

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 151

“The Credibility of Ellen White”

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Editorial Reflections

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JULY 4TH: A SPECIAL CELEBRATION FOR OUR FAMILY

It was on July 4, 1974, that our family of five landed at the Kennedy International airport in New York City. This past week, on July 4, 2006, we took time to reminisce at the providential way the Lord led our family from Italy to America. This event was the turning point in the life of each member of our family.

While Americans celebrate on July 4th with pomp and ceremonies the birth of their nation, our family celebrates also with thankful hearts (without fireworks) the beginning of a new life in this country.

As we look back to the past 32 years we have lived a mile away from the campus of Andrews University, we can truly say: Thank you Lord for leading us to this country where our three children have received an excellent Christian education and where my ministry of research and preaching has developed into a worldwide outreach.

Contrary to the million of illegal immigrants who attempt to come to the USA at great risks and expenses in order to improve their socio-economic conditions, our family came to America legally, at the invitation of Andrews University where I served for 26 years as a Professor of Church History and Theology. We came to America, not to improve our economic conditions, but to offer our children a Christian education and to expand my ministry of research and lecturing.

Financially, the Lord blessed us abundantly during the five years I spent studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University. To support our

family, I became a part-time Real Estate Agent, which proved to be a very lucrative profession. Fortunately, we were living in a new development with over 1000 lots for sale close to the seaside (Ostia). The demand for land and houses was great. Practically every day people were waiting at our home for me to come back from the university, so that I could help them to buy a lot or build a home. My father was a builder so we worked very well together.

During the five years I spent studying at the Gregoriana, I sold over 100 lots and arranged for building several homes. As you can imagine, my life was intense. It has always been that way. It seems that I function better when I have a lot to do.

By the time I finished my doctorate and we were ready to come to Andrews, we could count the blessings the Lord had bestowed upon our family. We owned two beautiful villas and had in our bank account more money than we have today. If money-making was the primary goal of my life, then there was no reason to come to America. The Real Estate business I started in Rome, provided me with far greater income than a teaching job at Andrews University.

But there is more to life than making money. Jesus said: “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” (Matt 16:26). Paraphrasing, I would say: “What is the point of accumulating wealth if in the process you lose your own children?” My heart resonates with the title of Richard W. O’Fallon’s book, *Lord Keep Your Mansions, Just Save My Children*.

Our Commitment to Adventist Education

The Christian education of our three children was a top priority for my wife and I. Having spent 12 years studying in our Adventist Academy in Florence, Adventist College in England (Newbold), and Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, I came to appreciate the value of Adventist education. We firmly believed that to pass on our faith and values to our children we needed to provide them with an Adventist Christian education that was not available in Italy, or for that matter in most Western European countries.

Sad to say, the few existing Adventist church schools in Italy have long been closed down. Even our Adventist Academy in Florence (Villa Aurora) no longer offer a secondary education to our Adventist young people. It only provides a few language and art classes to foreign students (mostly Americans) and some religion classes to a dozen of students mostly from Eastern European countries. The reason for this sad development, is the lack of support for Adventist Church schools. The prevailing perception is that government schools are good enough for Adventist children.

The absence of Adventist Church Schools in Italy (and in most European countries), is a major contributory factor to the loss of at least 90 per cent of our young people. If our Adventist church in Italy (and in other European countries) had been able to retain our young people during the past 30 years, today our membership would be double. When I visit in Rome the many parents I came to know while growing up and later while studying there for five years, most of them laments the fact that their children are no longer in the church. It is a sad litany.

My wife and I did not want our children to become another sad statistic. We felt that our Adventist schools system would offer them a safer place to grow intellectually and spiritually. The results speak for themselves. Loretta, our oldest child, is currently serving as Prof. of Nursing at the Florida Hospital School of Nursing and is actively involved in church programs, including reaching young adults and teaching the Sabbath School.

Daniel, our second child, is an architect, who builds prestigious homes and teaches in the Andrews University Architecture Department. At present he is spearheading a program to design and build churches in developing countries. Gianluca, our youngest son, is a successful corporate lawyer in Chicago. He serves as an elder of the Burr Ridge SDA Church. With his wife, Silvia, they preach and lead out in various church programs.

What more could we have asked from the Lord than children who have embraced our faith and share our commitment to the Lord? Nothing else in the world can compare with the joy of an extended family of children and grandchildren sharing the same faith, hope, mission, and destiny. This is what the 4th of July means to us: the beginning of a new life in America which has made it possible for us to bring up a family in the fear of God with the help of dedicated Adventist Christian teachers.

Unprecedented Opportunities to Expand My Ministry

On a more personal level the 4th of July represents for me the opening of doors of opportunities to expand my ministry of research, writing, publishing, and lecturing in many parts of the world. Such opportunities would have been denied to me by our church leaders in Italy or in other European countries. The reason is that our Adventist church government in Europe is more autocratic and restrictive. Workers are expected to abide by their job description. New initiatives or independent ministries are frowned upon.

What a difference in the USA! For almost 20 years Andrews University allowed me to teach half-time, so that I could devote myself more fully six months of each year to research, write, and lecture in many countries. The result has been the publication of 17 books, the recording of CD/DVDs, and the sharing of relevant studies on current issues with this newsletter with over 30,000 people in many countries. Such activities would have been unthinkable in Italy or in Adventist Colleges in Europe. To publish, promote, and distribute personal books and recordings to many countries, would have been condemned by our church leaders as an inappropriate commercial activity for an Adventist scholar.

