Learning from Ellen White's Perception and Use Of Scripture: Toward An Adventist Hermeneutic For The Twenty-First Century

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Introduction

Abstract: Ellen White, the most voluminous of all Seventh-day Adventist authors, held a high view of Scripture and used the Bible copiously. Studies of the past three decades have the potential to illumine the way in which White's writings support and inform the current need of the church in Western cultures to enhance its hermeneutic for the biblical canon.

Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827–1915) is the most prolific, most published and most influential author amongst some thirteen million Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) distributed within 204 nations.[1] White's literary career began in New England during the 1840s and endured into the second decade of the twentieth century, involving extended travels in the United States of America as well as in parts of Europe and Australasia.[2]

Early attempts at analysis of White's concepts and use of Scripture were hampered by the difficulty of achieving access to her entire literary corpus and the absence of adequate search aids for her voluminous writings. Beyond individual attempts, the church has fostered effective indexing and to that end it has produced useful publications, especially in 1926, 1962–3,1977 and 1992. It has also

1. See Marilyn C Crane, *Bibliography of Ellen G White Titles* (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Library, revised 1990) for an alphabetical list of nearly 600 titles used up to that time for pamphlets and books by Ellen White. For a list of publications available in the 1990s, see *Ellen G White Books and Pamphlets* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G White Estate, 1996). Note that hereafter in the text of this essay only Ellen White's married surname is used.
2. A brief account relevant for Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of the South Pacific Division is available in Arthur Patrick, 'Ellen White's Antipodean Exile, 1891–1900: Reflections on Her Australian Years', October 2002. This and other sources cited in this essay are available for study in the Ellen G White/SDA Research Centre, Avondale College.

published illuminating compilations from White's writings and increasingly facilitated better access to her unpublished manuscripts and letters, especially since the 1940s.[3] Although the effects of these related initiatives have flowered with the advent of computer technology, analyses of White's perception and use of Scripture are still indicative rather than definitive.[4] This essay builds on existing studies of these related matters, offering examples of the type of development that characterised her thought during seven decades of prophetic ministry, and citing illustrations of the variety of ways the Scriptures are treated within her writings.[5] However, its ultimate purpose is to inform one facet of Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutics in ways that have significance within Western cultures early in the twenty-first century.

Some Illustrative Dilemmas

A theology student spends countless hours with the four gospels establishing the order of the events in Christ's earthly life. In part, his method is to correct the gospel harmonies available to him on the basis of the only source the student believes to be definitive: White's writings. The conclusions reached are recorded systematically with a mapping pen in the student's wide-margin Bible. While the effort is prodigious, one of its outcomes is a sense of chronological and sequential certainty for a couple of decades during the delivery of sermons and Bible studies. However, a simple comparison of *The Spirit of Prophecy,* II (1877), with *The Desire of Ages* (1898) shows that White adjusted her understanding of the order of events. This revision has the potential to influence applications made of biblical statements. For instance, when describing the experience of the disciples during a storm on Galilee, the 1877 account states, 'In their agony of fear they turn to him, remembering how he had once saved them in a like peril' (307–8). But if the 'like peril' is in the future, it cannot be remembered. In other words, an altered sequence may invalidate an interpretation or necessitate the reinterpretation of comment made in an earlier piece of writing.[6] Therefore, the core of the student's research project and the way it informed years of ministry are brought into serious question.

A biblical scholar concludes that the Old Testament offers a 'good' revelation of God that meets the needs of its time and place but the New Testament makes an even 'better' disclosure, culminating as it does in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the founding of Christianity. He discovers that a similar type of development is apparent in White's experience and writings. He illustrates this reality by noting the change in White's emphasis from the awesome 'power' of Sinai to the winsome 'goodness' of Calvary. The *Adventist Review* publishes an abbreviation of his research in a five-part series, an action that remains a point of concern for some earnest believers.[7]

A respected district pastor with an earned MA degree and a reputation for a constructive understanding of Scripture and history decides to offer a series of seminars on the twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. His most vigorous congregation, in a city approaching thirty thousand people, includes several congregants noted for their determination to monitor ministerial orthodoxy. They bring a number of White's books to church week by week and leaf through these volumes diligently during the pastor's presentations, preparing questions to pose as the pastor greets members in the foyer. With a sense of triumph, on the day the seminar focuses on 'The Church,' a member avers that the SDA church is 'teaching heresy' because Fundamental 11 states that the church is the bride of Christ, whereas White declares in *The Great* Controversy (426–7) that 'the people of God are said to be guests at the marriage supper' and therefore 'cannot be represented as the bride' of Christ.[8]

These dilemmas are cited from the experience of three ordained SDA ministers who are actively teaching and preaching in 2003.[9] A survey of

3. The *Manuscript Release* process, initiated in the 1940s, accelerated slowly until it led to the publication of twenty-one volumes between 1981 and 1993.
4. A short review is offered in Arthur Patrick, 'Reflections on Unfinished Business: Ellen White Studies in Historical Perspective', January 2003.
5. Selected aspects of this development are expressed in Arthur Patrick, 'Ellen White, Yesterday and Today: Understanding and Affirming the Ministry of the Most Creative Sabbatarian Adventist', September 2003. Accessed 14 September 2010 at http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/white/patrick/egw-scripture.htm.
6. Compare Chapter 21, 'Walking on the Water', of Ellen G White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1969), 2:267–274; Chapter 25, 'Christ Stills the Tempest', *ibid*, 305–310; Chapter 35, 'Peace, Be Still', from Ellen G White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 2006), 333–341; Chapter 40, 'A Night on the Lake', *ibid*, 377–382. It should be noted that nowhere does White imply that she is an authority on such matters as chronology. The theology student was merely following a belief that seemed to be so pervasive in the church that it was beyond question.
7. See Alden Thompson, 'From Sinai to Golgotha,' a five part series in *Adventist Review,* December 1981; Alden Thompson, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1988), 15–17; Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), especially Appendix E, pages 285–298; Alden Thompson, 'From Burdensome Asceticism to Joyous Simplicity: The Interplay of Theology and Experience in the Life of Ellen White' (paper presented at the Pacific Northwest Region meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature, Eugene, Oregon, 5 May 2002).
8. S Ross Goldstone reports this event in a two-page statement dated November 2002. Goldstone's document is located in the same Research Center file as the original copy of this paper.
9. Compare such of my papers as 'Visioning and Re-Visioning Seventh-day Adventist Tertiary Education in Australia: A Centennial Assessment of Avondale College', The Inaugural Murdoch Lecture, August 1997, in *Avondale Reader,* Volume 1 (July 1999); 'Re-Visioning the Role of Ellen White for Seventh-day Adventists Beyond 2000', in *Adventist Society for Religious Studies Annual Meeting Papers* (November 1997), 107–132; 'Historians of Adventism: Their Agony, Ecstasy, and

