had never looked into before, and her experience in opening it to certain passages that helped her in describing that which she had seen and wished to present.—*Ibid.*

W. C. White relates another experience in which reading refreshed her mind as to what she had witnessed in vision:

When we were in Basel, in 1886, we had a very interesting experience with a group of translators. We found that our brethren in Europe were very desirous of having [The Great Controversy, IV](#),

[128]

translated in the French and German languages....

When we reached those chapters relating to the Reformation in Germany and France, the translators would comment on the appropriateness of the selection of historical events which Sister White had chosen, and in two instances which I remember, they suggested that there were other events of corresponding importance which she had not mentioned.

When this was brought to her attention, she requested that the histories be brought to her that she might consider the importance of the events which had been mentioned. The reading of the history refreshed to her mind that which she had seen, after which she wrote a description of the event.—*Ibid.*

Any attempt to come to an accurate appraisal in the matter of what are said to be “Mrs. White’s Sources” must build heavily on the above statements of key witnesses. That there are some “problems” is readily conceded. There are problems in the historical and chronological records of the Old Testament prophets and the inspired apostles. Can it be that we should look to rigid concepts of inspiration or misconceptions of inspiration as being at the root of some of these “problems”?

Thus far we have presented the evidences that the testimony borne by Ellen G. White was based upon the visions God gave to her, and that in the historical field her writings depicted scenes that passed before her, some in quite minute detail, some in symbolic depiction, some in broad sweeps touching the main points in principles involved. It is clear that she depended upon her Bible and reliable histories for the location of the events she saw or their timing and some descriptive details.

There is evidence that she was not shown the names of all of the places and the dates of all the events. The basic conception of the significant events of the controversy story was clearly laid before her in vision. In many cases minor details were not presented. Some of this information could be ascertained from the sacred writings, some from common sources of knowledge, some from reliable historians. Apparently God in His providence did not consider it essential to impart these minutiae through vision. Just how much we are justified in demanding of divine revelation is a significant point that has been discussed in Chapter 1 on "Inspiration," so it is not repeated here. See pages 13-48. [129]

The 1911 Edition of The Great Controversy

In many printings issued from the presses of our several publishing houses, *The Great Controversy* as enlarged in 1888 had a wide sale. After twenty years' use the printing plates were so badly worn that it became evident that the type for the book must be reset. This was a large and expensive undertaking, for it seemed clear that the book should be reillustrated if a new edition were to be produced. Other features, too, came in for consideration, especially the matter of references to all historical quotations and the furnishing in a comprehensive appendix¹³ of references to standard historical works that related to the materials.

As Ellen White studied the matter she looked even deeper into what might be done. She wrote of this July 25, 1911, very soon after the new revised book appeared:

When I learned that *Great Controversy* must be re-set, I determined that we would have everything closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages.

As a result of the thorough examination by our most experienced workers, some changing in the wording has been proposed. These changes I have carefully

¹³In 1950 this appendix was updated with the aid of Seventh-day Adventist scholars.

examined and approved. I am thankful that my life has been spared, and that I have strength and clearness of mind for this and other literary work.—[Letter 56, 1911](#). (See Appendix C.)

[130] The revision of an inspired book quite naturally raised some questions in the minds of ministers and laity alike. Some of the questions involved an understanding of inspiration. The fact that Ellen White determined to make the revision and worked closely with her office staff in doing so helped to mitigate some of the questions.

The W. C. White statements regarding the work already referred to, together with considerable correspondence with executives and leading ministers of the church regarding this new edition, provide much valuable data.

The Changes in the 1911 Edition

We turn to the W. C. White communications here mentioned to gain a picture of what was involved in bringing out the 1911 book. The key points, which for clarity we will present in numbered paragraphs, are:

1. The most noticeable change in the new edition, is the improvement in the illustrations....

2. The thirteen Appendix notes of the old edition, occupying thirteen pages, have been replaced by thirty-one notes occupying twelve pages.... The Biographical Notes have been omitted. [Neither the Appendix notes nor Biographical Notes were prepared by Mrs. White.]

3. The general Index has been enlarged from twelve to twenty-two pages.

4. In the body of the book, the most noticeable improvement is the introduction of historical references. In the old edition, over seven hundred Biblical references were given, but in only a few instances were there any historical references to the authorities quoted or referred to. In the new edition the reader will find more

than four hundred references to eighty-eight authors and authorities.

5. In a few instances, new quotations from historians, preachers, and present-day writers, have been used in the place of the old, because they are more forceful, or because we have been unable to find the old ones. In each case where there has been such a change, Mother has given faithful attention to the proposed substitution, and has approved of the change.

[131]

6. In spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, changes have been made to bring this book into uniformity of style with the other volumes of this series [*The Desire of Ages* and *Patriarchs and Prophets*].

7. In eight or ten places, time references have been changed because of the lapse of time since the book was first published.

8. In several places, forms of expression have been changed to avoid giving unnecessary offense. An example of this will be found in the change of the word "Romish" to "Roman" or "Roman Catholic."

9. In two places the phrase "divinity of Christ" is changed to "deity of Christ." And the words "religious toleration" have been changed to "religious liberty."

In the new edition, the rise of the papacy in 538, and its fall in 1798, are spoken of as its "supremacy" and "downfall," instead of its "establishment" and "abolition," as in the old edition.

In each of these places the more accurate form of expression has been duly considered and approved by the author of the book.

10. On pages 50, 563, 564, 580, 581, and in a few other places where there were statements regarding the papacy which are strongly disputed by Roman Catholics, and which are difficult to prove from accessible histories, the wording in the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily obtainable.

Regarding these and similar passages, which might stir up bitter and unprofitable controversies, Mother has often said: "What I have written regarding the arrogance and the assumptions of the papacy, is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to Catholics and others, and that needless controversies may be avoided it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy stated so moderately as to be easily and clearly proved from accepted histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students."

Work Done in Mrs. White's Office

[132] These illustrations make clear the type of work that was done in making the revisions for the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*. The work was done in Mrs. White's office at Elmshaven, near St. Helena in northern California, by her office staff and under her direction. The reader may ask, "What evidence do we have that Mrs. White did as she said she did in her statement quoted earlier: 'These changes I have carefully examined and approved'?"

The records of the White Estate are very full. In these is a large manila envelope containing proofs showing the changes made in the 1911 edition. This envelope is marked: "Controversy Proofs Prepared for Mrs. E. G. White's Inspection and Approval." At the bottom appear the words "All Approved."

Everyone, therefore, may rest assured that the 1911 edition, published four years before Mrs. White's death, was her presentation of the subject, in which, as she said, truths "were stated in the very best manner," prepared to reach the public in a form bearing her full and unqualified endorsement.

Four sets of printing plates were made, and the book was issued simultaneously from the three publishing houses in North America and the publishing house serving the church in Great Britain.

A Questionable Use of the Book

W. C. White, in one of his communications in 1912 regarding *The Great Controversy*, expressed his misgivings as to the outcome of a course that would lead our ministers to favor the historical areas of *The Great Controversy* over well-accepted standard works of history. We quote from his letter to Elder W. W. Eastman:

It seems to me, Bro. Eastman, that we must hold fast our confidence in the great Adventist movement of 1844, and we should not be easily moved from the positions held by the leaders in that movement and by the pioneers of our own denomination.

At the same time, I believe we should encourage our editors, our ministers, and the teachers in our schools, and the rank and file of our people, as far as they have time and opportunity, to be thorough Bible students and faithful students of history so that they may know for themselves, and so that they can prove to people who do not accept our denominational books as authority, the points that we hold as a people. It is my conviction that those who write for our denominational papers regarding prophecy and its fulfillment ought to be encouraged to give deep and faithful study to the subjects about which they write, and to use in their arguments references and quotations from those historians which will be accepted by the readers as authority.

[133]

It may be all right for a preacher in presenting Biblical expositions to his congregations to quote from *Daniel and Revelation* and *Great Controversy* as well expressed statement of his views; but it could hardly be wise for him to quote from them as authoritative histories to prove his points. I think you will discern the reasonableness of this proposition. A Presbyterian who was endeavoring to prove the soundness of his theories to a congregation of Methodists would not be expected to depend largely upon Presbyterian writers to prove

his points.... In all our work we must study to follow methods that are most effective.

When it comes to the matter of writing out expositions of doctrine or of prophecy, still greater care must be taken by the writer than by the preacher to select those authorities which will be accepted as authorities by the critical and studious reader.

If I understand the matter correctly, Brother---has been writing articles on prophecy and its fulfillment in which he uses D&R and “Great Controversy” as authority to prove his points. This I should consider to be a very poor policy.—*W. C. White Letter to W. W. Eastman*, Nov. 4, 1912.

Many Printings of the 1911 Edition

[134] The 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy* became the standard work used throughout the world. References in the Sabbath school lessons and textbooks are to this edition. It was soon provided on thin paper without illustrations for convenient reference work in what in denominational circles has become known as the “trade edition.”

The paging of certain of the editions intended for colporteur sale in some cases has varied—the illustrations have been different; there has been an updating of the appendix notes; in some editions some of the chapter titles have been changed and hundreds of thousands of copies have been distributed under the title *The Triumph of God’s Love*. But the text of the book is the same—the text of the 1911 edition. A few typographical or grammatical errors have been corrected, and current forms of capitalization and spelling have been employed. Such adjustments, made to keep a widely circulated book in the most acceptable form, do not affect the sense of the message in the volume.

As for adjustments related to the passage of time since 1911, the White Trustees in 1950 authorized a rewording of four phrases in the book in order to convey the sense correctly both in 1911 and to the present-day reader. The reader today is often a non-Adventist

not familiar with the history of the book and the later of the editions. These four are:

Page 287: In referring to the Bible, the 1911 edition stated: It “has since been translated into *more than four hundred languages and dialects.*” By 1950 the number was more than a thousand. The phrase was reworded so as to convey a correct image both in 1911 and the present, and reads in current printings: “has since been translated into *many hundreds* of languages and dialects.”

Page 288: Speaking of Voltaire the atheist, Mrs. White stated in the 1911 edition: “*A century* has passed since his death.” By 1950 it was more nearly two centuries. The substitute wording correctly stating the fact, whether in 1911 or the present, is “*Generations* have passed since his death.”

Page 378: In reference to the Jewish nation, Ellen White stated in the 1911 edition: “The people of Israel for *eighteen hundred years* have stood, indifferent to the gracious offers of salvation.” By 1950 it was nearer to nineteen hundred years. Reworded to state the facts correctly in 1911 and the present, the phrase reads: “The people of Israel *during* succeeding centuries have stood, indifferent to the gracious offers of salvation.”

Page 579: Mrs. White stated in the 1911 edition: “*For more than half a century*, students of prophecy in the United States have presented this testimony to the world.” The earlier 1888 edition read: “*For about forty years.*” By 1950 it was actually a full century. The White Trustees in this case authorized a specific reading that would be unaffected by time lapse: “*Since the middle of the nineteenth century*, students of prophecy in the United States have presented this testimony to the world.”

[135]

To speak of the foregoing four adjustments in wording as “changes in wording of the E. G. White books” is correct only

if we mean technical corrections of historical phrases to keep the statements chronologically accurate.

History and Historical Quotations

The fact that some historical quotations were changed, one being substituted for another in the 1911 edition, and the fact that source references were given to historical materials which had not been credited in earlier printings brought to the fore the question of Ellen G. White's writing in the field of history, and the basic source of the historical information she set forth in *The Great Controversy*.

We have presented the basic information on these points, well supported by documentation.