Obviously, I have faced some criticism from a few “concerned brethren” even in the USA. But, overall the American understanding of democracy allows for private initiative to thrive even within the Adventist church system. Some telling examples are 3ABN, Amazing Facts, The Quiet Hour, Weimar College and Health Institute, Black Hills Health and Education Center, Adventist Frontier Missions, Uchee Pines Institute, Maranatha Volunteer International, TEACH Services, and Good News Unlimited. These ministries are privately owned and operated. Their degree of support for the Adventist Church may vary. But the fact remains that independent Adventist ministries (which are practically absent in Western Europe) have multiplied within the Adventist church in America, largely because this is the land of the free. In America you are free to dream and to work hard to see your dream come true.

The freedom that the Adventist church has given me to research, to write, to publish, and to conduct seminars in many parts of the world, gives a special personal meaning to the 4th of July: This is the day when our

family our family celebrates the beginning of a new life in America, and is also the day when personally I celebrate my declaration of independence from the restrictions that would have stunted the growth of my ministry in the Old Country. Thank God for the 4th of July: a day for Americans to celebrate the birth of this great nation, but also a day for our family to celebrate the beginning of a new life abundantly blessed by God in the land of the free. Thank you for allowing me to share with you a few thoughts on what the 4th of July 4th means to our family and to me personally.

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**UPDATE ON THE RELEASE OF PROF. BRADFORD'S BOOK
MORE THAN A PROPHET AND OF HIS CD/DVD ALBUMS**

On Thursday, July 6, 2006, Prof. Graeme Bradford's new book *More than a Prophet* came off the press. On the same day also the editing of Bradford's live video lecture on Ellen White was completed. The two hours video lecture was recorded at Avondale College. With the help of 75 slides, he discusses in an open and objective way the major issues related to the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Your response to the announcement I made in the last newsletter about the release of Prof. Bradford's book and recording, surpassed our fondest expectation. Orders have been coming in from different parts of the world. In three days we have mailed out over 1500 copies of *More than a Prophet* and over 150 CD/DVD albums. About 25 Conference Presidents and Ministerial Secretaries have already requested a review copy of the book. Honestly, I must say that none of my 17 books generated such an encouraging response.

It is evident that the question of the authority and use of Ellen White's writings, is a hot issue in the Adventist church today. Several pastors have

called me to share the challenge they are facing in dealing with two different groups of members in their churches: those who are very critical of Ellen White, and those who strongly believe in the verbal inspiration of all her writings. They hope that *More than a Prophet* will help both groups to come to a more balanced understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

To make it possible for many Adventists to benefit from this timely study, I decided to offer the book by the case of 30 copies for the basic cost price of \$5.00 per copy, that is, \$150.00 for a case of 30 copies, mailing expenses included. Overseas mailing requires an additional charge of \$20.00. The regular price is \$25.00 per copy or \$750.00 for the case of 30 copies.

With the purchase of a case of 30 copies of *More than a Prophet*, we offer also for only \$20.00, the CD/DVD album that contains Bradford's writings and his live two hours video lecture on Ellen White. The regular price of the album is \$100.00. This means that for only \$170.00 you and/or your church can receive both a case of 30 copies of *More than a Prophet* and the CD/DVD album containing two disks, one is a CD-ROM with Bradford's writings and the other is a DVD with his two hours video lecture on Ellen White recorded few days ago at Avondale College in Australia. The regular price for this package is \$850.00.

The reason for offering the CD/DVD album at such a bargain price with a case of *More than a Prophet*, is to make it possible for you and church members to view Bradford's gripping video lecture which is designed to clear the air of prevailing misconceptions about Ellen White — misconceptions that have caused thousands of Adventists to leave church.

You can order the special package of 30 copies of *More than a Prophet* and the CD/DVD Album for only \$170.00, mailing expenses included for the USA, in four ways:

(1) Online:

(2) Email: Simply email us your order at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> with your credit card number and your mailing address.

(3) Regular Mail: Send us a personal check for \$170.00 with your mailing address.

(4) Phone: Feel free to call us at (269) 471-2915

UPDATE ON THE VIDEO RECORDING OF *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*

The preparation for the video taping of the two hours lecture on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE* has been slow, partly because of the countless hours I have spent preparing the manuscript *More than a Prophet* for publication. Considerable time went also into designing and editing the CD/DVD album with Prof. Bradford's writings and live lecture on Ellen White. Now that this major project is completed, I plan to devote every free moment to examine the pile of material sitting on my desk about the *Da Vinci Code*. I will also continue to collect nice slides of documents, persons, and places, in order to bring to life the powerpoint presentation.

God willing, the video taping will take place on Wednesday, August 30. *The Da Vinci Code* raises a number of questions that are particularly pertinent to Seventh-day Adventists. My plan is to devote the second part of the lecture to an analysis of such questions, especially the endtime prophetic significance of the neo-pagan form of worship promoted by Dan Brown. I will keep updated about the progress of this project.

ROME NEVER CHANGES

A recently published Catholic document, *The Gift of Scripture* (London: The Catholic Truth Society, 2005), shows that the traditional Catholic view of the equal authority of Scripture and Tradition, has not changed. The document was prepared by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England, Wales, and Scotland, in occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Dei Verbum—The Word of God*, an important document of the Second Vatican Council.

While the document offers a high view of Scripture, encouraging Christians to study it, value it, and live by its teachings, it nevertheless appeals to the role of Tradition in interpreting the Bible. "We approach the Scripture as members of the family of God, seeking guidance of the living Tradition of the teaching Church. We are more and more aware that Scripture and Tradition are closely bound together, coming from 'the same divine source . . . they constitute the one sacred deposit of the word of God entrusted to the Church,'" and they both are to be "accepted and honored with equal devotion and reverence" (p. 15).