ministers might quickly multiply such illustrations, for they are frequent within the regional and the world church. More than that, the church's archival collections include abundant evidence that dilemmas of this type have surfaced within Sabbatarian Adventism repeatedly since its early decades, often creating career uncertainties even for well-known and respected leaders.[10] This reality has helped to provide a rationale for heterodoxy and it has supplied grist for the mills of heresy. Also, it has helped fuel internal controversies and construct effective weapons for persons who criticise the church.[11]

Clearly, it is a matter of importance for the church to foster an adequate understanding of White's writings in general and their inspiration in particular. For pastors who face situations like those cited above, a doctrine of inspiration grounded in reality may be expected to facilitate more effective Bible study and preaching; it may support a sustainable application of White's counsels; and it may help to transmute divisive controversy into more effective relationships within the church and fuller cooperation in the church's mission to the world. However, while this essay acknowledges the importance of the doctrine of inspiration, it will only address that issue in an oblique fashion. Its purpose is to offer comment toward the development of a sustainable hermeneutic for Scripture in terms of White's writings.

Ellen White and the Bible

Most Seventh-day Adventists are well aware that White affirms Scripture as the church's only rule of faith and practice, the foundation of faith and the test of Christian experience.[12] As she reflected on her role during the church's formative years, she indicated that often it was to confirm steps already taken on the basis of prayerful yet diligent Bible study. She also describes her ministry as a 'lesser light' leading to the 'greater light' of Scripture.[13] It is instructive to observe the way in which she refused to settle theological debates, even when her legitimacy was thereby brought into serious question. Her lifelong attitude is well illustrated by the occasion in 1901 when she quite bluntly counseled assembled leaders to lay her writings aside until they understood the Scriptures.[14]

White is often described as a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From the vantage point of nineteenth-century historians, this makes her one of a group of innovative people who account in part for clusters of thought identified as Mormon, Seventh-day Adventist, Christadelphian, Christian Scientist, and Jehovah's Witness.[15] Of the founders of these religious bodies, White used Christian authors most extensively as background material for her writings. This fact, in addition to her Methodist upbringing, helps to make her more orthodox than the others, from the perspectives of historic Christianity. In a number of ways, she cogently pointed her spiritual descendants toward an effective relationship with the Bible. This fact has tended over time to narrow the gap between Seventh-day Adventists and mainstream Christianity.[16] How, then, may White's perception and use of Scripture be described?

At the outset it is important to observe that White made a concerted attempt to understand, employ and apply the whole of Scripture. This reality alerts those who value her writings to the fact that she will lead their Bible study in directions quite different from those fostered by the founders of the other religious movements that arose in nineteenth-century America. Her persistence in encompassing the

Potential' (April 1998); 'Ellen White, the Adventist Church and Its Religion Teachers: A Call for Transformed Relationships' (April 1998), Adventist Society for Religious Studies Annual Meeting, Orlando FL. A summary of central ideas embodied in these papers is attempted in a brief presentation, 'Ellen White and Adventists in the 1990s' (May 1998). I have benefited greatly since 1998 from critiques sent to me by scholars and pastors serving in many parts of the world, after they read one or more of these papers on sdanet.org in the AT ISSUE section.

10. For one of many potential illustrations, consult Gilbert M Valentine, *The Shaping of Adventism: The Case of W. W. Prescott* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1992).
11. For instance, note the frequently stated expectations of *The Remnant Herald* regarding the church's understanding and presentation of White's ministry, up to and including the issue dated December 2002. These expectations form an important strand in many of the forty volumes written and published by Drs Russell and Colin Standish.
12. 'God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the *standard* of all *doctrines* and the *basis* of all *reforms*', Ellen G White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1950), 595 (emphasis added). Several hundred similar passages refer to the Bible as *standard, foundation, basis* and *rule*. To extend the search, juxtapose such words as *faith, doctrine* and *practice* with *Bible, Scripture* and *Word of God*. This essay does not include extended lists of quotations in that computerised technology is readily available to most readers who may wish to check the statements.
13. The 'lesser light' expression is used by White to refer to the moon, the Jewish age and the ministry of John the Baptist, in addition to illustrating the relationship between her writings and the Bible.
14. For a contextual appraisal of this statement in terms of the three extant stenographic reports, see Arthur Patrick, 'An Adventist and an Evangelical in Australia? The Case of Ellen White in the 1890s', in *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review* 12 (December 1991): 42–53, especially footnote 20 in relation to *Manuscript Release* 115:12. For an edited version of this article, see *Ministry* (February 1995): 14–17.
15. The most instructive comparison of White and other female religious founders of her time is Ronald D. Graybill, 'The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century' (PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1983).
16. This process invites exploration from a number of perspectives, especially those of historians and sociologists. The most cogent contemporary analyses are available in the numerous journal articles by an expatriate Australian, Ronald Lawson. Lawson's initial PhD studies at the University of Queensland embraced both history and sociology. His long career at the City University of New York and his extensive research undertaken in various parts of the globe locate his interests progressively within the discipline of sociology, but his writings demonstrate the benefits of an ongoing engagement with historical studies.

thought of the entire Bible is intimated visually by indices to her writings. For instance, seldom in a relative sense is a chapter in the *SDA Bible Commentary* devoid of citations to White's writings.