Truths Indelibly Traced by the Holy Spirit

One point is crystal clear. Ellen White understood that the books recounting the great controversy story embodied what the Lord had revealed to her. Repeatedly she spoke and wrote of this fact. Of the Conflict books before *Prophets and Kings* and *The Acts of the Apostles* were published she said:

[136]

How many have read carefully *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *The Desire of Ages*? I wish all to understand that my confidence in the light that God has given stands firm, because I know that the Holy Spirit's power magnified the truth, and made it honorable, saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it." In my books, the truth is stated, barricaded by a "Thus saith the Lord." The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone.—[Colporteur Ministry, 126.](#)

Writing specifically of *The Great Controversy* she declared:

I was moved by the Spirit of the Lord to write that book.... The Lord has set before me matters which are of urgent importance for the present time, and which

reach into the future. The words have been spoken in a charge to me, “Write in a book the things which thou hast seen and heard, and let it go to all the people; for the time is at hand when past history will be repeated.” I have been aroused at one, two, or three o’clock in the morning with some point forcibly impressed upon my mind, as if spoken by the voice of God.—[Colporteur Ministry, 127, 128.](#)

This is the simple record of the portrayal of historical matters in *The Great Controversy*. Her writing in this area parallels much of Ellen White’s seventy years of active ministry—and of the production of books read by millions in the leading languages of the world.

The writing of her own life story and the biographical references in her books and articles are historical writings of an entirely different nature and are dealt with in Chapter 1.

Through the presentation of the Conflict of the Ages story tracing the great controversy story on the backdrop of history of events in the world, we are indeed made “children of the light and children of the day.”

[137] **Chapter 5—Hermeneutical Principles in the E. G. White Writings** ¹⁴

Hermeneutics is defined as “the science or art of the interpretation of literary productions, especially the Sacred Scriptures.” It is appropriate that the term should be used in dealing with the Spirit of Prophecy writings, God’s message conveyed to His people through a prophet of our day. The purpose of this presentation is to deal with some principles that may properly guide us in the study, interpretation, and application of the Spirit of Prophecy writings. Putting it simply we might head the chapter “What Did Mrs. White Mean?”

We are fortunate in having in our archives copies of materials from the pen of Ellen G. White in the form of letters, interviews, diaries, sermons, general manuscripts, tracts, periodical articles, and books. We also have a rich file of materials written by her contemporaries responding to her messages or commenting on her life and work. These combined files make our task a relatively easy one.

[138] Ellen G. White was contemporary with the Advent Movement, living and working in what is very nearly our day. She was close to the people dealing with man and the problems of the twentieth century. She employed her native tongue, the English language, in both oral and written discourses. Innumerable examples of how those with whom she communicated understood and applied her messages are in our hands.

Ellen G. White and the Bible

Ellen White often had to meet the suggestions of those who by their attitude toward the inspired message in the Bible and in her writings undercut the effectiveness of God’s messages to His people. Concerning the Bible she declared:

¹⁴This material was presented to the university and college Bible teachers at the Quadrennial Council for Higher Education held at Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1968.

I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.—[Selected Messages 1:17](#).

Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost.—[Selected Messages 1:18](#).

Although she recognized that there were certain problems and she valued highly the “revised versions,” Ellen White saw no grounds for probing studies or intricate investigations to ascertain the “true” meaning of the Word of God as apart from its apparent meaning. She wrote:

The Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guide-book to the human family to show them the way to heaven.—[Selected Messages 1:15](#).

We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes.—[Selected Messages 1:18](#).

Simplicity and plain utterance are comprehended by the illiterate, by the peasant, and the child as well as by the full-grown man or the giant in intellect.—*Ibid.*

She saw “human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart” as “undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted” “surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom.” [Selected Messages 1:15](#). [139]

The Problem of Communication

Ellen White recognized the problem of communication which the prophet faces in trying to create in the mind of the hearer or reader the image that was imparted to him in vision. Thus she says:

It is difficult for one mind to give to one of a different temperament, education, and habits of thought by

language exactly the same idea as that which is clear and distinct in his own mind. Yet to honest men, right-minded men, he can be so simple and plain as to convey his meaning for all practical purposes....

The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men. These men were inspired of the Holy Spirit. Because of the imperfections of human understanding of language, or the perversity of the human mind, ingenious in evading truth, many read and understand the Bible to please themselves.—[Selected Messages 1:19](#).

And in this connection she remarked:

This is the way my writings are treated by those who wish to misunderstand and pervert them. They turn the truth of God into a lie. In the very same way that they treat the writings in my published articles and in my books, so do skeptics and infidels treat the Bible. They read it according to their desire to pervert, to mis-apply, to willfully wrest the utterances from their true meaning.—*Ibid.*

Ellen White's frequent association of her writings with the writings of the Bible prophets indicates that it is not out of place in this study for us to do likewise.

We turn again to examples as she drew them from the Bible to further illustrate the point as she wrote of the failure of the Jews to accept God's Word exactly as it reads:

[140]

Those whom He [Christ] addressed regarded themselves as exalted above all other peoples. To them, they proudly boasted, had been committed the oracles of God. The earth was languishing for a teacher sent from God; but when He came just as the living oracles specified He would come, the priests and the instructors of the people could not discern that He was their Saviour, nor could they understand the manner of His

coming. Unaccustomed to accept God's word exactly as it reads, or to allow it to be its own interpreter, they read it in the light of their maxims and traditions. So long had they neglected to study and contemplate the Bible, that its pages were to them a mystery. They turned with aversion from the truth of God to the traditions of men.—[Manuscript 24, 1891](#).

And to us she counsels:

Be careful how you interpret scripture. Read it with a heart opened to the entrance of God's word, and it will express heaven's light, giving understanding unto the simple. This does not mean the weakminded, but those who do not stretch themselves beyond their measure and ability in trying to be original and independent in reaching after knowledge above that which constitutes true knowledge.

All who handle the word of God are engaged in a most solemn and sacred work; for in their research they are to receive light and a correct knowledge, that they may give to those who are ignorant. Education is the inculcation of ideas which are light and truth. Everyone who diligently and patiently searches the Scriptures that he may educate others, entering upon the work correctly and with an honest heart, laying his preconceived ideas, whatever they may have been, and his hereditary prejudices at the door of investigation, will gain true knowledge.

But it is very easy to put a false interpretation on scripture, placing stress on passages, and assigning to them a meaning, which, at the first investigation, may appear true, but which by further search, will be seen to be false. If the seeker after truth will compare scripture with scripture, he will find the key that unlocks the treasure house and gives him a true understanding of the word of God. Then he will see that his first impressions would not bear investigation, and that continuing to

believe them would be mixing falsehood with truth.—
[Manuscript 4, 1896.](#)

[141] It is clear that Ellen White in her public ministry lived with the problem of trying to make people understand just what she meant in the spoken and written word. To facilitate this difficulty she employed the simplest, clearest, plainest, and most direct language. She did not indulge in double talk or speak in parables. No subtle mystery surrounded her words.

To her the basic problem of communications stood out in stark reality when soon after the issuance of her first book in the summer of 1851—the 64-page *Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*—in several instances she felt called upon to explain what she meant. It was not long after this that copies of the little book carried a two-page insert entitled “Notes of Explanation,” and when the *Supplement* was published in 1854 the explanations and observations were expanded. See [Early Writings, 85-96.](#)

Her Choice of Words

From that time onward Ellen White took care to be more precise in her writings as she prepared them for publication, carefully scrutinizing every word, phrase, and sentence. On only a very few occasions through the years did she find it necessary to explain the meaning of some published statement. It is clear then that she was consciously ever alert to the choice of words and forms of expression that would adequately and accurately convey her thoughts to the hearer or reader. She at times studied diligently to choose words and to combine them so as to be most effective. At times the Spirit of God gave special aid. Thus:

While I am writing out important matter, He is beside me.... And when I am puzzled for a fit word with which to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind.—[Letter 127, 1902.](#)

[142] Taking into account the mass of her writings, we would say this was the rare exception and not the rule. We cite another similar reference of this character:

I am trying to catch the very words and expressions that were made in reference to this matter, and as my pen hesitates a moment, the appropriate words come to my mind.—[Letter 123, 1904](#).

The General Counsels

The fields of her discourse and writing were broad and diverse. There were the messages of admonition, correction, and encouragement. These often opened with such expressions as:

In the view given me in Rochester, New York, December 25, 1865, I was shown that the subject of taking usury should be considered by Sabbathkeepers.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:534](#).

November 5, 1862, I was shown the condition of Brother Hull. He was in an alarming state.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:426](#).

June 5, 1863, I was shown that Satan is ever at work to dishearten and lead astray ministers whom God has chosen to preach the truth. The most effectual way in which he can work is through home influences, through unconsecrated companions.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:449](#).

I was shown that Sabbathkeepers as a people labor too hard without allowing themselves change or periods of rest.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:514](#).

In the vision given me in Rochester, New York, December 25, 1865, I was shown that our Sabbathkeeping people have been negligent in acting upon the light which God has given in regard to health reform.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:485](#).

“To Our Brethren in Positions of Responsibility” she wrote:

God has given me a message for the men who are carrying responsibilities in Washington and other centers of the work. This is a time when the work of God should be conducted with the greatest wisdom,

unselfishness, and the strictest integrity by every conference.—[Letter 32, 1908](#).

To Brother George W. Reaser she wrote:

[143] I am instructed to say to you.—[Letter 34, 1908](#).

To Elder J. S. Washburn she wrote:

Dear Brother: Some time ago I had light that you should become acquainted with the work that is being done by the large educational institutions for the colored people in Nashville.—[Letter 48a, 1908](#).

Messages of this character constitute a large part of the *Testimonies for the Church* and testimony letters in the E. G. White manuscript files. The message is straightforward; the words were carefully chosen to convey the messages to those concerned. No special interpretation was needed. The hermeneutical principle here involved was that she gave the message of God to those concerned in the language they could understand.

Concerning such communications she declared:

You might say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your minds things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:67](#).

I shall write just as God bids me write. What I have written, I have written. Every word is truth. I am to give to the people of God the warnings given me.—[Letter 95, 1905](#).

But she was ever aware of the problem of how to write so as to be understood. She was also aware that some would misconstrue her words in spite of every effort to avoid misunderstanding. Thus she wrote:

There are many who interpret that which I write in the light of their own preconceived opinions. You know what this means. A division in understanding, and diverse opinions, is the sure result. How to write in a way to be understood by those to whom I address important matter, is a problem I cannot solve....

Owing to the influence of mind upon mind, those who misunderstand can lead others to misunderstand, by the interpretation they place upon the subjects from my pen. One understands them as he thinks they should be, in accordance with his ideas. Another puts his construction upon the written matter, and confusion is the sure result.—[Letter 96, 1899](#).

[144]

The Sermons

Akin to the messages conveyed by letter or published testimony were the sermons preached to congregations large and small. The largest congregation to which she preached was 20,000 at the Groveland, Massachusetts, camp meeting in 1877. In these sermons she usually spoke without notes. Her words were always well chosen and the style was simple. The people could easily understand the message presented in practical terms, whether admonition, reproof, doctrinal exposition, or prophetic interpretation.

Of such presentations she at times wrote:

I speak that which I have seen, and which I know to be true.—[Letter 4, 1896](#).

When I attend meetings such as this camp meeting ... I speak the words of the Lord, with the authority that He gives me, and then I leave the matter in His hands, knowing that I have done my duty. This I must do, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. But I am not to speak words of my own, lest I weaken the testimony God gives me.—[Letter 145, 1902](#).

There was direct communication with the people in language they could understand and apply.