The claim that the Traditional Teachings of the Catholic Church come from “the same divine source” as the Bible, is a deceptive claim designed to justify the host of Catholic heresies that can only be justified by appealing to Catholic traditional teachings. It is evident that Rome never changes. Luther’s call for *Sola Scriptura* 500 years ago, is still falling on Catholic deaf ears. The lesson of history is eloquently expressed by Christ: “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition” (Mark 7:9).

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

A detailed description of the special offers on goods and services is provided at the end of this newsletter. Here is a brief listing of the announcements that are expanded at the end of this newsletter.

1. CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS for the months of July and August 2006. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. PROF. BRADFORD NEWLY RELEASED BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, HIS CD/DVD ALBUM WITH HIS WRITINGS, AND LIVE LECTURE ON ELLEN WHITE. Both new releases, (the book, the CD/DVD album) are being offered for the first time at an introductory price. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

3. PROF. JON PAULIEN PUBLICATIONS IN ONE CD ALBUM. The album contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written during the past 20 years of research. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

4. DR. BACCHIOCCHI’S NEW DVD ALBUM ON *THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST*. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

5. TAGNET SPECIAL NEW WEB HOSTING OFFER for Adventist churches and members. TAGnet provides an incredible number of services to our churches and members. This newsletter comes to you through their gracious and efficient service. For detail information, visit their website at <http://www.netadventist.org> or <http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET

6. SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL THE RECORDINGS DONE BY DR. BACCHIOCCHI. The package consists of 5 albums which are offered for only \$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 60 CD DISKS containing 120 lectures that explain verse by verse the book of Revelation. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

8. SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS: HITACHI has offered an additional discount to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries. For examples, the special offer for the new 2000 LUMENS PROJECTOR CP-X250 IS ONLY \$1095.00, instead of the previous SDA price of \$1995.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

9. SPECIAL OFFER ON NEW TOSHIBA LAPTOP TECRA A8 released on June 28, 2006. See details at the end.

10. REMOTE PRESENTER: Special offer on the smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION TO "THE CREDIBILITY OF ELLEN WHITE"

This newsletter offers you a foretaste of Prof. Graeme Bradford's book *More than a Prophet*. I have decided to introduce you to this timely book, by posting chapters 11 and 12, which I have packaged together under the title "The Credibility of Ellen White." In the first chapter Bradford mentions 10 reasons why people closely associated with Ellen White during her 70-year ministry, firmly believed in her prophetic gift, though they were well aware of several weaknesses in her life.

You will enjoy especially the testimony of H. M. S. Richard who had tremendous confidence in the ministry of Ellen White because as a young man he heard her preach three years before she died. I was moved to read about the impact of Ellen White's prayer on himself and the 5000 people attending the meeting.

Elder Richard was fully aware of the discussion about the literary dependency of Ellen White, discussed even at the 1919 Bible Conference, but his confidence on her prophetic gift remained unperturbed, because he was fully aware of that prophets are human.

The second chapter contains significant insights into the literary dependency of Ellen White. First, Bradford shows that borrowing from other sources was a common practice in the nineteenth century. Second, Ellen White used historical sources, not to approve or correct them, but to teach the way of salvation. Third, she never claimed to be an authority on history or theology. She asked for help both in gathering the information and in correcting any inaccuracies.

Fourth, the problem of historical inaccuracies in *The Great Controversy*, is partly due to her use of Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*. Unfortunately, Uriah Smith was a very poor historian and she followed his lead. Lastly, Bradford shows that it is imperative to understand that the stated purpose of Ellen White's writings is not to be the final word on history, prophecy, science, or theology, but to illustrate spiritual lessons. When we understand and accept the stated purpose of her writings, then we should find no problem in accepting her prophetic gift—a gift designed to bring encouragement, reproof, and spiritual instruction to the church.

I trust that this preview of the essay has wetted your appetite for a thoughtful reading of this timely study. It is my plan to post other important chapters in future issues of our newsletter.

“The Credibility of Ellen White”

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ELLEN WHITE'S GIFT OF PROPHECY

More than 150 years ago a 17-year-old girl began to give messages to early Adventist believers and said they were from God. Often these messages were not what they wanted to hear. Often they ran contrary to their plans. At times they pointed out weaknesses in the lives of many of the leaders and gave them advice contrary to their own inclinations. But they believed her.

Why Early Adventists Believed in Ellen White's Prophetic Ministry?

Throughout her 70-year ministry, those who were closest to her were firm believers in the fact that God had given her the gift of prophecy. Why was this? There are several reasons.

1. They saw that she was a true Christian.
2. They felt the power of her ministry in uplifting Jesus Christ, and in her calls for obedience to God and His Word.
3. When they were discouraged after the "Great Disappointment" of 1844 she was the one who kept their advent hopes alive.
4. In 1 Corinthians 14: 22-25, Paul declares that the presence of prophecy among God's people is a sign to believers. It confirms the presence of God is with them. She was indeed able to reveal the secrets of the human heart. There could be no doubt that she had revelations in order to come by this knowledge. Over many years she sent out personal testimonies to individuals. Only a handful ever claimed they were irrelevant.¹¹⁴
5. She gave them a sense of purpose and direction, a belief that God was still with them.
6. She expanded their concepts of mission to the world.
7. She gave them a sense of breadth and depth of mission to include health, education and welfare.
8. They witnessed her save the church from theological disaster at the hands of Kellogg, Waggoner, and the Holy Flesh Movement.
9. When her counsel was followed, individuals usually prospered. When they failed to follow her counsel, things did not always prosper. Her messages and predictions were timely and practical.¹¹⁵
10. She saved the Church from Arianism by highlighting the true divinity of Christ and the Trinity.