Secondly, White maintained for seven decades a focus on the apocalyptic literature of Scripture, demonstrating thereby both the promise and the problems of millenarian thought. Her experiences as a Millerite, as a 'Shut Door' Sabbatarian Adventist, as an 'Open Door' Adventist, as a pioneer of Health Reform and Righteousness by Faith, were impacted by the apocalypticism of Daniel and Revelation in particular. Even as there is a creative tension between the classic prophets of the Old Testament and those suffused with the characteristics of the apocalyptic mind, there is a tension in White's writings between the *now* and the *not yet,* between occupation and imminence. This is a tension which must never be resolved if the Christian is to balance the teachings of Scripture. White's experience and diary-like comment on the relevant issues during the founding years and early maturity of Adventism illumine the past and offer instructive comment for the ongoing present.[17]

Thirdly, White revealed during her ministry a growing interest in basic principles of exegetical Bible study. Exegesis requires attention to linguistic, syntactical and contextual considerations, openness to the illumination provided by historical and archaeological studies, and recognition of the immediate life setting of the text under consideration and the relationships that exist between the various parts of the Bible. While White was not an academician in these respects, her writings demonstrate a genuine interest in Bible study that either takes account of or leaves room for exegetical endeavours.[18] Unlike some of her most ardent supporters at the present time, she welcomed translation initiatives that improved upon the delivery of God's Word through the King James Version.

A fourth consideration is the way in which major themes in White's literary endeavours led her to persistent Bible study. One of the best examples is the 'Great Controversy' theme. Fortunately, the development of her writing on this concept is now well documented and widely understood.[19] Ten years after her introduction to the idea, she began to express it in *Spiritual Gifts* (1858–1864), followed by four *Spirit of Prophecy* volumes (1870–1884), and five *Conflict of the Ages* tomes (1888–1917). These books illustrate her engagement with the theme, but they do not encompass it. Indeed, the controversy between Christ and his angels and Satan and his angels provides the most comprehensive framework for her entire corpus. *Early Writings* is probably the most accessible early expression of this strand within White's writings; it both illustrates the concept and resonates with the way New England's religious culture understood and applied the related insights of John Milton. She continued to explicate the theme throughout her life in the books mentioned above and in many others, especially *Testimonies for the Church* (1855–1909), *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (1896) and *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900). This engagement continues in many of her five thousand periodical articles and in uncounted numbers of letters, manuscripts, and oral discourses.

Twenty-five years ago, Adventists in the South Pacific Division started to hear about Walter Rea's research into the sources that White used so copiously in her extensive writings. Four years later, near the highest point of the intense controversy surrounding Rea's claims, an article was published suggesting that the literary relationship between White's writings and the work of other authors is in the order of 0.002 per cent.[20] It was no doubt motivated by a commendable desire to stabilise the understanding of the church in the South Pacific. However, the painstaking, four-volume study by Fred Veltman and suggests a figure 15,000 times higher may apply to fifteen randomly selected chapters of *The Desire of Ages.* In a public lecture during September 2002, Rea offered evidence that the discovery of literary parallels is ongoing, significant and includes the content of such books as *The Great Controversy*. The debate over percentages will remain contentious until we examine candidly a range of models that take account of all the known evidence and foster sustainable configurations.

White states that 'scenes', 'views', and 'representations' were disclosed to her mind in prophetic visions and dreams. Her son, William White, who more than any other person associated with her during her long literary career, described these experiences as 'flashlight' or 'panoramic' scenes. If her 1858 Great Controversy vision was like a two-hour video of the war between righteousness and sin, subsequently reinforced by flashbacks and similar experiences, there was every reason for her to explore and select from the multiple sources she used in writing on the Old Testament, the New Testament, and on Christian and Adventist history. There was rationality in her reliance on literary assistants, advisers and

17. The recent study by Douglas Morgan indicates how the church has attempted to understand and apply Revelation 13:11–18 over a period of sixteen decades. A shelf of similar books could well be written about other important passages in Daniel and Revelation. See Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Sect* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).
18. A trusted colleague warns that this sentence may overstate the case. After careful consideration of his caution, I have retained the concept but admit it needs thorough exploration in a single-issue paper.
19. Note the attention given to the Great Controversy theme in Herbert E Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998). See also Frank B Holbrook, 'The Great Controversy', in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* Commentary Reference Series twelth, edition, Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).
20. Robert J Wieland, 'Ellen White's Inspiration: Authentic and Profound', in *Australasian Record* (31 May 1982): 9.

editors in the initial process of preparing her writings for publication and in the subsequent revision of such works as the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy*. When Bible and history teachers met with administrators during 1919, the recorded discussion makes it clear that such processes were remembered within the group quite adequately. However, obscurantist impulses were so apparent at the time that the records of the 1919 discussions were packaged, stored and lost to the memory of even the church's thought-leaders. So, during the next six decades, the entire Adventist community largely forgot the vibrant lessons offered by this aspect of its past. It moved White's writings away from their historic role toward making them the definitive and authoritative encyclopedia of Adventist thought and practice. Therefore, the church needed the factual disclosures of the 1970s and 1980s, even though these revelations seemed traumatic to some at the time. Because of the church's failure to remember the way the Lord had led and taught it during its past history, there was much for it to fear and it experienced great loss.[21]

There remains a tendency amongst some Adventist apologists to continue to claim too much for White's writings, a fact that undermines her credibility. For instance, the McAdams' study of sources for the John Huss chapter in *The Great Controversy* indicates that she followed known historians 'page after page, leaving out much material, but using their sequence, some of their ideas, and often their words', even their 'historical errors and moral exhortations'.[22] Such practice