Articles in the Journals

The journals of the church through the years carried some 4,400 articles from the pen of Ellen White. These articles varied in form and content. Of them she wrote:

I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:67](#).

[145] Mainly the articles were admonitions to the church, sometimes being her sermons. Some dealt with doctrine. Sometimes she reported journeys in these articles. At times they were comprised of material drawn from her manuscript files.

The Writings in Practical Fields

Ellen White wrote much in such practical fields as:

1. Education and the development and operation of educational institutions.
2. Health and the health work.
3. The minister and pastoral and evangelistic work.
4. The publishing of the message through the public press.
5. Church finance and administration.

These counsels appear in clear, plain language, instructing, exhorting, and admonishing. No particular interpretation is called for. The reader is continually reminded that these counsels are based on the visions that God gave her. If any who have not for themselves read these counsels are tempted to think that they may reflect either Ellen White's personal pet ideas or the theories of her contemporaries, the reading of the books will remind them of the true source and, hence, the binding claims of the counsel, by such expressions as:

The Lord has instructed me that as a general rule, we place too much food in the stomach.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 136](#).

Dear Brother, In the past you have practiced health reform too rigorously for your own good. Once, when you were very sick, the Lord gave a message to save your life.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 199](#).

I saw that God does not require anyone to take a course of such rigid economy as to weaken or injure the temple of God.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:205](#).

The light given me was that a sanitarium should be established, and that in it drug medication should be discarded, and simple, rational methods of treatment employed for the healing of disease.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 303](#).

I have received instruction in regard to the use of flesh meat in our sanitariums. Flesh meat should be excluded from the diet, and its place should be supplied by wholesome, palatable food, prepared in such a way as to be appetizing.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 289](#).

I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in the place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 344](#).

It is for their own good that the Lord counsels the remnant church to discard the use of flesh meats, tea, and coffee, and other harmful foods.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 381](#).

Those who use flesh meat disregard all the warnings that God has given concerning this question.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 383](#).

From the light God has given me, the prevalence of cancer and tumors is largely due to gross living on dead flesh.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 388](#).

The light given me is that it will not be very long before we shall have to give up any animal food.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 357](#).

I have been instructed that the nut foods are often used unwisely, that too large a proportion of nuts is

used, that some nuts are not as wholesome as others. Almonds are preferable to peanuts ...—[Testimonies for the Church 7:134](#).

I have been instructed that the students in our schools are not to be served with flesh foods or with food preparations that are known to be unhealthful.” [Testimonies for the Church 9:157](#).

The light that God has given upon the subject of disease and its causes, needs to be dwelt upon largely; for it is the wrong habits of indulgence of appetite, and careless, reckless inattention to proper care for the body that tell upon people.—[Counsels on Diet and Foods, 291](#).

An hour spent in reading the counsels given in the area of health cannot but convince the earnest seeker for truth that Ellen White in her writings on this subject is attempting to convey in clear, plain language that all can understand just what God’s will is for His remnant church. The writing is not in figures or symbols or parables. This is also true of all of the practical counsels.

[147]

The Testimonies to Explain the Testimonies

If in these counsels a given statement seems somewhat obscure, we turn to other statements that approach the same subject from a different angle, and this often makes clear the perplexing point. This Ellen White expected, for she wrote:

The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture.—[Selected Messages 1:42](#).

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing and Christ’s Object Lessons

These two Ellen G. White books are devoted to expounding the teachings of our Lord in His parables and in the Sermon on the Mount. As she recounts these teachings she draws out the deep principles and presents the practical lessons to each child of God. In

dealing with the parables she clarifies the meanings and sets forth the lessons in language easily understood.

Descriptions of the Future State and Events

Some of Ellen White's earliest visions deal with the future state and future events. Subsequently some of her visions dealt with the same themes. In these visions Ellen White seemed to be transported, and she viewed the rewards and activities of the redeemed. As she writes of her first vision she describes a path on which the Advent people were traveling to the Holy City, with a bright light behind the travelers to keep them from stumbling. Then follows a description of the second advent of Christ; the ascension to the New Jerusalem with its sea of glass, the river of life, the tree of life by its banks; and crowns and harps given to the redeemed. Whereas, in the city she speaks of meeting Brethren Fitch and Stockman under a tree and of conversing with them of the events that had occurred since they were called to rest in the grave just before the disappointment of 1844. [148]

In this presentation there is intermingled the symbolic and the real. The pathway and the bright light were symbolic; were the crowns and harps real? Brethren Stockman and Fitch were real. Was the tree real, under which Ellen White, carried forward in vision, was conversing with them? She writes of the sea of glass and the river of life. Were these real or symbolic, or was one real and the other symbolic?

Milton S. Terry, in his *Biblical Hermeneutics*, comes to our relief:

It is an old and oft-repeated hermeneutical principle that words should be understood in their literal sense unless such literal interpretation involves a contradiction or absurdity.—*Biblical Hermeneutics*, ch. 10, p. 247.

This position taken toward the Bible and her writings seems well sustained by several E. G. White allusions and statements that will be presented shortly.

The Presentation of the Great Controversy

[149] Basic to an understanding of God's character, His actions, and His purposes and basic to an understanding of the philosophy of man is the great controversy presentation that begins with a sinless universe in which God is supreme over all; the fall of Lucifer; the creation of our world and of man; man's response to evil; the steps in the redemption of the fallen race; man's preparation for translation; the climactic termination of life on the earth; the destruction of sin and sinners; and the earth restored to its Edenic state inhabited by a redeemed race immune to sin and rebellion. The various books of the Sacred Canon deal with segments of the story. To Ellen White, nearly two thousand years this side of the last of the Biblical records, the whole picture was unveiled in great sweeps and then in more detail. The concepts permeated her entire work, and placed a certain mold on the work of the denomination. Certain segments of paramount importance were first given to her as presented in such chapters of *Early Writings* as "My First Vision," "Subsequent Visions," and so on. Then in 1848 the over-all picture was opened to her in one grand panoramic sweep. The opportunities and facilities for writing and publishing were extremely limited at the time. There is reason to believe that certain segments of the depiction were presented in chapters of her first book, *Experience and Views*, and now are a part of the first section of *Early Writings*.

In 1858 after the publishing work was well established the view was again repeated. Of this she wrote:

In this vision at Lovett's Grove, most of the matter of the Great Controversy which I had seen ten years before, was repeated, and I was shown that I must write it out.—[Spiritual Gifts 2:270](#).

This she proceeded to do immediately, and within six months of the vision the 219-page *Spiritual Gifts—The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels* appeared. It opens with the words, "The Lord has shown me that Satan was once an honored angel in heaven" and closes with the triumphant declaration: "The kingdom ... was then given to the saints of the Most High, who were to possess it forever, even forever and ever."

No less than once for each page Ellen White indicates that what she was presenting to her readers had been revealed to her in vision.

As repeated and more-comprehensive visions were imparted to her down through the years and as the church grew and could absorb larger books, the great controversy presentation was made in the four 400-page volumes of *The Spirit of Prophecy* and later in the five volumes of the Conflict of the Ages series, comprising 3,500 pages. Getting this vital theme before the church and the world was a task that stretched through most of Ellen White's life, from the 1858 issuance of *Spiritual Gifts* to her last work, on *Prophets and Kings* in early 1915.

[150]

Authoritative, but No Expression “I Saw”

The later fuller presentation in the Conflict series carries no reminders that Ellen White viewed in holy vision that which she was presenting, for she deliberately refrained from the use of all such expressions as “I saw” and “I was shown.” She did so lest the reading public generally, who were unfamiliar with her call and work, should by the use of such expressions have their attention diverted from the topic she was presenting to questions as to the meaning of such expressions. None need, however, be in any uncertainty as to the vision source of the materials comprising the great controversy presentation. Let us cite some such evidences:

1. The frequency of such expressions in the basic presentation made in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, in 1858.

2. Her 1864 Preface to *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 3, which opens with the words:

In presenting this, my third little volume, to the public, I am comforted with the conviction that the Lord has made me His humble instrument in shedding some rays of precious light upon the past.... The great facts of faith, connected with the history of holy men of old, have been opened to me in vision.

3. The first of the five Conflict of the Ages books to come from the press, *The Great Controversy*, published in 1888, in the author's “Introduction” carries two significant statements:

[151]

(a) Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the Author of our salvation, and Satan, the prince of evil, the author of sin, the first transgressor of God's holy law.—Page x.

(b) As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.—Page xi.

4. Commenting in 1888 on the presentation of earth's closing events and the second advent of Christ as presented in her books she declared:

Scenes of such thrilling, solemn interest passed before me as no language is adequate to describe. It was all a living reality to me, for close upon this scene appeared the great white cloud, upon which was seated the Son of man.—[Letter 38, 1888](#). (Published in [Selected Messages 1:76](#).)

5. In 1906 in advance of the publication of her books *Prophets and Kings* and *The Acts of the Apostles* she referred to the source of information in her works which present the great controversy.

How many have read carefully *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *The Desire of Ages*? I wish all to understand that my confidence in the light that God has given stands firm, because I know that the Holy Spirit's power magnified the truth, and made it honorable, saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it." In my books, the truth is stated, barricaded by a "Thus

saith the Lord.” The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone.—[Colporteur Ministry, 126](#).

6. Then, dealing with single volumes, she wrote:

God would be pleased to see *The Desire of Ages* in every home. In this book is contained the light He has given upon His word.—[Letter 75, 1900](#). (Published in [Colporteur Ministry, 126](#).)

Have you read volume 4? ¹⁵ Do you know what it contains? ...

I was moved by the Spirit of the Lord to write that book....

[152]

The Lord has set before me matters which are of urgent importance for the present time, and which reach into the future. The words have been spoken in a charge to me, “Write in a book the things which thou hast seen and heard, and let it go to all the people; for the time is at hand when past history will be repeated.” I have been aroused at one, two, or three o’clock in the morning with some point forcibly impressed upon my mind, as if spoken by the voice of God.—[Letter 1, 1890](#). (Published in [Colporteur Ministry, 127, 128](#).)

While writing the manuscript of *The Great Controversy*, I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God. And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind.—[Letter 56, 1911](#). (Published in [Colporteur Ministry, 128](#).)

Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her lifework

¹⁵Note: *The Great Controversy*, 1888 edition. For a few years *The Great Controversy* was referred to as volume 4. When *Patriarchs and Prophets* was first issued it was titled *Great Controversy, Volume One*.

God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servant to be given to the world.—[The Review and Herald, January 20, 1903](#). (Published in [Colporteur Ministry, 125](#).)

Looking beyond the question of the use Mrs. White made of the historical writings of others as she wove the narrative and the doctrinal presentation and the prophetic forecast of *The Great Controversy* story on the tapestry of history—for this is dealt with in Chapter 4—and having established through her own witness the fact that what she presented in these books was revealed to her by God, let us look at some features of the presentation she gives. As we do so we recognize that certain segments are dealt with not only in these volumes of the great controversy presentation—*Spiritual Gifts*, *Spirit of Prophecy*, and the Conflict series, and we might include [153] *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* and *Christ's Object Lessons* as well, for they were overflow material—but they also appear in other of the E. G. White productions.

The Symbolic and the Real

We come now to a point of hermeneutical interest. Although the great controversy presentation deals much with narrative of events past, present, and future, often in the light of Bible prophecy, it also abounds in doctrinal presentation and views of heavenly things. No special hermeneutical problem resides in the historical narrative. She tells the story in simple terms. The treatment of heavenly things embodies events (*a*) antedating Creation; (*b*) paralleling world history; and (*c*) postdating the Second Advent. On some phases of these events, at times questions are raised.