Awareness of Weaknesses in Ellen White's Life

They still believed in Ellen White, even though they were also aware of weaknesses in her life. And they could have listed them as well:

1. She did have some problems in her marriage. There were times when she and her husband worked apart.¹¹⁶
2. She had problems with her children. She tended to favour Willie as the "good boy." James Edson, the only other of her four sons who

survived to adulthood, turned away from the faith, but she won him back and he became a missionary to former slaves in the south of the United States.

3. She often became despondent over the criticism she faced. She could even doubt her own experience in Christ.¹¹⁷

4. She could be forgetful.¹¹⁸

5. She may not have always been as open about her use of other sources as she could have been.¹¹⁹

6. She struggled to give up eating flesh foods and live up to the health counsel she had given to others.¹²⁰

However, as they applied the biblical tests for a prophet, they saw that she matched the biblical expectation in that she uplifted Jesus and called for obedience to God and His word. (It is also helpful to remember that all of us would like to be judged by the general tenor of our lives and not from a few lapses).

They found that she was in harmony with the major doctrines of the Bible such as Creation, salvation, law and the deity of Christ. And, in hindsight, you can add that she had a view of inspiration that is biblically correct even though it was not the prevailing view of her contemporaries. Her material on the subject was not printed until volume one of *Selected Messages* appeared in 1958, with more of her material on the topic appearing in volume three in 1980.

A large number of Adventists are still oblivious to her views found in these volumes. Why her views on inspiration have not been widely known until recent times will be dealt with when considering the 1919 Bible Conference and its aftermath.

The Testimony of H. M. S. Richards

H. M. S. Richards had tremendous confidence in the prophetic gift of Ellen White because as a young man he heard her preach just three years before she died. About 5000 people were present, most of them non-Adventists. Here is how he described it: “Willie White led her out to the table where she was to speak. Just a little old lady in a black silk dress, with a little cap on her head. But, oh, when she started to preach

there came on Bible text after another—at least 100 of them quoted right off just like that. She had no notes. She had her Bible but she never had to look at it but she would just keep turning the pages and quoting the texts. Her voice was like a silver bell as it carried out over that great audience. It started to rain; but above its din on the iron roof, you could hear that silver voice ringing out clearly through it all.

“When she had spoken about 45 minutes her son came out and said, ‘I think you are getting tired mother. You have talked long enough. I think you had better sit down.’ ‘No not yet I haven’t prayed yet.’ Then she began to pray and when she did something happened. Before that she was just a dear old lady, talking. But when she knelt down a great change came over the whole congregation. She was God’s prophet then and God honored her. Within 30 seconds we were all in the presence of God. I was afraid to look up lest I should see God standing there by her side. Within minutes you could hear sobs around the congregation.”¹²¹

That experience stayed with Richards the rest of his life. Later, when troubles over her writings erupted he never lost his confidence in her ministry. He always had a true biblical expectation of what to expect from a person manifesting the gift of prophecy. In his biography of Richards, Robert Edwards comments on Richard’s attitudes and understanding of the work of Ellen White: “Although the writings and the character of Ellen White powerfully influenced him, he also had common sense enough to know that she was a fallible human being, that she made mistakes.

“When the furore over the accusations that she had plagiarized from other authors shook many in the church some years ago, Richards remained unperturbed. ‘They haven’t discovered anything new,’ he said ‘All those charges are old. I heard them all 40 years ago. They were all discussed at the 1919 Bible Conference.’ H. M. S Richards accepted her for what she was and what she herself claimed to be. It protected him from the disappointments some men and women experienced who held an unreal view of what a prophet and prophecy should be.”¹²²

Walter Martin¹²³ was once interviewed about his concepts of Ellen White. He was critical of her work, on a basis she did not meet up with his private expectations. Toward the end of the interview he said, “I have been pressed and pressed by people to get me to say Ellen White is a false prophet. . . . Mrs. White in my opinion, made false statements.

She misused what she claimed was the prophetic gift she had. I believe this, in certain instances. But if you're going to try and say that makes Ellen White the same as the false prophets prohibited in Exodus and Deuteronomy, then you have to demonstrate, that Ellen White was an unbeliever and that it was a deliberate and willful perversion of truth regarding salvation and revelation. That's a very fine line. . . . Of course, technically, I would have to say that the person who prophesies in the name of God and turns out to be wrong, has prophesied falsely. You have to say that. But they want me to go further than that. They want me to make Mrs. White a biblical false prophet which means that she is not a Christian. I cannot endorse that."¹²⁴

Martin, although critical in many respects, still accepted her as a believer in Jesus Christ and a true Christian.

Critics Ignore the Real Test of a True Prophet

There have been many critical of her work. It may also be that those who are most critical have not done their homework in the Scriptures to have a proper understanding of the biblical expectations of how a person functions under the gift of prophecy.

Remember, the real test is that the prophet calls people to holy living and obedience to God's word. The true prophet will uplift Jesus Christ as the sin bearer of the world and challenge people to trust in Him. Jesus said that "by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7: 15-23).

The honest inquirer attempting to make a decision regarding Ellen White's authenticity, should read some of her most famous books. As you read books like *The Desire of Ages* and *Steps to Christ* you will find the fruitage that Jesus said should be found in a true prophet. Ingemar Linden in his book *The Last Trump* states, "If E. G. W. had achieved nothing else than write *The Desire of Ages* she would still merit a place among the outstanding Christian women. Her life provides spiritual food for Christians in all walks of life."¹²⁵

In *The Desire of Ages*, the chapter on the Garden of Gethsemane paints such a picture of Christ as to melt the hardest of hearts—as does the chapter on Calvary. The fruitage of this book is to exalt Christ and

lead people to trust in Him. The little book *Steps to Christ* has a marvelous chapter on how a person may know they are a Christian. Here the fruitage of the book is to build Christian hope and assurance. Some will argue that some of this material has been gleaned from other writers. However, as we have already seen, writers under inspiration can do this.