21. In papers referenced above I refer to analyses of the three reactions likely to occur when a religious group is inundated with new information: reversion, rejection, or transformation. The interpretation of Adventist history since 1970 in particular is illumined usefully in terms of such sociological insights. Perspectives relating to White from the pioneering study of sociologist Robert Wolfgramm (1983) are now extended by other doctoral studies. For example, see Michael Chamberlain, 'The Changing Role of Ellen White in Seventh-day Adventism with Reference to Sociocultural Standards at Avondale College' (PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 2001). Currently Rick Ferret is researching and writing an illuminating doctoral thesis on the impact of the routinisation of charisma, identity and sectarian change within Adventism.'
22. Donald R McAdams, 'Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G White Studies in the 1970s', in *Spectrum* 10 (March 1980): 27–41. See page 34 for McAdams' abbreviated account of his research on the Huss chapter. The McAdams' article remains the best overview of the 1970s, the decade in Adventism during which the most significant data about White's life and thought became available. Over 900 pages of material were generated for the 1982 International Prophetic Guidance Workshop, thereby making crucial information a matter of public record. Data discovered since that time has added further illumination and offered additional confirmation of some positions that were still tentative at that time. For the past two decades the task of the church has been located more within the area of interpretation than in the realm of discovery. The indefatigable research of Fred Hoyt is one of the best examples of the importance of this process. For instance, Hoyt's ongoing research has illumined the charismatic milieu of White's early ministry, confirming the picture that in 1982 was available only in outline form. In similar fashion, Hoyt's research demonstrates that while the fact of the literary relationship between White's writings and those of other authors was well known by 1982, the implications of this reality are still being

is consistent with the 'divine video' understanding of White's experience, which presented Huss as a man of God who stood for truth and righteousness. This visionary input may well have left White to determine a host of related matters: When and where did Huss live? What were the main events of his life? Who were his contemporaries? How was his witness received within his time and place? The common Adventist mistake when reading volumes like *The Great Controversy* is to think White was *writing* history. In actual fact she was *interpreting* history. The first is a human endeavor; the latter needs divine disclosure, if it is to rise above the level of human analysis and offer a sustainable theology of human experience.

Such remarks are predicated on the belief that White's work has an inner consistency, whether she is interpreting Scripture, history, or other matters. The overarching themes she treats disclose the essence of her unique advantage over other authors. However, we do her a great disservice when we hold her to ransom over mundane details. God gave us what we needed: a trail blazed by an intrepid explorer, for a journey during which we are sustained by his grace as we follow the Guidebook illumined by the Holy Spirit. God chose not to give us the equivalent of a paved and lighted freeway with controlled access to facilitate an unthinking glide into the kingdom of glory. To change the metaphor, we should be grateful for a direction-setting, panoramic vision of a vast landscape with evident landmarks, rather than lamenting the lack of a contour map and a street directory.[23] Ours is a journey to be undertaken by faith, not by sight. Our decisions are to be made after considering the weight of evidence, not on the basis of 20/20 vision. We are to seek the level of Christian maturity intimated in Ephesians 4 and illustrated aptly by such authors as Kohlberg and Fowler.[24]

The picture that emerges from these considerations is reinforced by reference to other areas of White's writings, including the theme of healthful living. The research of a Melbourne surgeon, Don McMahon, provides the church with another useful window into White's world with particular reference to her health counsels. A number of competent observers imply that McMahon's findings merit careful consideration.[25] McMahon's studies indicate that White's 'what'

defined by new discoveries. See, for one telling example, Hoyt's reconstruction of the context of White's comments on the Civil War; in particular, her reference (Ellen G White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1948) 1:266–7) to the First Battle of Manasses.
23. Note the expression of this concept in Arthur Patrick, 'Landmarks and Landscape', in *Adventist Review* (27 October 1983): 4. The church would be greatly helped if a range of appropriate metaphors was developed and popularised.
24. For a useful application of the insights of Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler in relation to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the need for inclusive worship styles, see Barry Oliver, 'Worshipping in the Joy of the Holy Spirit', in *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,* edited by Gerhard Pfandl (Wahroonga: South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, nd [circa 1995]). Especially note page 44, footnote 5.
25. Dr Russell Standish, a medical doctor, strongly contests these suggestions; note his comment

and 'why' health statements achieve about twice the credibility rating of the 'what' and 'why' health statements of her contemporaries. This is evidence that she received input from a Source far more reliable than Graham, Alcott, Jackson, and Kellogg combined.[26] Those who take her health counsels seriously are apt to live seven or more years longer than the general population.[27] However, even as White's writings leave room for continued biblical enquiry, they also leave room for the development of medical science on the bases of diligent observation and intentional research. Thus the health emphasis that she initiated now embraces scientific medicine and its advocates are able to hold their heads high in a world that is very different from that of her lifetime.[28] It is remarkable indeed that, according to McMahon's findings, her 'health and medical statements' in books like *Spiritual Gifts* (1864) and *The Ministry of Healing* (1905) may merit about a seventy per cent credibility score amongst health professionals, and that this score may improve as medical research continues to develop.

The evidence that White's biblical and theological writings are related to the North American and Adventist cultures of her time is well documented. A similar clarity derives from the evidence that her historical writings are related to those of Protestant historians and that her health writings are related to those of American health reformers. William White notes that her literary dependence was especially significant in the general areas of prophetic and doctrinal exposition.[29] The reversionist response within Adventism has continuing problems with the recognition and application of such data. From a polar opposite position, the rejectionist response seeks resolution from acute cognitive dissonance by creating distance from the prophet and in some instances from the Adventist community. By contrast, the transformationist response accepts all the known data and searches for ways to be faithful to the entire body of evidence as conclusions are formed and applications are made. Only the latter pattern is sustainable and unifying.[30]

It may well be claimed that these remarks are theoretical. The next section will, therefore, seek to concretise them by noting examples of the way in which White related to biblical themes and employed specific Bible passages during her long literary career.