Writing of the Holy Scriptures, Ellen White makes this significant declaration:

The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning

not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: “Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.”

The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. ¹⁶ Christ has given the promise: “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.”

[154]

If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.—[The Great Controversy, 598, 599.](#)

Figures and Symbols

Reference is made to symbols that God apparently often employed as an effective means of conveying truth to the prophets. Note these statements:

God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way.—[Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists, 211, 212.](#) (Republished in [Selected Messages 2:319.](#))

Angels ... for ages have communicated to men light and knowledge, telling them what to do ..., unfolding before them scenes of thrilling interest, waymark by waymark in symbols and signs and illustrations.—[Manuscript 16, 1888.](#) (Published in [Selected Messages 1:17.](#))

¹⁶Note: In narrating the experience of William Miller, Ellen White, with no suggestion that the position he took was not correct, declares: He [Miller] saw that the prophecies, so far as they had been fulfilled, had been fulfilled literally; that all the various figures, metaphors, parables, similitudes, etc., were either explained in their immediate connection, or the terms in which they were expressed were defined in other scriptures, and when thus explained, were to be literally understood.—[The Great Controversy, 320.](#)

But the prophet gaining his knowledge in symbolic representation usually embodied the truths taught in words projecting a literal image. Ellen White in her Introduction to *The Great Controversy* states:

The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.—[Selected Messages 1:25](#).

However, this was not always the case. At times as a means of impressive teaching the symbols were reproduced by the prophet in his written account. Note this concerning the revelator:

[155]

In figures and symbols, subjects of vast importance were presented to John, which he was to record, that the people of God living in his age and in future ages might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them.—[The Acts of the Apostles, 583](#).

And of her own experience she wrote:

In the night season the Lord gives me instruction in symbols, and then explains their meaning.—[Manuscript 22, 1890](#).

For instance, on several occasions the ills that would result from consolidation of the publishing work of the denomination—removing from the several houses their autonomy and placing the control under one management, a course which seemed very promising to our leaders in the early 1890's—were revealed to Ellen White as trees planted too closely together, with entangled roots, resulting in their being stunted and dwarfed. The symbol gave force to the point made.

In 1903, writing to Dr. John H. Kellogg, medical superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium and the natural leader of our medical

work, she opened to him certain symbolic representations given to her relating to his case:

Many other scenes connected with your case have been presented to me. At one time you were represented to me as trying to push a long car up a steep ascent. But this car, instead of going up the hill, kept running down. This car represented the food business as a commercial enterprise, which has been carried forward in a way that God does not commend.—[Letter 239, 1903](#).

I saw you holding up the banner on which are written the words: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” [Revelation 14:12](#). Several men, some of them those with whom you are connected in the sanitarium, were presenting to you a banner on which was a different inscription. You were letting go the banner of Seventh-day Adventists, and were reaching out to grasp the banner presented to you.—[Testimonies for the Church 8:153, 154](#).

A few sentences carried a message that without the symbolic representation would have taken pages to present, and perhaps would have been less effective. But there is no mystery as to the teaching of these two representations. Rather than creating mysteries, symbols were an effective and economical means employed to convey plainly clear-cut truths. But because truths are at times presented in a symbolic framework, there are some who would tend to consider as symbolic much that we have evidence should be understood literally. This tendency gave Ellen White considerable concern, and on a number of occasions she spoke out emphatically on this point. [156]

Consistent and Repeated Declarations on a Critical Point

One such case relates to the personality of God and involves the Trinity. I have failed to find one instance in which Ellen White employs the term *Trinity*. However, she was clear on the subject of “the three highest powers in heaven—the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Ghost” ([Evangelism, 617](#)). She had been reared in the Methodist Church with a creed, the very first tenet of which declares:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.—*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1888, pp. 16, 17.

Besides reacting against this doctrine she also had to meet the devastating teachings of the “spiritualizers” in the mid-1840’s.

The point of God being without body or parts was a question Ellen White in vision discussed with Jesus. She records it in her first book, published in 1851:

[157]

I saw a throne, and on it sat the Father and the Son. I gazed on Jesus’ countenance and admired His lovely person. The Father’s person I could not behold, for a cloud of glorious light covered Him. I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. He said He had, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.” [Early Writings, 55](#) (1882 edition).

In an explanatory statement published in 1854 Ellen G. White defines further just what she meant:

On page 55, I stated that a cloud of glorious light covered the Father and that His person could not be seen. I also stated that I saw the Father rise from the throne. The Father was enshrouded with a body of light and glory, so that His person could not be seen; yet I knew it was the Father and that from His person emanated this light and glory. When I saw this body of light and glory rise from the throne, I knew it was because the Father moved, therefore said, I saw the Father rise. The glory,

or excellency, of His form I never saw; no one could behold it and live; yet the body of light and glory that enshrouded His person could be seen.—[Early Writings, 92.](#)

And she discussed the matter elsewhere in the book:

I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, “I am the express image of My Father’s person.” [Early Writings, 77.](#)

Then follows a significant statement employing the word *spiritualism*¹⁷ in a manner not usually employed by Seventh-day Adventists, and stemming from the work of “the spiritualizers,” who were heard in 1845 and onward for a few years:

I have often seen that the spiritual view took away all the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David and the lovely person of Jesus have been burned up in the fire of spiritualism.—*Ibid.*

[158]

Our forefathers consistently were averse to the doctrine of the Trinity as defined in church creeds, notably the Methodist. They saw in it an element that “spiritualized” away both Jesus Christ and God. James White in a letter sent to the *Day Star* and published in the issue of January 24, 1846, speaks of—

A certain class who deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This class can be no other than those who spiritualize away the existence of the Father and the Son, as two distinct, literal, tangible persons, also a literal Holy city and throne of David.... The way spiritualizers this way have disposed of or denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ is first using the old unscriptural trinitarian creed.

¹⁷The term spiritualism as used by some of the post-Millerites in the late 1840’s refers to that system of interpretation by which Biblical doctrines and prophecies were spiritualized away.

James White's use of the term *spiritualizers* helps to clarify Ellen White's use of the term *spiritualism* as it appears in the quotations above, and this is a point we shall pursue. But before doing so, let us place on the record here four statements particularly significant in the light of the words from *Early Writings* quoted above:

In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature.—[The Great Controversy, 644, 645.](#)

God is a being, and man was made in His image. After God created man in His image, the form was perfect.—[Manuscript 117, 1898.](#)

Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is "the express image" of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God.—[Patriarchs and Prophets, 45.](#)

When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. "God created man in His own image." [Education, 15.](#) They bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker.—[Education, 20.](#)

[159] In laying a foundation for what is to come, we turn to the *Review and Herald Extra* bearing date of July 21, 1851. Note the date. James White under the heading "A Warning" declares:

We feel to pity, and mourn over the condition of our honest brethren who have fallen into the mischievous error and bewitching snare of modern spiritualism, ¹⁸ and we would do all in our power to help them.—*Ellen G. White Present Truth and Review and Herald Articles*, vol. 1, p. 16.

¹⁸Note: Having taken the position that Christ had come spiritually and that, because the kingdom was in their hearts, they were in the kingdom of God, every action was therefore without sin. James White spoke out in strong language as he witnessed the fruit of such teaching, referring to those "who hold some doctrines as corrupt, and as black as hell.... We cannot conceive of language too pointed to express our views of that 'damnable heresy' that leads to the violation of the seventh commandment. We mean the doctrine of spiritual union." James White in [The Review and Herald, Extra, July 21, 1851.](#)

Ellen White Repeats and Applies the Counsel Given

At the turn of the century when called upon to meet the pantheistic views promulgated by Dr. John H. Kellogg, the leader of the medical work of the denomination, Ellen White on several occasions alluded to the experience of early days and of how she was called upon to meet similar teachings. Note the following written to Dr. Kellogg on November 20, 1903:

After the passing of the time, we were opposed and cruelly falsified. Erroneous theories were pressed in upon us.... Just such theories as you have presented in “Living Temple” were presented then. These subtle, deceiving sophistries have again and again sought to find place amongst us. But I have ever had the same testimony to bear which I now bear regarding the personality of God.—[Letter 253, 1903](#).

In *Early Writings* ... are the following statements:

May 14, 1851, ¹⁹ I saw the beauty and loveliness of Jesus. As I beheld His glory, the thought did not occur to me that I should ever be separated from His presence. I saw a light coming from the glory that encircled the Father, and as it approached near to me, my body trembled and shook like a leaf. I thought that if it should come near me I would be struck out of existence, but the light passed me. Then could I have some sense of the great and terrible God with whom we have to do.—Page 70.

[160]

I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, “I am in the express image of My Father’s *person*.”

I have often seen that the spiritual view took away all the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David and the lovely person of Jesus have

¹⁹Note: Compare this date with James White’s statement and reference to “modern spiritualism.”

been burned up in the fire of Spiritualism. I have seen that some who have been deceived and led into this error will be brought out into the light of truth, but it will be almost impossible for them to get entirely rid of the deceptive power of spiritualism. Such should make thorough work in confessing their errors and leaving them forever.—[Early Writings, 77, 78.](#)

There is a strain of spiritualism coming in among our people, and it will undermine the faith of those who give place to it, leading them to give heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils....

I could say much regarding the sanctuary; the ark containing the law of God; the cover of the ark, which is the mercy seat; the angels at either end of the ark; and other things connected with the heavenly sanctuary and with the great day of atonement. I could say much regarding the mysteries of heaven; but my lips are closed. I have no inclination to describe them....

I am instructed to say that there is nothing in the word of God to substantiate your spiritualistic theories. You have followed the enemy step by step, striving to look into mysteries too high and holy for your comprehension. Then in your teaching the Holy One has been brought down to man's scientific, spiritualistic ideas....

[161]

Heaven is not a vapor. It is a *place*. Christ has gone to prepare mansions for those who love Him, those who, in obedience to His commands, come out from the world, and are separate....

Ever since I was seventeen years old, I have had to fight this battle against false theories, in defense of the truth. The history of our past experience is indelibly fixed in my mind and I am determined that no theories of the order that you have been accepted shall come into our ranks.—[Letter 253, 1903.](#)

A number of other statements from sources published and unpublished could be presented here. Some of these go further than

the above statements. In one such presentation published in 1904 Ellen White declared:

The spiritualistic theories regarding the personality of God, followed to their logical conclusion, sweep away the whole Christian economy.—*Spec. Test.*, Series B, No. 7, p. 54. (Republished in [Selected Messages 1:204](#).)

The Heavenly Sanctuary

It is of interest to note that in this connection Ellen White not only deals firmly with the personality of God in contrast to any “spiritualistic” views but also mentions the *heavenly sanctuary* and the *ark* and so forth and *the reality of heaven as a place*. The three seem closely linked together, and indeed it is in the latter two areas that questions sometimes arise in discussions today.

The apostle John and Ellen White describe what they saw in vision. There is every evidence that Ellen White considered the sanctuary in heaven real.

While the pantheistic crisis was still raging Ellen White wrote:

They [the children of God] will not, by their works and acts, lead any one to doubt in regard to the distinct personality of God, or in regard to the sanctuary and its ministry.

We all need to keep the subject of the sanctuary in mind. God forbid that the clatter of words coming from human lips should lessen the belief of our people in the truth that there is a sanctuary in heaven, and that a pattern of this sanctuary was once built on this earth. God desires His people to become familiar with this pattern, keeping ever before their minds the heavenly sanctuary, where God is all and in all. We must keep our minds braced by prayer and a study of God’s word, that we may grasp these truths.—[Letter 233, 1904](#).