Also, as noted, writers under inspiration may see a need to have secretarial help. While Ellen White's husband was alive he helped her with her writing, but after his death she felt very inadequate. This was partly because of her lack of formal education. She said, "I am not a scholar. I cannot prepare my own writings for the press. . . . I am thinking I must lay aside my writing I have taken so much pleasure in, and see if I cannot become a scholar. I am not a grammarian. I will try, if the Lord will help me, at forty-five years old to become a scholar in the science. . . . Oh, that God would quicken the understanding, for I am but a poor writer, and cannot with pen or voice express the great and deep mysteries of God. . . ." ¹²⁶

BORROWING TO ILLUSTRATE SPIRITUAL TRUTH

Even though a great deal of study has been undertaken to find out more about Ellen White's borrowing from other writers, there still exists, and will always exist, a difference of opinion as to the percentage borrowed. How could anyone ever hope to reconstruct all her sources? ¹²⁷ The truth is that we all borrow from each other, and from many sources of which we are scarcely aware. ¹²⁸ And it is difficult for us to sit in the mindset of those who lived in her age. Today we have tight copyright laws, which, in her day were just coming to the fore.

The first person to point out her borrowings from others was a former Adventist pastor D. M. Canright. Yet when the denomination wished to reprint Moses Hull's book *The Bible from Heaven*, ¹²⁹ they asked Canright to work it over to print it under his name. This he did and followed Hull's work very closely. He even felt free to put in the preface that the book had been written "after extensive reading and careful thought upon the subject." ¹³⁰ Neither James White nor the other Adventist leaders saw anything wrong with using the material from Hull. They all perceived what they wrote as belonging to a pool of common property with anyone free to dip into the pool.

Literary Borrowing an Accepted Practice

This was also true of Ellen White's writings. They took from her and she took from them. Willie White comments: "All felt that the truths to be presented were common property and wherever one could help another or get from another in the expression of biblical truths, it was considered right to do so. Consequently there were many excellent statements of present truth copied by one writer from another. And no man said that ought which he wrote was exclusively his own. In the process of time many things which Sister White wrote and said were used by others without credit, and she in turn when dealing with prophetic statements felt free to use without credit the statements and teachings of leading writers among the pioneers when she found in their writings the exact thought that she wished to present."¹³¹

When Ellen White used material from other Adventist writers in her book *The Great Controversy*¹³² she was doing what they all felt free to do with each other's writings. And although Canright tried to upset the Adventist community with the charges of plagiarism, they were never upset by what he revealed. It could well be that many were already aware of her borrowing practice. The books she borrowed from were often the same books she recommended the Adventist community to read.

Vincent Ramik a copyright-law specialist researched the legal aspects of her use of other writers and came to the conclusion in his report that there would have been no legal case against her in her day, and that he had his life changed forever by reading her books.¹³³ William Hanna in the preface to his book *The Life of Christ*, one of Ellen White's sources for *The Desire of Ages* states, "Nor has he thought it necessary to burden the following pages with references to all the authorities consulted."¹³⁴

It seems that Ellen White's time was a state of transition regarding the need to acknowledge the use of the writings of others. The important point to note is that we must not judge her by today's expectations, but see her operating within the context of her time and the expectations of that time.

Times and expectations do change. I now look back in horror that when I did my theological training we accepted the fact that the girls at

Avondale only received about half the wages of the boys. They had to pay the same fees and all other costs were the same but because they were female they were paid less. No one, to my knowledge, ever questioned it, but looking at it through today's eyes, it was wrong.

God meets people where they are. He works within their cultural mindset. Ellen White wrote and borrowed in a way that appeared normal to her and her contemporaries. Today we think differently.¹³⁵ Her mindset allowed her to borrow freely from other writers—as did others.¹³⁶ Some of them we regard as great writers.

Ellen White Borrowed to Glorify Christ

Debate has centered around how much of her work is borrowed from other authors. But the percentage she borrowed is not as important as why she borrowed. The truth is she borrowed to glorify Jesus. She borrowed to move people's heart to have faith in Him.

After her death they found in her library a book entitled *Sunshine and Shadows Along the Pathway of Life* by M. G. Clarke. In the flyleaf of the book Ellen White had written a note that shows us her thinking regarding, how she could use what she had read and appreciated so much in the book: "This is a book I esteem highly. Never let it be lost of [sic] this time. I appreciate it, I shall be pleased to keep this book for it has treasures of truth which I appreciate in presenting to many others."¹³⁷

How Ellen White Wrote

It is important to understand how she did her work. Insights from her son, Willie, are helpful because probably no one understood her work better than he did, for he worked with her for many years. Willie states, "The great events occurring in the life of our Lord were presented to her in panoramic scenes as also were other portions of *The Great Controversy*. In a few of these scenes chronology and geography were clearly presented, but in the greater part of the revelation the flashlight scenes, which were exceedingly vivid, and the conversations and the controversies, which she heard and was able to narrate, were not marked geographically or chronologically, and she was left to study the Bible and history, and the writings of men who had presented the life of our Lord to

get the chronological and geographical connection”¹³⁸ It would seem that it was left to her to fill out these “flashlight scenes” and “panoramas” in her visions by studying the writings of others.¹³⁹

In a letter he wrote to F. M. Wilcox, Willie gives more insights as to why she borrowed ideas from history: “Sister White has often quoted from history. Her descriptions of scenes presented to her in vision, and her use of the statements of historians, have been made for *teaching the way of salvation*, and not for the purpose of approving or correcting history. Her burden has been to make clear to the common people the character of the great controversy between good and evil, and to arouse in their hearts a hatred for sin and a loyalty to the King of Kings. . . .