Ellen White, Biblical Themes and Selected Passages

Theology is literally word or discourse about God.[31] For about seven of Sabbatarian Adventism's founding years, White along with most other leaders and members denied saving truth about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. To declare that God had rejected the sinful world and that the time for the salvation of sinners was past meant that serious heresy was proclaimed.[32] The process whereby the church has dealt with this matter is instructive. In the early years, White's writings were edited to remove problematic expressions and ephemeral items were lost sight of as the movement developed. Thus, over time, relevant evidence became hard to access until effective archives were established throughout the Adventist world during the 1970s. Therefore, even a prominent author like Francis D Nichol could expend great energy in denying the reality of the problem.[33] Since 1982 the church has placed this matter increasingly within a coherent framework. It is clear that God leads his people step by step; indeed, the orthodoxy of one period may become the heresy of the next and, contrariwise, the heresy of one era may develop into the orthodoxy of the next. White is emphatic that the Adventist movement has many, many lessons to *unlearn* as well as many things to *learn.*[34] Examples of the essential unlearning process are numerous from the 1840s to the present. For instance, Miller used fifteen evidences to identify 1844 as a prophetic

filed with the original of this paper in the Research Centre.

26. I am indebted to Dr McMahon for the way he has shared both his methodology and his conclusions with me orally over several years. For a short introduction to his research, see Don S McMahon, 'Adventist Health: Inspired or Acquired?' However, a far more comprehensive report is available on the CD that McMahon has produced. McMahon's research corrects the impulse to claim 100 per cent accuracy for White's health counsels, even as it undermines the claim that she borrowed all her health concepts from her contemporaries.
27. Dr Gary Fraser's forthcoming volume will offer a context for interpreting this remark. Fraser, a researcher based at Loma Linda, intimates that his book may be entitled *Diet and Chronic Disease: Studies of Seventh-day Adventists and Other Vegetarians.* He expects it to be published by Oxford University Press.
28. More than a thousand hours of research and writing about Sydney Adventist Hospital convinces me that this theme merits careful investigation. See Arthur Patrick, *The San: 100 Years of Christian Caring, 1903–2003* (Warburton: Signs Publishing Company, 2003).
29. Observe the way this concept is placed within a helpful context in Graeme Bradford's forthcoming volume on White's writings. Bradford's content, honed with the help of some twenty readers, has been intimated in his preaching, teaching and writing of the past decade (*cf Ministry,* August 1999, 25–27).
30. Probably the finest manual for implementing a transformationist response within Adventism is Fritz Guy's volume, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999). Rejectionist responses are available currently from a plethora of websites as well as via videos and publications. Reversionist responses are also plentiful; in magazines, books and websites. For a brief comment on one outspoken author, Samuel Kooranteng-Pipim and his volume *Receiving the Word,* see Alden Thompson, *Spectrum,* Volume 26, No. 4 (January 1998): 50–52. Pipim's 2001 volume may be as tangential as his 1996 one. His sincerity is not under question, but the concept of inspiration he proposes leads either to the denial of data that is beyond dispute, or to the destruction of White's prophetic ministry in the way Roger Coon warned (1982).
31. For a much more adequate definition, see Guy, *Thinking Theologically, op cit,* 3–19.
32. For some of the data basic to this statement and an attempt to interpret it constructively, see Patrick, 'Ellen White Yesterday and Today'.
33. Francis D Nichol, *Ellen G White and Her Critics* (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1951).
34. Ellen G White, *Review and Herald,* 26 July 1892.

date, whereas in 2003 probably no informed Australian Adventist could conscientiously support fourteen of them. More than that, Miller was wrong about the event that he predicted would occur in 1844. Yet we firmly believe that God led Miller and his colleagues to proclaim an essential 'present truth'. Similarly, we are now able to demonstrate cogently that the evidence used by early Adventists to adduce the idea that the door of mercy closed in 1844 is invalid. However, the 'Shut Door' teaching served an important purpose, holding the fledgling movement together while it established a membership base with more viable biblical and organisational foundations.[35]

White's perception of 'present truth' is a crucial consideration for those who would place such theological development within a sustainable and constructive context. God is infinite truth but human perceptions of truth are always partial. Therefore, within the Adventist community of faith, truth is well defined as 'progressive'. Our constant expectation is that 'the Lord will send us increased truth'. Conversely, it is a satanic deception to conclude that 'we have all the truth essential for us as a people'. The faithfulness and zeal of our forebears are exemplary for us; however we may well be judged and condemned if we do not 'improve our light as they improved theirs'.[36]

Critics of White and the Seventh-day Adventist church are apt to hurl a host of colorful missiles in their attempt to demolish her credibility and that of the movement with which she sustained a symbiotic relationship. It has proved impossible to parry some of these missiles in the way Nichol and other apologists tried to do. Conversely, White's prophetic ministry is not imperiled by the actuality of such minor mistakes.[37] Her understanding of the descent of the human race into iniquity is a case in point. Genesis 6 expresses this concept in unmistakable terms. White reaches into her culture and employs a nineteenth-century idea to illustrate antediluvian degeneracy. Her understanding of amalgamation, interpreted as the interbreeding of humans and animals, is clarified by Uriah Smith's *Review and Herald* defense of her statement. James White's action clinches the interpretation decisively: he republished Smith's apologetic in book form for wide distribution at Adventist camp meetings.[38] From our vantage point it is evident that a minor flaw like White's adoption of such an idea does not militate against her credibility for those who have developed an adequate understanding of her inspiration.[39]