[162]

The next year at the General Conference session she warned:

In the future, deception of every kind is to arise.... The enemy will bring in false theories, such as the doctrine that there is no sanctuary. This is one of the points on which there will be a departing from the faith.—[The Review and Herald, May 25, 1905](#). (Quoted in [Evangelism, 224](#).)

Ellen White was ever clear concerning the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and its furnishings. Note the following quotation, published in 1884:

In their investigation they [our spiritual forefathers] learned, that the earthly sanctuary, built by Moses at the command of God, according to the pattern shown him in the mount, was “a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices;” that its two holy places were “patterns of things in the heavens;” that Christ, our great High Priest, is “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.”...

The sanctuary in Heaven, in which Jesus ministers in our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy....

The matchless splendor of the earthly tabernacle reflected to human vision the glories of that heavenly temple where Christ our forerunner ministers for us before the throne of God.

As the sanctuary on earth had two apartments, the holy and the most holy, so there are two holy places in the sanctuary in Heaven. And the ark containing the law of God, the altar of incense, and other instruments of service found in the sanctuary below, have also their counterpart in the sanctuary above. In holy vision the apostle John was permitted to enter Heaven, and he there beheld the candlestick and the altar of incense, and as “the temple of God was opened,” he beheld also “the ark of his testament.” ([Revelation 4:5; 8:3; 11:19](#).)

Those who were seeking for the truth found indisputable proof of the existence of a sanctuary in Heaven. Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern which was shown him. Paul declares that that pattern was the true sanctuary which is in Heaven. John testifies that he saw it in Heaven.—[The Spirit of Prophecy 4:260, 261](#).

And Ellen White might have added that she too saw this sanctuary and its furnishings. In the vision confirming the Sabbath truth given in Topsham, Maine, April 3, 1847, she seemed to be carried by an angel “from the earth to the Holy City.” Then she describes what she saw:

In the city I saw a temple.... I passed into the holy place. Here I saw the altar of incense, the candlestick with seven lamps, and the table on which was the shewbread.... I passed into the holy of holies. In the holiest I saw an ark.... Jesus stood by the ark.—[Early Writings, 32](#).

In 1858 Ellen White wrote on this point:

I was shown a Sanctuary upon earth containing two apartments. It resembled the one in heaven. I was told that it was the earthly Sanctuary, a figure of the heavenly. The furniture of the first apartment of the earthly Sanctuary was like that in the first apartment of the heavenly. The veil was lifted, and I looked into the Holy of Holies, and saw that the furniture was the same as in the Most Holy place of the heavenly Sanctuary.—[Spiritual Gifts 1:160, 161](#).

Speaking in Sweden in 1886 concerning the sanctity of the Sabbath she said:

I warn you, Do not place your influence against God’s commandments. That law is just as Jehovah wrote it in the temple of heaven. Man may trample upon its copy here below, but the original is kept in

the ark of God in heaven; and on the cover of this ark, right above that law, is the mercy seat. Jesus stands right there before that ark to mediate for man.—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on [Exodus 31:18](#), p. 1109.

[164] Although this matter was opened up to Ellen White in vision many times and she wrote of it for the church and for the world, she never indicated that what was revealed on these points merely conveyed certain truths and thus was without reality. She ever contends for the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, its furnishing and its services. If what she saw was but a figure, would she not have made this known? She firmly held that God makes clear the truths He intends to convey:

God speaks to the human family in language they can comprehend. He does not leave the matter so indefinite that human beings can handle it according to their theories.—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers](#), 136.

The Reality of the Reward

Concerning the New Jerusalem and the new earth she is equally positive as to the realities:

Adam is reinstated in his first dominion. Transported with joy, he beholds the trees that were once his delight—the very trees whose fruit he himself had gathered in the days of his innocence and joy. He sees the vines that his own hands have trained, the very flowers that he once loved to care for. His mind grasps the reality of the scene; he comprehends that this is indeed Eden restored.—[The Great Controversy](#), 648.

A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions

for them in the Father's house.—[The Great Controversy, 674, 675.](#)

We repeat the principle enunciated by Terry:

It is an old and oft-repeated hermeneutical principle that words should be understood in their literal sense unless such literal interpretation involves a contradiction or absurdity.

Ellen White Guided to the Fundamental Principles

We now turn to some practical related matters that may be profitable to consider here. In Ellen White's endeavor to convey truth in such a way that it might be readily accepted she often followed the course of presenting general principles, hoping that the hearer might grasp them and apply them in his personal experience. The Spirit of Prophecy was given to make us a strong people, not a weak people merely following dictates of a higher power. We are to grasp the principles set forth and apply them in our own lives. We are a people who live by principle. In giving counsel to a physician she wrote: [165]

I was carried from one sickroom to another where Dr.-----was the physician. In some cases I was made sad to see a great inefficiency. He did not have sufficient knowledge to understand what the case demanded, and what was essential to be done to baffle disease. The One of authority that has often instructed me, said, "Young man, you are not a close student. You skim the surface. You must make close study, make use of your opportunities, learn more; and what lessons you learn, learn thoroughly. You go too lightly loaded. It is a solemn thing to have human life in your hands, where any mistake you may make, any neglect of deep insight on your part, may cut short the existence of those who might live. This danger would be lessened, if the physician had more thorough intelligence how to treat the sick."

I never have written this to you, but I have presented all, in a general manner, without applying it to your case. I feel now that you should know these things, that the light that has been given to the workers at the sanitarium, in some things meant you. I tell you in the spirit of love for your soul, and with an interest in your success as a medical practitioner, you must drink deeper at the fountain of knowledge, before you are prepared to be first or alone in an institution for the sick.—[Letter 7, 1887](#).

Somewhat in the same vein William C. White reports on a meeting in Australia at which certain questions on points in a sensitive area were brought to the union conference committee at which Ellen White was invited to be present:

[166]

I read the letters which you enclosed to me, and Elder Colcord read extracts from your letters to him. Then the principles were briefly discussed, but as our brethren seemed most desirous of hearing from mother, she occupied most of the time.

As you are Well aware mother seldom answers such questions directly; but she endeavors to lay down principles and bring forward facts which have been presented to her that will aid us in giving intelligent study to the subject, and in arriving at a correct conclusion.—*W. C. White Letter to A. O. Tait, Nov. 22, 1895.*

The Principles Are Clear

It is well for us to study the Spirit of Prophecy counsels to find the principles involved in them, for each individual is constantly making choices, and these choices should be guided by principles. The application of these principles may change as circumstances change, but principle never changes. This fact is sometimes overlooked as certain counsels of earlier years are mentioned.

As study is given to the counsels set before the church in the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy it is well to search for

the underlying principles that support the counsels. It is proper to ask, “Why?” and then to single out the fundamental elements. This having been done, the individual is prepared to make right decisions in other cases where these principles may come into play.

Although the principles are often seen through the specific counsels, they are not always singled out by Ellen White. She may write, as she did in 1903 in [Education](#), 216, 217: “If girls ... could learn to harness and drive a horse ... they would be better fitted to meet the emergencies of life.” Looking at it several decades after the words were penned, we do not cast the counsel aside as for another age, but we see clearly the point that girls should be so trained that they will be self-sufficient and well prepared for everyday responsibilities of life. It is not difficult to apply the principle to driver training, for example.

Ellen White may write, as she did in 1894, of “a bicycle craze” in which money was spent “to gratify an enthusiasm.” This bewitching infatuation called for “time and money” to gratify “supposed wants.” Each was trying to “excel the other,” and this idea led to a “spirit of strife and contention” as to who “should be the greatest” [Testimonies for the Church](#) 8:51, 52. [167]

Written at a time when the bicycle was a rich man’s toy and every member of the family wanted “a wheel,” even at the cost of \$100 or \$120, they involved Adventist youth in mortgaging their incomes far into the future to buy bicycles. The counsel was timely. Within seven years the same bicycle could be purchased new for \$10 to \$18 and a used one for \$2, and it became the most economical and one of the most useful means of transportation.

The specific application within the connotations of the 1894 counsel concerning bicycles no longer applies in the same way today. One need not search far, however, in this article to find principles valuable to the Christian as they may touch the seeking of status, undue expenditure of means, wasting of time, and the cultivation of the spirit of rivalry, et cetera.

In *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, Ellen White mentions ball games (see pp. 274, 456, 350). In the first mention, under the heading “Manual Labor Versus Games,” she declares:

The public feeling is that manual labor is degrading, yet men may exert themselves as much as they choose at cricket, baseball, or in pugilistic contests, without being regarded as degraded.

[168] She speaks of Satan's delight when "he sees human beings using their physical and mental powers in that which does not educate, which is not useful, which does not help them to be a blessing to those who need their help." *Ibid.* The principles involved stand out more boldly in the light of the closing comment that games can be set in operation which "will so confuse the senses of the youth that God and heaven will be forgotten" [Testimonies for the Church 8:275](#).

Keeping in mind that good exegesis will take into consideration all materials available on a given point, we turn to other E. G. White statements to find the basic principles clearly enunciated. They appear in [Selected Messages 2:321-324](#), and [The Adventist Home, 499, 500](#).

"I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball," Ellen White wrote to a young man who had made inquiry of her (see [The Adventist Home, 499](#)). In other words, there is nothing inherently wrong with playing a game in which a ball is used. Then she continues in a statement that presents principle after principle underlying the cautions she has sounded. To these all should be alert:

"But this," she continued, "even in its simplicity, may be overdone.

"I shrink always from the almost sure result which follows in the wake of these amusements. It leads to an outlay of means that should be expended in bringing the light of truth to souls that are perishing out of Christ. The amusements and expenditures of means for self-pleasing, which lead on step by step to self-glorifying, and the educating in these games for pleasure produce a love and passion for such things that is not favorable to the perfection of Christian character." [The Adventist Home, 499](#).

As she continues she declares that "the way" these sports had been conducted at the [Battle Creek] college does not "strengthen the intellect" or "refine ... the character." Those involved became

so engrossed and infatuated that in heaven they were pronounced “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

“The Lord God of heaven,” she declared, “protests against the burning passion cultivated for supremacy in the games that are so engrossing.” [The Adventist Home, 500.](#)

Ellen White was not unsympathetic to Christian youth engaging in games in which a ball may be used. However, the young man or woman is alerted to certain perils through the enumeration of the underlying principles. The young person seeking to avoid subtle pitfalls will keep the eye single to the glory of God. A frequent review of these principles will establish guidelines in his choice of what to play and what not to play and the extent of involvement in this type of recreation acceptable in itself. [169]

There is the statement that “study in agricultural lines should be the A, B, and C of the education given in our schools” [Testimonies for the Church 6:179.](#) Although presented in the setting of the value of the garden and farm to the boarding school, this statement that links agriculture with education upon thoughtful perusal reveals that it has more than economic intent.

Even with mechanical farming, which reduces the raising of food crops to an ever-shrinking proportion of population, the reading of other counsels concerning the important place of gardening in the experience of the child and the adult, as well as the invalid, makes it clear that it is not the size of the venture nor its ultimate economic value but rather the basic lessons learned, the satisfaction gained, and the therapeutic value in agricultural pursuits that establish agriculture as “the A, B, and C of the education given in our schools.”

The quest for the basic principles in each line of counsel will yield rich returns. It will call for the reading of statements in their setting plus going back and reading beyond the statement in question. It will lead to the reading of other statements touching on the same topic. To assist in this study the three-volume *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* is a valuable tool.