“From this we may conclude that it is not the will of God that we use these writings to prove the historical accuracy of authors or to correct their errors. But rather that we use them to make clear to the minds of men, the living truths of the Word of God, and the practical meaning of the signs of the times, and the fulfillment of prophecy. *History has been used to illustrate the lessons of the book*”¹⁴⁰ (emphasis added).

Borrowing to Present Prophetic, Doctrinal, and Historical Matters

Willie also makes the following, significant points: “The class of matter written by Mrs. White, in which she used the writings of others, is comparatively small when considering the vast field covered by her writings. It is in the delineation in *prophetic and doctrinal exposition* that we find that *she used the words of others or had closely paraphrased them*. In the vast field covering thousands of pages of messages of *encouragement, reproof, and spiritual instruction*, she worked independent of all other writers, also in her divine prediction of future experiences through which the church must pass”¹⁴¹ (emphasis added).

It is important for us to note the reason she gathered the material from history, prophecy and doctrine, is that she might bring home spiritual lessons to her readers. First and foremost she was fulfilling the role of a prophet as Paul had stated, “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:

3). Above all else, she was concerned with upholding a high standard of Christian living. Doctrine was not her main concern unless she saw false doctrine undermining faith in Christ.

At the General Conference session in Minneapolis, in 1888, where the leadership was divided on the correct understanding of the law in Galatians and other theological points, George Knight makes the following observation, “The message of 1888, as Ellen White viewed it, is not doctrinal. We do not find her concerned with the law in Galatians, the covenants or the Trinity. Nor do we find her expounding upon the human or divine nature of Christ or sinless living as key elements of the message. She was not even obsessed with the doctrine of righteousness by faith. Her special interest was Jesus Christ, that Adventists might apply the attributes of His loving character to the practical experience of daily life, and that individuals go to Him for forgiveness.”¹⁴²

Ellen White Was More Concerned about Christian Attitude than Doctrinal Correctness

Bert Haloviak agrees: “In Dec of 1888, after noticing the spirit of those who defended the old position on Galatians, E. G. White noted: ‘For the first time I began to think it might be we did not hold correct views after all, upon the law in Galatians, for the truth required no such spirit to sustain it.’ Notice how she explained issues to a group of ministers. . . . ‘I am afraid of you and I am afraid of your interpretation of any scripture which has revealed itself in such an un-Christ-like spirit. . . . I am afraid of any application of scripture that needs such a spirit and bears such fruit as you have manifested. . . . you could never have given a better refutation of your own theories than that you have done. . . . I have nothing to say, no burden regarding the law in Galatians. This matter looks to me of minor consequence in comparison with the spirit you have brought into your faith. . . . The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit which attends the advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true and Christ-like, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth.’”¹⁴³

Here, Ellen White was more concerned with Christian conduct than theological correctness. In doing this she was fulfilling her role as a prophet. She borrows material from history, theology and prophecy

with the main aim of helping to press home spiritual truths so that we might become better Christians. This she saw as far more important than being precisely accurate in every detail. In her introduction to *The Great Controversy* she states that she is using “well known and universally acknowledged. . . facts which none can gainsay.”¹⁴⁴ That is she is using facts which were commonly acknowledged by people in her era. Her purpose is that of spiritual application.

When we look at her writings we see that most of what she had to say is in the area of spiritual application of Scriptural principles to daily living. Comparatively speaking, only a small percentage of her writings have to do with deep theology. She was more concerned that we show the fruits of the Spirit in our daily living and follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Retired Andrews University Seminary Professor, Raoul Dederen agrees, “As interpreter of the Bible, Ellen White’s role was that of an evangelist—not an exegete, nor a theologian, as such, but a preacher and an evangelist. . . . No wonder, therefore, that the prophetic and hortatory mode was more characteristic of her than the exegetical. . . . she was, in the typical prophetic attitude, primarily desirous to press the text into service for the immediate objective, that of the spiritual quickening of her hearers or readers. She lived in a century of evangelistic revival, and her main purpose was to arrest attention and to *bring conviction and repentance more than merely to relay information*” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁵

Ellen White Did not Claim to Be Authority in History or Theology

In the after-meeting of the 1919 Bible Conference, A. G. Daniells¹⁴⁶ could speak with authority. He had on many occasions, along with W. W. Prescott, been part of the team that worked with her in the putting together of some of her books. During the course of the after-meeting he made this observation, “Well, now, as I understand it, Sister White never claimed to be an authority on history, and never claimed to be a dogmatic teacher on theology. She never outlined a course of theology, like Mrs. Eddy’s book on teaching. . . . She never claimed to be an authority on history . . . she was ready to correct in revision such statements as she thought should be corrected. I have never gone to her writings, and taken the history that I found in her writings, as the positive statement of history regarding the fulfilment of prophecy.”¹⁴⁷

At the after-meetings, H. C. Lacey, Religion Teacher at the Foreign Mission Seminary, added an interesting comment: “In our estimate of the spirit of prophecy, isn’t its value to us more in the spiritual light it throws into our own hearts and lives than in the intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters? Ought we not to take those writings as the voice of the Spirit of our hearts, instead of as the voice of the teacher to our heads? And isn’t the final proof of the spirit of prophecy its spiritual value rather than its historical accuracy? A. G. Daniells: ‘Yes I think so.’”¹⁴⁸