Often the reader of White's writings is helped to understand their appropriate application by learning more about how she did her work. For instance, the theology student described earlier who sought to develop a definitive chronology of Christ's life needed to reshape his approach after reading a pamphlet from White Estate, 'How *The Desire of Ages* Was Written'.[40] This document and its exhibits make it apparent that White laid no claim to ultimate knowledge about matters such as the order of the events in Christ's earthly life. Rather, with the help of her staff, she used the best harmony that happened to be available to her at the time. She was open to consider insights from the people around her, such as those gleaned by her longest-serving literary assistant, Marian Davis, from attendance at classes in the Melbourne Bible School. White's *Life of Christ* project was located within responsible nineteenth-century Evangelical Christian thought in terms of the thirty known sources that she valued. The nature of the revision that White implemented for her writings is illustrated aptly by her response to 105 suggestions made by W.W. Prescott for the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*. In short, many of the conclusions reached by the theology student distorted the author's intent for her classic volume. The student's studies might have proceeded usefully had he read page 22 of *The Desire of Ages* as an indication of the book's theme: 'to know God is to love Him.' The book is a peerless production within Adventism because it is such a winsome invitation to develop a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

As for the 1888 statement discussed earlier that the church *is not* the bride of Christ, it is only a problem if White's subsequent statements are unheeded, declaring without reservation that the church *is* the bride of Christ. The concept of development within her understanding of Scripture illumines a host of apparent contradictions. As already noted, Alden Thompson's *From Sinai to Golgotha* series has identified and described a helpful example of the constructive development that characterises her thought. Rolf Poehler provides a comprehen-

35. A doctoral student commented on this point by saying that the Shut Door provided time, necessary time, much like when a basketball team takes 'time out' to consider its options. Compare Arthur Patrick, 'Mount Exmouth and the Adventist Journey', in *Record,* 27 October 2001: 2; Bruce Manners, 'The Challenge of "Present truth"', in *Record,* 26 October 2002: 2.
36. See *Signs of the Times,* 26 May 1881, 26 May 1890, White, *Testimonies,* 1:261.
37. As in the way in which Ellen White acknowledges the possibility that there are mistakes in the Bible yet avers the reliability and sufficiency of Scripture in terms of its Divine purpose.
38. Gordon Shigley, 'Amalgamation of Man and Beast', *Spectrum,* 12 (June 1982): 10–19.
39. For a representative list of such flaws, see Robert W Olson, 'The Question of Inerrancy in Inspired Writings' (Washington, DC: Ellen G White Estate, 12 April 1982). Olson's statement should be read in the context of several thousand pages included in or referred to in Document Files 65 and 739. Clearly the church will benefit when a competent author (such as George Knight) presents it with a comprehensive analysis of relations between Adventism and Fundamentalism. Whereas in the 1920s and 1930s many Adventists adopted the fundamentalist notion of inerrancy, by the 1970s it was evident that this concept would either require unfaithfulness to evidence or abandonment of White's prophetic ministry. The Adventist debate over inspiration in the 1990s was impaired by failure to recognise this reality; note, for instance, the way in which chapters by Frank Hasel and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim were promoted by the Adventist Theological Society.
40. Robert W Olsen, 23 May 1979.

sive framework for understanding continuity and change in Christian doctrine, Adventist heritage, and White's thought.[41] Fritz Guy offers 'how to' ideas that will help the church rise above controversy and develop a constructive future.[42] Therefore, instead of being threatened by the reality of doctrinal development that is evident in White's personal experience and writings, Adventist pastors should enable their members to understand and rejoice that God leads errant human beings (including prophets) toward the increasing light of His perfect day.

Due to limitations of space, we shall notice only three further illustrations of the way in which White related to important biblical concepts over time: 'the daily', 'the schoolmaster' and 'the holiest'. Each of these expressions might be interpreted fruitfully in the light of decades of discussion within the church, but we must focus upon them chiefly in terms of White's perspectives.

Daniel 8:13 and its reference to 'the daily' was an important theme within Millerism before it became a staple in Sabbatarian Adventism. Linked with 'the transgression of desolation' and the treading under foot of 'the sanctuary and the host', the daily has demonstrated a potential to both engage constructive dialogue and create divisive controversy. Was it to be interpreted in terms of 'sacrifice', the supplied word in the King James Version? Was the attack upon the sanctuary by paganism in its Babylonian, Greek, or Roman manifestations? Or was the attack by apostate Christianity, as in the papacy, or by a non-Christian religion, as in Islam? Was the sanctuary under discussion was a Jewish temple on earth or the 'true tabernacle' in heaven. Once the relations between the daily, 'the little horn' and 'the king of the north' were included in the discussion, the potential for controversy was intensified. Adventist heritage collections preserve accounts of debates point by point in books, periodicals, document files, and microform materials. Some of these controversies persisted for decades, often subsumed under titles (like 'The Eastern Question') that have long since lost their earlier intensity.[43]

In the post-1844 years, White supported Owen Crosier and his colleagues as they began to move away from identifying 'the daily' as paganism. During the controversy of 1850, White saw a need to divert the Sabbatarians from an interest in a physical return to a literal Jerusalem that was associated with continued date setting. Therefore she returned to the Millerite concept as 'the correct view' of the daily. This support seemed to put White at variance with the 'new' view propounded fifty years later by though-leaders like LR Conradi and WW Prescott, that 'the daily' was Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Some observers believed that White was reversing her earlier position by being open to the new view. This perception raised deep concern about her prophetic reliability and even about the integrity of Adventism. However, a century later the entire issue is much clearer and can be discussed without fear or rancor.[44]

In the 1840s White fostered an embryonic view that proved fruitful in the long term prove the most fruitful, because it best apprehended the ministry of Jesus Christ. In the 1850s she seemed to revert to the Millerite position, to steer the young Sabbatarian movement away from a destructive heresy. In the early 1900s she was open to a more inclusive attempt to exegete the Bible, understand history and emphasise the Christ-centered nature of the biblical revelation. At no stage did she present her writings as the final authority in the matters of biblical interpretation that were in focus. Always her counsel sought to limit destructive controversy by helping to envision and implement a present that would develop a productive future for the Advent movement.[45]