This sort of study of the Spirit of Prophecy counsels as they touch on the many facets of life and experience will disclose principles invaluable to the Christian in making day-by-day decisions. [170]

In conclusion it may be said that when Ellen White spoke or wrote she meant what she said.

In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit. There was never a time when God instructed His people more earnestly than He instructs them now concerning His will and the course that He would have them pursue.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:661](#).

Appendix A—Our Use of the Visions of Sister White [171]

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(An Editorial by J. N. Andrews)

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It is quite generally understood that the Seventh-day Adventists are believers in the perpetuity of spiritual gifts. It is also understood that we regard the visions of Sr. White as given by the Spirit of God. But the use which we make of the doctrine of spiritual gifts, and particularly of the visions of Sr. White, is very generally misunderstood.

1. We understand that the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired, and that they contain the truth of God which is able to make us wise unto salvation.

2. But we do not understand that the gift of the Scriptures to mankind, supersedes the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God.

3. On the contrary, we do believe that the Scriptures plainly reveal the office and work of the Holy Spirit; which office and work can never cease while man remains upon probation.

4. This work of the Holy Spirit is revealed to us in the Bible doctrine of spiritual gifts.

5. While therefore we do heartily accept the Scriptures as teaching man's whole duty toward God, we do not deny the Holy Spirit that place in the church which the Scriptures assign to it.

6. The office of the Holy Spirit is to reprove men of sin ([John 16:8](#)); to take away the carnal mind, and to change our evil nature by removing guilt from the conscience; to make us new creatures ([Romans 8:1-9](#)); and to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God ([Romans 5:5](#)); and to bear witness with our spirits that we are the children of God ([Romans 8:16](#)); and to lead

into all truth ([John 16:13](#)); and finally to change the saints to immortality at the last day. [Romans 8:11](#); [2 Corinthians 5:4, 5](#).

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7. The Scriptures contain the truth of God, as the precious metals are contained in a mine. The work of the Spirit of God in leading man into all truth is to search out, lay open, bring to light and vindicate the truth of God. And in reproofing sin, it has not only the work of impressing the conscience of the sinner by powerful convictions of guilt, but also in showing to chosen servants of God the guilt of others; and revealing wrongs which otherwise would remain hidden to the great detriment of the church, and to the ruin of the sinner.

8. The work of the Holy Spirit may be divided into two parts: First, that which is designed simply to convert and to sanctify the person affected by it. Second, that which is for the purpose of opening the truth of God, and of correcting error, and of reproofing and rebuking secret sins. This part of the work is wrought by what the Scriptures term spiritual gifts. These exist, not for the especial good of the person to whose trust they are committed, but for the benefit of the whole body of the church.

9. Now it is plain that those who reject the work of the Spirit of God under the plea that the Scriptures are sufficient, do deny and reject all that part of the Bible which reveals the office and work of the Holy Spirit.

10. Thus [1 Corinthians 12](#), and [Ephesians 4](#), which define the gifts of the Spirit of God, cannot really form a part of the rule of life of those who affirm that the Scriptures are so sufficient in themselves that the gifts of the Spirit are unnecessary.

11. The Spirit of God gave the Scriptures. But it is plain that it did not give them for the purpose of shutting itself out from all participation in the work of God among men. And what the Bible says of the gifts

of the Spirit shows just what relation the Spirit of God sustains to the work of the gospel.

12. Thus Paul states the matter in two of his epistles:

1 Corinthians 12:4-11: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same spirit; to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”

Ephesians 4:11-13: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

13. Now the Bible expressly teaches that the existence of these gifts is as necessary to the church of Christ, as the different members are necessary to the well-being of the body. While, therefore, the Bible recognizes the gifts of the Spirit, these are not given to supersede the Bible, nor yet to fill the same place as the Bible.

14. The object of spiritual gifts is to maintain the living work of God in the church. They enable the Spirit of God to speak in the correction of wrongs, and in the exposure of iniquity. They are the means whereby God teaches His people when they are in danger of taking wrong steps. They are the means by which the Spirit of God sheds light upon church difficulties, when other-

wise their adjustment would be impossible. They also constitute the means whereby God preserves His people from confusion by pointing out errors, by correcting false interpretations of the Scriptures, and causing light to shine out upon that which is in danger of being wrongly understood, and therefore of being the cause of evil and division to the people of God. In short, their work is to unite the people of God in the same mind and in the same judgment upon the meaning of the Scriptures. Mere human judgment, with no direct instruction from Heaven, can never search out hidden iniquity, nor adjust dark and complicated church difficulties, nor prevent different and conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures. It would be sad indeed if God could not still converse with his people.

15. But here it is proper to say that these uses of the gifts of the Spirit pertain almost wholly to the household of faith. Men who have no acquaintance with them cannot be affected by them. And also, when men have had little opportunity to be acquainted with the manifestations of the Spirit of God, they cannot be asked to accept such work as specially wrought by God. It is but just that they should have clear and convincing evidence for themselves that the Spirit of God is in the work.

16. For this purpose we hold that all the tests presented in the Bible should be applied to the gifts, and that they should be found to sustain the test of such examination.

17. We therefore do not test the world in any manner by these gifts. Nor do we in our intercourse with other religious bodies who are striving to walk in the fear of God, in any way make these a test of Christian character. Upon none of these persons do we urge these manifestations of the Spirit of God, nor test them by their teaching.

18. There is such a thing, however, as men having in the providence of God an opportunity to become acquainted with the special work of the Spirit of God, so

that they shall acknowledge that their light is clear, convincing, and satisfactory. To such persons, we consider the gifts of the Spirit are clearly a test. Not only has God spoken, but they have had opportunity to ascertain that fact, and to know it for themselves. In all such cases, spiritual gifts are manifestly a test that cannot be disregarded except at the peril of eternal ruin.

19. One of the chief gifts of the Spirit of God that he has placed in the New Testament church is the gift of prophecy. [Joel 2:28](#); [Acts 2:1-4, 17, 18](#); [1 Corinthians 12:1-31](#); [14:1-5](#); [Ephesians 4:11-13](#). This gift the Bible connects with the closing work of this dispensation. [Revelation 12:17](#); [14:12](#); [19:10](#). Spiritual gifts do not, therefore, cease to be of importance in the sight of God, nor in that of his true people. And that message which is to accomplish the perfecting of the saints and to fit them for translation, has the Spirit of God connected with it, and speaking out in the management of its work.

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20. Finally, in the reception of members into our churches, we desire on this subject to know two things: 1. That they believe the Bible doctrine of Spiritual gifts; 2. That they will candidly acquaint themselves with the visions of Sr. White, which have ever held so prominent place in this work. We believe that every person standing thus and carrying out this purpose will be guided in the way of truth and righteousness. And those who occupy this ground, are never denied all the time they desire to decide in this matter.

—[The Review and Herald, February 15, 1870.](#)

Appendix B—The Inspiration of the Evangelists and Other New Testament Writers

Henry Alford, D.D.

Back in the days when Ellen White was living, her staff considered the Henry Alford statement on the inspiration of the Evangelists and other New Testament writers to be of great value in that he seemed to grasp a concept of inspiration that is well supported by facts they were familiar with, as demonstrated in the work of Ellen G. White. The White Estate staff through the years in its work with the E. G. White materials has reached similar conclusions and heartily recommends Dr. Alford's statement as being helpful in understanding inspiration. Alford was an Episcopalian clergyman, Dean of Canterbury, and a contemporary of Ellen G. White.

1. The results of our inquiries hitherto may be thus stated:—That our three Gospels have arisen independently of one another, from sources of information possessed by the Evangelists:—such sources of information, for a very considerable part of their contents, being the narrative teaching of the Apostles; and, in cases where their personal testimony was out of question, oral or documentary narratives, preserved in and received by the Christian Church in the apostolic age;—that the three Gospels are not formal, complete accounts of the whole incidents of the sacred history, but each of them fragmentary, containing such portions of it as fell within the notice, or the special design, of the Evangelist.

2. The important question now comes before us, *In what sense are the Evangelists to be regarded as having been inspired by the Holy Spirit of God?* That they were

so, in some sense, has been the concurrent belief of the Christian body in all ages. In the *second*, as in the *nineteenth* century, the ultimate appeal, in matters of fact and doctrine, has been to these venerable writings. It may be well then first to inquire on what grounds their authority has been rated so high by all Christians.

3. And I believe the answer to this question will be found to be, *Because* they are regarded as authentic documents, descending from the apostolic age, and presenting to us the substance of the apostolic testimony. The Apostles being raised up for the special purpose of witnessing to the Gospel history,—and these memoirs having been universally received in the early church as embodying their testimony, I see no escape left from the inference, that they come to us with inspired authority. The Apostles themselves, and their contemporaries in the ministry of the Word, were singularly endowed with the Holy Spirit for the founding and teaching of the Church; and Christians of all ages have accepted the Gospels and other writings of the New Testament as the written result of the Pentecostal effusion. The early Church was not likely to be deceived in this matter. The reception of the Gospels was immediate and universal...

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4. Upon the authenticity, i.e. the *apostolicity* of our Gospels, rests their claim to inspiration. Containing the substance of the Apostles' testimony, they carry with them that special power of the Holy Spirit which rested on the Apostles in virtue of their office, and also on other teachers and preachers of the first age. It may be well then to inquire of what kind that power was, and how far extending.

5. We do not find the Apostles transformed, from being men of individual character and thought and feeling, into mere channels for the transmission of infallible truth. We find them, humanly speaking, to have been still distinguished by the same characteristics as before the descent of the Holy Ghost. We see Peter still ardent and impetuous, still shrinking from the danger of

human disapproval;—we see John still exhibiting the same union of deep love and burning zeal;—we find them pursuing different paths of teaching, exhibiting different styles of writing, taking hold of the truth from different sides.

6. Again, we do not find the Apostles *put in possession at once* of the divine counsel with regard to the Church. Though Peter and John were full of the Holy Ghost immediately after the Ascension, neither at that time, nor for many months afterwards, were they put in possession of the purpose of God regarding the Gentiles, which in due time was specially revealed to Peter, and recognized in the apostolic council at Jerusalem.

7. These considerations serve to show us in what respects the working of the Holy Spirit on the sacred writers was analogous to His influence on every believer in Christ; viz. in the retention of individual character and thought and feeling,—and in the gradual development of the ways and purposes of God to their minds.

8. But their situation and office was *peculiar and unexampled*. And for its fulfillment, peculiar and unexampled gifts were bestowed upon them. One of these, which bears very closely upon our present subject, was, the *recalling by the Holy Spirit of those things which the Lord had said to them*. This was His own formal promise, recorded in [John 14:26](#). And if we look at our present Gospels, we see abundant evidence of its fulfillment.

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What unassisted human memory could treasure up saying and parable, however deep the impression at the time, and report them in full at the distance of several years, as we find them reported, with every internal mark of truthfulness in our Gospels? What invention of man could have devised discourses which by common consent differ from all sayings of men—which possess this character unaltered notwithstanding their transmission through men of various mental organization—which

contain things impossible to be understood or appreciated by their reporters at the time when they profess to have been uttered—which enwrap the seeds of all human improvement yet attained, and are evidently full of power for more? ...

9. And let us pursue the matter further by analogy. Can we suppose that the light poured by the Holy Spirit upon the *sayings* of our Lord would be confined to such sayings, and not extend itself over the other parts of the narrative of His life on earth? Can we believe that those miracles, which though not uttered in words, were yet *acted parables*, would not be, under the same gracious assistance, brought back to the minds of the Apostles, so that they should be placed on record for the teaching of the Church?