Not only did Ellen White’s helpers have this view of her writing, but she supports this concept. Notice in a letter Willie wrote to S. N. Haskell (a letter she signs at the end with the comment, “I approve of the remarks made in this letter, [signed] Ellen White): “Regarding Mother’s writings, she has never wished our brethren to treat them as authority on history. . . . When *Controversy* was written, Mother never thought that the readers would take it as an authority on historical dates and use it to settle controversies. . . .”¹⁴⁹

At another time, Willie wrote, “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, and where she has followed the description of historians or the exposition of Adventist writers, I believe that God has given her discernment to use that which is correct and in harmony with truth regarding all matters essential for salvation. If it should be found by faithful study that she has followed some expositions of prophecy which in some detail regarding dates we cannot harmonize with our understanding of secular history, it does not influence my confidence in her writings as a whole any more than my confidence in the Bible is influenced by the fact that I cannot harmonize many of the statements regarding chronology.”¹⁵⁰

Here, Willie, some of her helpers, and Ellen White herself view her work as it should be seen, and in harmony with the one statement in Scripture which clearly tells why the gift of prophecy was given: “But everyone who prophecies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Perhaps we can understand her mindset even further when we read statements like this from *The Desire of Ages*: “In the story of the Good

Samaritan, Christ illustrates the nature of true religion. He shows that it consists not in systems, creeds, or rites, but in the performance of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others; in genuine goodness.”¹⁵¹

We can also see her understanding of different ideas as expressed in the Bible when she wrote “The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. *The Bible was given for practical purposes.*”¹⁵²

To Ellen White the Bible was primarily given to help us to find Jesus and tell us how to live. Not just to pass on information. Because of this she never got “hung up” as did some others because of the differences of details found within the Scriptures. She saw her own writings operating in the same manner. Her writings were primarily to help us find and maintain our faith in Jesus and teach us how to live in harmony with His will. In doing this she was fulfilling the role of a prophet.

The Problem of Historical Inaccuracies

It can be unsettling for some to come to grips with the fact that there are historical inaccuracies in her writings, so let’s explore this matter further. In her appendix to a draft copy of *Spiritual Gifts* vol 2 she makes this comment: “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.”¹⁵³

When writing *The Great Controversy* she made this request, “Tell Mary to find me some histories of the Bible that would give me the order of events. I have nothing and can find nothing in the library here” (Letter 38, 1885).¹⁵⁴ And we know in order to get a chronology for the life of Christ when writing *The Desire of Ages*, she consulted Samuel J Andrews *The Life of our Lord Upon the Earth*.¹⁵⁵

The evidence is clear that she was open to help and willing to consult others in regards to historical details. This has not always been widely understood until recent times. In her day there were some well informed

on this matter, an inner circle who helped her in her work. Sadly this knowledge was not widely known¹⁵⁶ in her time and almost lost after her death. We will investigate how this came about in chapter 18 on the 1919 Bible Conference.

In 1982 an Adventist pastor in Czechoslovakia gave a copy of *The Great Controversy* to Prof. Amedo Molnar of Prague University. [Prof. Molnar has written two volumes *History of the Waldenses*. He is rightly regarded as the authority on the Waldenses]. He was asked to give an evaluation on her work in his area of speciality, namely the Waldenses, Wycliffe, Huss, and Jerome. In his letter he notes her errors regarding the facts of history and how there are many important historical events omitted. He repeats the idea that it seems to him that she is not writing history but rather is giving a meaning to history. He states, “The impulse of her work lies in the interpretation of the sense of historical events, teaching the believing and hoping Christian, that is, it lies in another field other than proper historical research. As far as her work. . . . is not used as a substitute for the strictly historical research. . . . it may feed an eschatological hope of the believing Christians”.¹⁵⁷

In other words, she is not a historian. Rather, she is giving a meaning to history. She is interpreting history for Christians. Today these historical inaccuracies are acknowledged by the White Estate; but this should not a problem for those who have a correct view of her work.¹⁵⁸

In the 1970s, William S Peterson wrote an article “A textual and historical study of Ellen White’s account of the French Revolution.” He was very critical of her work from a historian’s point of view claiming that she had: Not used the best sources available to her; she had used her sources carelessly; they were strongly anti-Catholic sources; they were weak on factual evidence; sometimes she had misread them; at other times she had exaggerated them; and occasionally she left out crucial facts.

Some Inaccuracies Derive from Ellen White’s the Use of Uriah Smith

Ron Graybill, a research assistant in the White Estate was given the job of checking out the work of Peterson. In the Summer of 1972 *Spectrum*, Graybill responded to Peterson’s work on the “French

Revolution” chapter of *The Great Controversy*. A study of the notes left by Clarence Crisler, Ellen White’s secretary, showed that she was not misusing sources at all. The notes showed that she took the history in this chapter straight out of Uriah Smith’s *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*. Uriah Smith was the poor historian and she followed his lead.¹⁵⁹

It is well known that the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy* was revised in 1911. The plates for the older edition had worn and so there was an opportune time for a reprint and revision. She received advice from Prescott and accepted some of his advice.¹⁶⁰ Among the changes were: In the 1888 edition she wrote, “The Waldenses were the first of all the peoples of Europe to obtain a translation of the Holy Scriptures.” In the 1911 edition she said, “The Waldenses were among the first of the peoples of Europe to obtain a translation of the Holy Scriptures.” In the 1888 edition she said the fall of Babylon cannot refer to the Romish Church because it fell in the early centuries. In the 1911 edition she wrote that the fall of Babylon cannot refer to the Roman Church alone.