In Galatians 3:24, the Apostle Paul presents the law as 'our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith'. The Adventist discussion over whether this law is ceremonial or moral has simmered for much of the history of the movement. Like Mount Vesuvius it has proved able to erupt with destructive force, as it did in the context of the Minneapolis General Conference of 1888. Once again White's relation to the issue is instructive. For a time she had seemed to support the concept that Paul's opposition to law should be understood as directed against the ceremonial law. That position enabled a fitting apologetic for the perpetuity of the moral law and hence for the continuing significance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. At a later time, when the identity and continuance of the Sabbath were well established, the burning issue was the problem of the misuse of law by legalistic thought and behaviour. The perception that White had altered her understanding of the schoolmaster distressed Adventist literalists, who feared identifying the schoolmaster as the moral law may would

41 Rolf J Poehler, 'Change in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Study of the Problem of Doctrinal Development' (PhD diss, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 1995). The Adventist focus of this 591-page study has since become more accessible in such publications as Rolf J. Poehler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000).

42 See his *Thinking Theologically.*

43 For an historical introduction to such matters, see Richard Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1979), especially Chapter 24, 'Debates Over Nonessentials.'

44. This interpretation is based on about twenty statements White made with reference to the daily between the 1840s and 1911, read within the context of the discussions taking place in the church. Obviously these two paragraphs on the daily need at least an entire article to treat the subject adequately. For a succinct and illuminating introduction to 'the Daily', see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia,* Commentary Reference Series, second edition, edited by Don F Neufeld (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1996), 10:429–433.

45. Perhaps the most perceptive published account of the daily in relation to White's ministry is Valentine's Chapter 13, 'Theological Controversy and a Change of Job', in *The Shaping of Adventism, op cit*, 185–203.

imperil the Sabbath and destroy White's prophetic authority. Reversionist concern and rejectionist criticism of White's stances on the schoolmaster are not well founded when they are viewed in the light of varying historical contexts or in the glare of present research.[46]

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle is intent on showing that Jesus Christ is a better high priest offering a better sacrifice and ministering in a better sanctuary. The reading of such passages as Hebrews 6:19, 20, and 10:19–22 has raised concerns for Adventists ever since Crosier sought to distinguish between a daily atonement for the *forgiveness* of sins and a yearly atonement for the *blotting out* of sins. After the Great Disappointment, Hebrews created a landmark for Sabbatarian Adventists as they began to focus on Christ as minister of 'the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched' (Heb 8:2). But for some believers, Hebrews seemed to erode the very landmark that it helped to create, by implying that Jesus at his ascension entered 'within the veil' (Heb 6:19), indeed 'into heaven itself' to appear there 'in the presence of God for us' (Heb 9:24). How could it be that even New Testament Christians may have 'boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus'?

Once again White's writings offer enormous help to the Advent Movement. She affirms the stances of Crosier and Edson in the 1840s, but she moves far beyond both of them in later decades. We can now discern more clearly that Crosier and Edson led the young movement in the *right direction,* but did not arrive at the *ultimate destination* of consummate understanding. Even the 'Shut Door' concept embodied a 'present truth,' despite its biblical inadequacy. James White and Uriah Smith continued the Adventist journey, as did major doctrinal statements of the 1870s, 1890s and 1930s. Fundamental 23 adopted in May of 1980 formed a new and important climax in a long process, but even its refined understanding was not the church's last word. In August of the same year, at the largest-ever assemblage of Adventist thought-leaders convened for study of the sanctuary doctrine, the conferees probably came closer to agreement with the biblical data than any other Adventist assembly had previously been able to do. Thousands of pages of documents indicate that since that time the process of constructive development has continued as Adventists have diligently studied their Bibles. In hindsight, White's potential as a coalescing agent within Adventism can be discerned with increasing clarity. The sincerity of those who have used her writings as a centrifugal force may merit deep respect, but both the hermeneutical evidence and documented historical results call loudly for continuing change in attitude and practice.

How can such matters be understood coherently? A cluster of considerations must be noted. The maturation of biblical understanding within Adventism had been enhanced by the production of the *SDA Bible Commentary* and other factors. The experiences and the studies of the 1950s moved some believers toward a more sustainable view of the biblical doctrine of judgment. The concept of theodicy, so deeply imbedded in the Book of Daniel, was emerging into a matter of importance, enhanced by linguistic and other aspects of biblical studies. The implications of the doctrine of Righteousness by Faith were being integrated more effectively into the church's thinking. There was a perceived need to redefine the church's understanding of White's writings in relation to Scripture, following the effervescent discussions of the 1970s.

This latter need was achieved in principle by a short statement voted during August 1980 but the component ideas were not spelled out clearly until 1982 and 1983. At last the church was readied to read Hebrews without threat to its faith and to appreciate more fully White's *historical* reviews of the sanctuary doctrine, her *experiential* reflections on its process, and her intimations of what Calvary meant in terms of the Letter to the Hebrews.[47] A landmark statement of 'affirmations and denials' was formed, discussed, amended and published during 1982 and 1983. Welcomed by some church members, its import was little understood by the majority. Therefore, its essence merits restatement at this point.

Before its final publication, the single-page statement was read and commented upon by more thought-leaders worldwide than most other documents have been in the history of the denomination. This reality means it has less authority than a statement voted at a General Conference Session, but it has greater credence than most other articles in such centrist publications as *Adventist Review, Ministry* and *Record.*[48] The document lists ten affirmations. The first four statements relate to Scripture as divinely revealed and inspired in a canon of sixty-six books, a canon that provides 'the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice' and constitutes 'the Word of God in human

46 Again, at the press of a few computer keys, White's writings can be searched on this issue. Most useful are her comments preserved in White, *Selected Messages,* volume 1; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, volume 6, edited by Francis D Nichol (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1953); *Review and Herald* articles; *1888 Materials, Manuscript Releases,* volume 1; and the biography, Arthur L White, *Ellen G White Biography,* volume 3 (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1985).