10. And, going yet further, to those parts of the Gospels which were wholly out of the cycle of the Apostles' own testimony,—can we imagine that the divine discrimination which enabled them to detect the “lie to the Holy Ghost,” should have forsaken them in judging of the records of our Lord's birth and infancy,—so that they should have taught or sanctioned an apocryphal, fabulous, or mythical account of such matters? *Some account* of them must have been current in the apostolic circle; for Mary the mother of Jesus survived the Ascension, and would be fully capable of giving undoubted testimony to the facts. (See notes on [Luke 1:2](#).) Can we conceive then that, *with her among them*, the Apostles should have delivered other than a true history of these things? Can we suppose that St. Luke's account, which he includes among the things *delivered by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word* from the first, is other than the true one, and stamped with the authority of the witnessing and discriminating Spirit dwelling in the Apostles? ...

11. But if it be inquired, *how far* such divine superintendence has extended in the *framing of our Gospels as we at present find them*, the answer must be furnished

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by no preconceived idea of what ought to have been, but by *the contents of the Gospels themselves*. That those contents are *various*, and *variously arranged*, is token enough, that in their selection and disposition we have human agency presented to us, under no more direct divine guidance, in this respect, than that *general leading*, which in main and essential points should ensure entire accordance. Such leading admits of much variety in points of minor consequence. Two men may be equally led by the Holy Spirit to record the events of our Lord's life for our edification, though one may believe and record, that the visit to the Gadarenes took place before the calling of Matthew, while the other places it after that event; though one in narrating it speaks of two demoniacs,—the other, only of one.

12. And it is observable, that in the only place in the three Gospels where an Evangelist speaks of himself, he expressly lays claim, not to any supernatural guidance in the arrangement of his subject-matter, but to a diligent tracing down of all things from the first; in other words, to the care and accuracy of a faithful and honest compiler. After such an avowal on the part of the editor himself, to assert an immediate revelation to him of the *arrangement to be adopted* and the *chronological notices to be given*, is clearly not justified, according to his own showing and assertion. The value of such arrangement and chronological connection must depend on various circumstances in each case:—on their definiteness and consistency,—on their agreement or disagreement with the other extant records; the preference being in each case given to that one whose account is the most minute in details, and whose notes of sequence are the most distinct.

13. In thus speaking, I am doing no more than even the most scrupulous of our Harmonizers have in fact done. In the case alluded to in paragraph 11, *there is not one of them who has not altered the arrangement*, either of Matthew, or of Mark, and Luke, so as to bring

the visit to the Gadarenes into the same part of the Evangelic history. But, if *the arrangement itself* were *matter of divine inspiration*, then have we *no right to vary* it in the slightest degree, but must maintain (as the Harmonists have done in other cases, but never, that I am aware, in this), *two distinct visits to have been made at different times, and nearly the same events to have occurred at both*. I need hardly add that a similar method of proceeding with all the variations in the Gospels, *which would on this supposition be necessary*, would render the Scripture narrative a heap of improbabilities; and strengthen, instead of weakening, the cause of the enemies of our faith.

14. And not only of the *arrangement* of the Evangelic history are these remarks to be understood. There are certain minor points of accuracy or inaccuracy, of which human research suffices to inform men, and on which, from want of that research, it is often the practice to speak vaguely and inexactly. Such are sometimes the conventionally received distances from place to place; such are the common accounts of phenomena in natural history, etc. Now in matters of this kind, the Evangelists and Apostles were not supernaturally informed, but left, in common with others, to the guidance of their natural faculties.

15. The same may be said of citations and dates from history. In the last apology of Stephen, in which he spoke, being full of the Holy Ghost, and with divine influence beaming from his countenance, we have at least two demonstrable inaccuracies in points of minor detail. And the occurrence of similar ones in the Gospels would not in any way affect the inspiration or the veracity of the Evangelists.

16. It may be well to mention one notable illustration of the principles upheld in this section. What can be more undoubted and unanimous than the testimony of the Evangelists to *the resurrection of the Lord*? If there be one fact rather than another of which the Apos-

bles were witnesses, *it was this*: and in the concurrent narrative of all four Evangelists it stands related beyond all cavil or question. Yet of all the events which they have described, *none is so variously put forth in detail*, or with so many minor discrepancies. And this was just what might have been expected, on the principles above laid down. The great fact that the Lord *was risen*,—set forth by the ocular witness of the Apostles, who had seen Him,—became from that day first in importance in the delivery of their testimony. The *precise order* of His appearances would naturally, from the overwhelming nature of their present emotions, be a matter of minor consequence, and perhaps not even of accurate enquiry till some time had passed. Then, with the utmost desire on the part of the women and Apostles to collect the events in their exact order of time, some confusion would be apparent in the history, and some discrepancies in versions of it which were the results of separate and independent enquiries; the traces of which pervade our present accounts. But what fair-judging student of the Gospels ever made these variations or discrepancies a ground for doubting the veracity of the Evangelists as to the fact of the Resurrection, or the principal details of the Lord's appearances after it?

17. It will be well to state the bearing of the opinions advanced in this section on two terms in common use, viz., *verbal* and *plenary* inspiration.

18. With regard to *verbal inspiration*, I take the sense of it, as explained by its most strenuous advocates, to be, that every word and phrase of the Scriptures is absolutely and separately true,—and, whether narrative, or discourse, took place, or was said, in every most exact particular as set down. Much might be said of the *a priori* unworthiness of such a theory, as applied to a Gospel whose character is the freedom of the Spirit, not the bondage of the letter; but it belongs more to my present work to try it by applying it to the Gospels as we have them. And I do not hesitate to say, that being

thus applied, its effect will be to destroy altogether the credibility of our Evangelists. Hardly a single instance of parallelism between them arises, where they do not relate the same thing indeed in substance, but expressed in terms which if literally taken are incompatible with each other. To cite only one obvious instance. The *Title over the Cross* was written in Greek, and being reported in Greek by the Evangelists, must represent not the Latin or Hebrew forms, but *the Greek form*, of the inscription. According then to the verbal-inspiration theory, each Evangelist has recorded the *exact words* of the inscription; *not the general sense*, but the *inscription* itself,—*not a letter less or more*. This is absolutely necessary to the theory. Its advocates must not be allowed, with convenient inconsistency, to take refuge in a common-sense view of the matter wherever their theory fails them, and still to uphold it in the main. And how it will here apply, the following comparison will show:

Matthew, *This is Jesus the King of the Jews.*

Mark, *The King of the Jews.*

Luke, *This is the King of the Jews.*

John, *Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*

Of course it must be understood, that *I* regard the above variations in the form of the inscription as in fact no discrepancies at all. They entirely prevent our saying with perfect precision what was the form of the inscription, but they leave us the spirit and substance of it. In all such cases I hold with the great Augustine, whose words I have cited in my note on Matt. XIV, when treating of the varying reports of the words spoken by the Apostles to our Lord during the storm on the lake of Galilee,—and cannot forbear citing here again: “*The sense of the Disciples waking the Lord and seeking to be saved, is one and the same: nor is it worth while to enquire, which of these three was really said to Christ. For whether they said any one of these three, or other words, which no one of the Evangelists has mentioned,*

but of similar import as to the truth of the sense, what matters it?"

19. Another objection to the theory is, that if it be so, the Christian world is left in uncertainty what her Scriptures are, as long as the sacred text is full of various readings. *Some one manuscript must be pointed out to us*, which carries the weight of verbal inspiration, or *some text whose authority shall be undoubted*, must be promulgated. But manifestly neither of these things can ever happen. To the latest age, the reading of some important passages will be matter of doubt in the Church; and, which is equally subversive of the theory, though not of equal importance in itself, there is hardly a sentence in the whole of the Gospels in which there are not varieties of diction in our principal MSS., baffling all attempts to decide which was its original form.

20. The fact is, that this theory uniformly gives way before intelligent study of the Scriptures themselves; and is only held, consistently and thoroughly, by those who have never undertaken that study. When put forth by those who have, it is never carried fairly through; but while broadly asserted, is in detail abandoned.

21. If I understand *plenary inspiration rightly*, I hold it to the utmost, as entirely consistent with the opinions expressed in this section. The inspiration of the sacred writers I believe to have consisted in the fulness of the influence of the Holy Spirit especially raising them to, and enabling them for, their work,—*in a manner which distinguishes them from all other writers in the world, and their work from all other works*. The men were full of the Holy Ghost—the books are the pouring out of that fulness through the men,—the conservation of the treasure in earthen vessels. The treasure is ours, in all its richness: but it is ours as only it can be ours,—in the imperfections of human speech, in the limitations of human thought, in the variety incident first to individual character, and then to manifold transcription and the lapse of ages.

22. Two things, in concluding this section, I would earnestly impress on my readers. First, that we must take our views of inspiration not, as is too often done, from *a priori* considerations, but *entirely from the evidence furnished by the Scriptures themselves*: and secondly, that the *men were inspired, the books are the results of that inspiration*. This latter consideration, if all that it implies be duly weighed, will furnish us with the key to the whole question.

—*The New Testament for English Readers,*

Vol. 1, Chapter 1, Section 6, pp. 20-27.

From the Deanery, Canterbury, May 4, 1863.

Alford's *Footnote to Paragraph 12*: To suppose St. Luke to have written "It seemed good to me also," if he were under the *conscious* inspiration of the Holy Spirit, superseding all his own mental powers and faculties, would be to charge him with ascribing to his own diligence and selection that which was furnished to him independently of both. Yet to this are the asserters of *verbal* inspiration committed.

Alford's *Footnote to Paragraph 18*: This has been done, as far as I have seen, in all remarks of verbal-inspirationists on this part of my Introduction to the Greek Testament. A most curious idea has been propounded on the example above given, viz., that by forcing into accord the words of the title in Mark and Luke, and believing it to represent a translation from the *Latin* inscription, we may suppose those in Matthew and John to have been, the one the original *Greek*; the other, a translation from the *Hebrew* (!)

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Appendix C—The 1911 Edition of The Great Controversy

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A statement of approval “great controversy” new editionellen G. White’s statement regarding the 1911 edition of “great controversy”

An Explanation of the Involvements of the 1911 Revision

Great Controversy in its enlarged form was published in the early summer of 1888. Ellen G. White had furnished identical printing plates to both the *Review and Herald* and the Pacific Press. After the establishment of the Southern Publishing Association, it too was supplied with plates. All houses printed from these plates until 1907, when it became necessary to patch some of the badly worn plates. Some reillustrating was done at that time. A few years later it was seen that the worn-out printing plates must be replaced with new ones and that the type for the book must be reset. As explained by Mrs. White, it was this situation that led her to plan a slight revision of the book. It was only natural that any change in the text of an E. G. White book long in circulation would call for a discussion of inspiration and its bearing on the book in question. The statements comprising this document supply the information given at the time the new edition of *Great Controversy* appeared in 1911.

A STATEMENT OF APPROVAL

Yesterday and again this morning I have read the letter written by W. C. White to our General Missionary Agents, and his letter to the members of our Publication Committee, regarding the new edition of “Great Controversy.”

And now I wish to say to you that what he has written regarding my wishes, and decisions, and instruction relative to this work is a true and correct statement.

(Signed) Ellen G. White
St. Helena, California, July 27, 1911
E. G. White [Letter 57, 1911](#)

“GREAT CONTROVERSY” NEW EDITION

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A statement made by W. C. White before the General Conference Council, October 30, 1911.

Addressing the Council, Elder W. C. White said:

“It is with pleasure that I present to you a statement regarding the latest English edition of ‘Great Controversy.’