When the new edition was released it was met with a mixed reaction. W. A. Spicer felt there should have been more changes and blamed the editors.¹⁶¹ One gets the impression that, particularly toward the end of her life, she was significantly relying upon the input of others in the production of her books.¹⁶² This point is made even stronger when we read a letter written to W. W. Prescott from her secretary Clarence E. Crisler. In this letter he appeals to Prescott to come to give some help in the work of Ezra (which must have been for writing the book *Prophets and Kings*). In this letter he makes a list of the problem areas they need help and then says at the end, “I am sure that Sister White would be specially pleased and cheered, if she could know that you were coming soon to help us over hard places.”¹⁶³

Understanding Ellen White’s Purpose

That she had people helping her do her work should not cause too much concern when we understand that Paul’s writings also show evidence of such help (see chapter four, “Literary Assistance for Inspired Writers”). And if we also have clearly in mind her purpose in writing was to take material from history to impress home spiritual truth by way of

illustration. And, of course, 1 Corinthians 14:3 must remain the theme text: “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”

Even in her day, not everyone had this idea clearly in mind and they gave her writings an authority beyond what was appropriate. This could account for the protest that Prescott made to Willie in the year that Ellen White died. “It seems to me that a large responsibility rests upon those of us who know that there are serious errors in our authorized books and yet make no special effort to correct them. The people and our average ministers trust us to furnish them with reliable statements, and they use them as sufficient authority in their sermons, but we let them go on year after year asserting things we know to be untrue. . . .

“The way your mother’s writings have been handled and the false impression concerning them which is still fostered among the people have brought great perplexity and trial to me. It seems to me that what amounts to deception, though probably not intentional, has been practiced in making some of her books, and that no serious effort has been made to disabuse the minds of the people of what was known to be their wrong view concerning her writings. But it is no use to go into these matters. I have talked to you for years about them, but it brings no change. I think however that we are drifting toward a crisis which will come sooner or later and perhaps sooner. A very strong reaction has already set in.”¹⁶⁴

Adventists Should be Better Informed About Ellen White’s Writings

Prescott’s letter is indeed a serious one. It seems Willie White and Prescott held to the same ideas regarding how Ellen White’s work was produced, their difference lay in the fact that Prescott felt Adventists should be better informed.¹⁶⁵ What he says is hinted at in the conversation of the 1919 Bible Conference after-meeting. It seems many Adventists held to a view of verbal inspiration regarding her writings.¹⁶⁶ J. N. Anderson asks the question, “Is it well to let our people in general to go on holding to the verbal inspiration of the *Testimonies*? When we do that, aren’t we preparing for a crisis that will be very serious some day?”¹⁶⁷

We will return to the subject of Adventists and their views of inspiration later. Meanwhile it is important to keep in mind Ellen White's understanding of her work. Regarding the writing of *The Great Controversy*, she states in the introduction, the purpose of the book, "To unfold the scenes of the great controversy between truth and error; to reveal the wiles of Satan, and the means by which he may be successfully resisted; to present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil, shedding such a light upon the origin and the final disposition of sin as to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with His creatures; and to show the holy, unchanging nature of His law, is the object of this book."¹⁶⁸

She also talks in terms of how she viewed the material from history that she borrowed, "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. . .*" (emphasis added).¹⁶⁹ That is, she is telling us that she is using ideas accepted by the Protestant world of her day to present the Advent message to them. If God had given her information we know to be more correct today her book would have been rejected by many who felt they were well informed in her era. We have seen that God meets people where they are to give to them His messages about Jesus. In doing this she was in harmony with how God has used prophets in the past.

Ellen White Borrowed to Illustrate Spiritual Truths

We must keep clearly in mind her stated purpose and then we will not stumble on some of the details as she uses history—as it was understood by many in her time—to illustrate spiritual lessons. *The Great Controversy* was never meant to be the final word on history, prophecy or theology. She borrowed much of her material from other Adventist writers, particularly Andrews and Smith.¹⁷⁰ She was willing to make changes when she had input from others and no doubt she would continue to do so if she were alive. The book was prepared for public usage to be sold as an evangelistic tool to win people to Adventism, using concepts that Adventism had at that time of its development.¹⁷¹

Some say that when she states "I saw," her words have special authority. However, we know there were times when she used these words

and then quoted from the works of others. It could be that the words “I saw” or “I was shown” mean “she saw” or “was shown” through the study of books. There are even times when she uses the words of authors when describing words she had heard spoken in vision. Ron Graybill, an Associate Secretary of the White Estate, made the following comments in a series of General Conference Worshipships in 1981.

“Did Mrs White ever borrow when she was reporting a vision? Did she ever say ‘I was shown’ and then proceed to borrow? The answer to that is ‘yes,’ although examples of it are not very plentiful. They are quite rare. I know of only three clear and unequivocal examples.”¹⁷² Graybill then goes on to give examples and show how the handwritten drafts of her material were even closer to the source than the published versions which followed. This was no doubt due to the work of her literary assistants.

Graybill adds further light to her borrowings with the following comments “She also employed extra-biblical comments on the lives of various biblical characters, often turning the speculations and conjectures of her sources into statements of positive fact. Sometimes similar use was made of their comments on the thoughts and activities of supernatural beings, that is, God, Satan, and their respective angels... These borrowings occurred not only in the historical sections of *The Great Controversy* but also in its prophetic sections.”¹⁷³

If we continue to see her work in harmony with her stated purpose, and the stated purpose of Scripture for prophets then we should find no problem with the above data. Problems only arise when we claim more for her works than she claimed for them herself. She made this helpful comment: “The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed . . . Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given” (5T 665).

ENDNOTES

For the sake of brevity the endnotes have been left out, since they are readily accessible at the end of *More than a Prophet*. The last 60 pages of the book contain the footnotes.

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