“About two years ago, we were told that the electrotype plates for this book, in use at the Pacific Press, the Review and Herald, and the International Tract Society (London), were so worn that the book must be reset and new plates made. This work has been done at the Pacific Press. Four sets of plates were made—one for each of our offices in Washington, Mountain View, Nashville, and Watford [England].

“In a letter sent to the managers of our publishing houses, I wrote as follows, on July 24, 1911: ²⁰

“After taking counsel with ministers, canvassers and other friends of the book, we thought best to reset the text so that the new edition would correspond as nearly as possible with the old. And although we could not use exactly the same type, the matter runs nearly page for page. Every chapter in the new edition begins and ends on the same pages as does the corresponding chapter in the old edition.

²⁰Note: This is the same as the letter of the same date that was addressed to “Our General Missionary Agents.”

“The most noticeable change in the new edition is the improvement in the illustrations. Each of the forty-two chapters, together with the Preface, Introduction, Contents, and list of Illustrations, has a beautiful pictorial heading; and ten new full-page illustrations have been introduced, to take the place of those which were least attractive.

“The thirteen Appendix notes of the old edition, occupying thirteen pages, have been replaced by thirty-one notes occupying twelve pages. These are nearly all reference notes, intended to help the studious reader in finding historical proofs of the statements made in the book.

“The Biographical Notes have been omitted, and the general Index has been enlarged from twelve to twenty-two pages, thus greatly facilitating the finding of desired passages.

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“In the body of the book, the most noticeable improvement is the introduction of historical references. In the old edition, over seven hundred biblical references were given, but in only a few instances were there any historical references to the authorities quoted or referred to. In the new edition the reader will find more than four hundred references to eighty-eight authors and authorities.

“When we presented to Mother the request of some of our canvassers, that there should be given in the new edition, not only scripture references, but also references to the historians quoted, she instructed us to hunt up and insert the historical references. She also instructed us to verify the quotations, and to correct any inaccuracies found; and where quotations were made from passages that were rendered differently by different translators, to use that translation which was found to be most correct and authentic.

“The finding of the various passages quoted from historians has been a laborious task, and the verification of the passages quoted has led to some changes in the

wording of the text. This is especially noticeable in the quotations from the “History of the Reformation,” by J. Merle D’Aubigné. It was found that there were six or more English translations, American and British, which varied much in wording, although almost identical in thought; and in the old edition of “Great Controversy” three of these had been used, according to the clearness and beauty of the language. But we learned that only one of these many translations had the approval of the author; that is the one used by the American Tract Society in its later editions. Therefore the quotations from D’Aubigné in this edition of “Great Controversy” have been made to conform in the main to this approved translation.

“In a few instances, new quotations from historians, preachers, and present-day writers, have been used in the place of the old, because they are more forceful, or because we have been unable to find the old ones. In each case where there has been such a change, Mother has given faithful attention to the proposed substitution, and has approved of the change.

“You will find that changes of this character have been made on pages 273, 277, 306-308, 334-335, 387, 547, and 580-581.

“There are still some score or more quotations in the book whose authority we have so far been unable to trace. Fortunately, these relate to matters regarding which there is not a probability of there being any serious contention.

“In spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, changes have been made to bring this book into uniformity of style with the other volumes of this series.

“In eight or ten places, time references have been changed because of the lapse of time since the book was first published.

“In several places, forms of expression have been changed to avoid giving unnecessary offense. An example of this will be found in the change of the word

“Romish” to “Roman” or “Roman Catholic.” In two places the phrase “divinity of Christ” is changed to “deity of Christ.” And the words “religious toleration” have been changed to “religious liberty.”

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“The statements made on pages 285-287, regarding the action of the Assembly, in its blasphemous decrees against religion and the Bible, have been so worded as to show that the Assembly set aside, and afterward restored, not only the Bible, but also God and His worship.

“In the new edition, the rise of the papacy in 538, and its fall in 1798, are spoken of as its “supremacy” and “downfall”, instead of its “establishment” and “abolition”, as in the old edition.

“In each of these places the more accurate form of expression has been duly considered and approved by the author of the book.

“On pages 50, 563-564, 580, 581, and in a few other places where there were statements regarding the papacy which are strongly disputed by Roman Catholics, and which are difficult to prove from accessible histories, the wording in the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily obtainable.

“Regarding these and similar passages, which might stir up bitter and unprofitable controversies, Mother has often said: “What I have written regarding the arrogance and the assumptions of the papacy, is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to Catholics and others, and that needless controversies may be avoided, it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy stated so moderately as to be easily and clearly proved from accepted histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students.”

“If you hear reports that some of the work done on this latest edition was done contrary to Mother’s wish, or without her knowledge, you can be sure that such reports are false, and unworthy of consideration.”

Passages from the old and the new editions were read and compared, to illustrate the statement read from the speaker’s letter of July 24. Then Brother White said:

“Since the printing of this new edition, Mother has taken great pleasure in looking over and rereading the book. Day after day, as I visited her in the morning, she spoke of it, saying that she enjoyed reading it again, and that she was glad that the work we have done to make this edition as perfect as possible, was completed while she was living and could direct in what was done.

“Mother has never claimed to be authority on history. The things which she has written out, are descriptions of flash-light pictures and other representations given her regarding the actions of men, and the influence of these actions upon the work of God for the salvation of men, with views of past, present, and future history in its relation to this work. 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. When I was a mere boy, I heard her read D’Aubigné’s ‘History of the Reformation’ to my father. She read to him a large part, if not the whole, of the five volumes. She has read other histories of the Reformation. This has helped her to locate and describe many of the events and the movements presented to her in vision. This is somewhat similar to the way in which the study of the Bible helps her to locate and describe the many figurative representations given to her regarding the development of the great controversy in our day between truth and error.

“Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration,²¹ and I do not find that my father, or Elder Bates, Andrews, Smith or Waggoner put forth this claim. If there were verbal inspiration in writing her manuscripts, why should there be on her part the work of addition or adaptation? It is a fact that Mother often takes one of her manuscripts, and goes over it thoughtfully, making additions that develop the thought still further.

“The first edition of this book was published in California in 1884. When ‘Spirit of Prophecy,’ Volume III was printed, there was some matter left over. A portion of this was printed in pamphlet form, and circulated; and it was expected that Mother would proceed immediately to add to this matter and bring out Volume IV. Before Father’s death he had advertised the book, ‘Spirit of Prophecy,’ Volume IV.

“When Mother brought out Volume IV, she and those who had to do with its publication had in mind the fulfilment of Father’s plan. We also had in mind that it was written for the Adventist people of the United States. Therefore with much difficulty the matter was compressed so as to bring this volume into about the same size as the other volumes of the series.

“Later on, when it was found that the book could be sold to all people, the publishers took the plates and printed an edition on larger paper. Illustrations were inserted, and an experiment made in selling it as a subscription book at \$1.50.

“In 1885 Mother and I were sent to Europe, and there the question came up regarding its translation into German, French, Danish, and Swedish. As Mother considered this proposition, she decided to make additions to the matter.

“Mother’s contact with European people had brought to her mind scores of things that had been presented to her in vision during past years, some of them

²¹Note: See Introduction to [The Great Controversy](#), 11 and 12.

two or three times, and other scenes many times. Her seeing of historic places and her contact with the people refreshed her memory with reference to these things, and so she desired to add much material to the book. This was done, and the manuscripts were prepared for translation.

“After our return to America, a new edition was brought out much enlarged. In this edition some of the matter used in the first English edition was left out. The reason for these changes was found in the fact that the new edition was intended for world-wide circulation.

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“In her public ministry, Mother has shown an ability to select from the storehouse of truth, matter that is well adapted to the needs of the congregation before her; and she has always thought that, in the selection of matter for publication in her books, the best judgment should be shown in selecting that which is best suited to the needs of those who will read the book.

“Therefore, when the new edition of ‘Great Controversy’ was brought out in 1888, there were left out about twenty pages of matter—four or five pages in a place—which was very instructive to the Adventists of America, but which was not appropriate for readers in other parts of the world.

“Much of the research for historical statements used in the new European and American editions of ‘Great Controversy’ was done in Basel, where we had access to Elder Andrews’ large library, and where the translators had access to the university libraries.

“When we came to go over this matter for the purpose of giving historical references, there were some quotations which we could not find. In some cases there were found other statements making the same point, from other historians. These were in books accessible in many public libraries. When we brought to Mother’s attention a quotation that we could not find, and showed her that there was another quotation that we had found,

which made the same point, she said, 'Use the one you can give reference to, so that the reader of the book, if he wishes to go to the source and find it, can do so.' In that way some historical data have been substituted.

"Now, with reference to the statement that the people at Washington, or the General Conference Committee men, have been doing this or that, right or wrong, in connection with this book, it is important that you should have a clear statement of facts regarding the matter.

"Our brethren at Washington and at Mountain View have done only that which we requested them to do. As stated in the beginning, we took counsel with the men of the Publishing Department, with State canvassing agents, and with members of the publishing committees, not only in Washington, but in California, and I asked them to kindly call our attention to any passages that needed to be considered in connection with the resetting of the book.

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"When it was pointed out that some of the historical data were questioned and challenged, we asked them to give us a written statement that would help us in our research. They did as we requested and nothing more. All decisions as to what should be changed, and what should be printed word for word as in the old edition, were made in Mother's office, by persons in her employ and working under her direction. Therefore there is no occasion for any one to say a word against the General Conference Committee men or the literary men at Washington, or against the book, because of anything done by the brethren in Washington or elsewhere in connection with this work.

"We are very thankful to our brethren in Washington, and to many others, for kind and faithful painstaking labors in looking up those passages that were likely to be challenged by the Catholics and other critics. We are also profoundly thankful to our brethren, in England and on the Continent, and also to brethren in Boston,

New York, and Chicago, for helping to find in the great libraries, and verify, those quotations that were difficult to locate. They have done this work at our request, and to help us in what we thought ought to be done. The uses made of the results of this research, are seen in the historical references at the foot of the page and in the Appendix.

“The Appendix in the old book, as you remember, was partly explanatory, partly argumentative, and partly apologetic; but such notes seemed to us to be no longer necessary, and the thirty-one notes in the new edition are chiefly references to historical statements showing the correctness of the statements made in the book. We felt that it would be of value to the studious reader to have these definite references to the statements of well-known historians.”

ELLEN G. WHITE’S STATEMENT REGARDING THE 1911 EDITION OF “GREAT CONTROVERSY”

Sanitarium, Cal., July 25, 1911

Dear Brother Wilcox:

A few days ago I received a copy of the new edition of the book “Great Controversy,” recently printed at Mountain View, and also a similar copy printed at Washington. The book pleases me. I have spent many hours looking through its pages, and I see that the publishing houses have done good work.

The book “Great Controversy” I appreciate above silver or gold, and I greatly desire that it shall come before the people. While writing the manuscript of “Great Controversy,” I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God. And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind.

Recently it was necessary for this book to be reset, because the electrotypes were badly worn. It has cost me much to have this done, but I do not complain; for whatever the cost may be, I regard this new edition with great satisfaction.

Yesterday I read what W. C. White has recently written to Canvassing Agents and responsible men at our publishing houses regarding this latest edition of "Great Controversy," and I think he has presented the matter correctly and well.

When I learned that "Great Controversy" must be reset, I determined that we would have everything closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages.

As a result of the thorough examination by our most experienced workers, some changing in the wording has been proposed. These changes I have carefully examined, and approved. I am thankful that my life has been spared, and that I have strength and clearness of mind for this and other literary work....

(Signed) Ellen Gould White
E. G. White [Letter 56, 1911](#)