47. One again, computer-assisted research can identify readily some forty Ellen White comments that provide the backdrop for these brief remarks.

48. The statement is one of the few carried in all three of these publications as well as many others worldwide. See 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G White Writings: A Statement of Present Understanding', in *Adventist Review,* 23 December 1982; *Record,* 22 January 1983; *Ministry,* February 1983. For a straightforward application of such principles that a pastor might share profitably with a local congregation, see the article by Woodrow W Whidden, 'Ellen White, Inerrancy, and Interpretation', in *Ministry* (December 2002): 24–28. Of great value in this regard is George Knight's *Ellen White Series* of four books, especially *Reading Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997).

language'. The next three statements affirm that 'the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times', that 'the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy', and that, as the product of inspiration, they 'are applicable and authoritative especially to Seventh-day Adventists'. Affirmation eight focuses on the purpose of White's writings as including 'guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life'. The final two affirmations emphasise the importance White has for the nurture and unity of the church, and they emphasise that her 'use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible'.

These affirmations are followed by ten important denials, as follows:

1. *We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.*
2. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture.*
3. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.*
4. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.*
5. *We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.*
6. *We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.*
7. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.*
8. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.*
9. *We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.*
10. *We do not believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.*

These affirmations and denials were intended to foster 'a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White' and, therefore, to avoid two extremes: first, regarding these writings as functioning on a canonical level identical with Scripture', or, secondly, 'considering them as ordinary Christian literature'. These 1982 statements form the parameters within which this essay seeks to examine and interpret the studies of White's writings undertaken within the church during the past three decades.

Two statements White made before important church assemblies seem to epitomise her life-long intent. Amidst the turmoil of Minneapolis she stood tall and enjoined warring Adventists to solve their destructive debate by a deeper study of the Word of God.[49] In the charged climate of the 1901 General Conference she pointedly called for her writings to be laid aside in favor of the Scriptures, the precious source of truth she so often challenges her readers to duly search, rightly understand, and faithfully apply.[50] Such counsels focus attention upon the crucial question: How should responsible Seventh-day Adventists envision from her writings a viable hermeneutic for Scripture in the twenty-first century?

Preliminary Hermeneutical Considerations

Although this section of the essay needs a book-length treatment, it must be profiled in a few words, much like an artist may try to depict an event or narrate a story with a few strokes. The questions are several yet closely related. What perceptions did White have of the Bible and its study? What example does she model and what counsel does she offer Adventists toward the development of a viable hermeneutic? How does she enjoin the application and outcomes of Bible study? Such an exploration might well begin with the 1962–3 indices of her published writings by looking up three expressions: *Bible, Scripture* and *Word of God*.[51] That exercise will lead to fifty pages listing several thousand references; the scanning of these will yield key words that can be tested and extended with the help of subsequent printed indices and used in a more comprehensive computer-assisted exploration. For convenience, a number of words and phrases that will especially reward a computer search are presented below in italics. Effective packaging for this vast body of material may include headings such as the following.

Orientation: reverence in the presence of Scripture

The attitudes and presuppositions of the *Bible student* are crucial. The *sacred* or *holy Word* of the living God is to be approached with *awe, reverence* and the attitudes of *'a learner in the school of Christ'*. The student may be confident in seeking

49. Read in context White's sermon, 'A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word', delivered 1 November 1888, printed in AV Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years, 1888–1901* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1966, 1981): 303–311.
50. Note the references given in footnote 14, above.
51. Here, too, it is appropriate to explore the rich heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist community and its engagement with Bible study. For a recent conspectus see Richard Davidson, 'Biblical Interpretation', in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology. Hagerstown MD: Review and Herald, 2000,* 58–104. Davidson offers in five pages an illuminating selection of 'Ellen G White Comments'.

the guidance of the *Holy Spirit.* However, *diligent effort* is indicated, along with awareness that the *mine of truth* can never be exhausted.[52]

The human interpreter: responsible but limited

Every *rational being* is responsible for learning the *truth* from the Scriptures, for exemplifying it and sharing it with others. Yet, because of the scope of the task, the conclusions of any one person are unlikely to convey the fullness of truth. Therefore, the task is best pursued within a community of faith. Disagreements are likely but should be checked by grace and humility as well as by continuing efforts to understand *'the truth as it is in Jesus'.* Strong convictions may be a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and as such are to be respected as essential in the experience of Christians.[53]

Process and method: respecting text, canon and historical context

The recovery of the authentic text of the Bible and its accurate translation lays a foundation for understanding the Word of God effectively. Linguistic information is useful in this regard. The Bible is its own *expositor*, so it is fruitful to *compare Scripture with Scripture.* The recovery of the life setting of any given text may be instructive and may be assisted by reference to the biblical writer, his experience and circumstances as the well as local customs and practices. White's practice demonstrates that it is legitimate to read widely in books about the Bible and to seek to understand the way any given text has been interpreted and applied elsewhere in Scripture as well as in Christian experience and Adventist history. It is likewise fruitful to use White's writings as a lesser light leading to the greater light of Scripture.[54]

Theme and purpose: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salavation

The *Old Testament* (624) whether it treats *history* (3,606), *precept* (1,516) or *prophecy* (1,992), is *irradiated* (33) with the glory of *Christ* (69,227) *Jesus* (37,038) The *New Testament* (450) has the same *grand* (1,403) *theme* (629). *Scripture* (1,942) discloses *God's* (133,323) *original* (642) *purpose* (6,514) for this *earth* (16,508), it describes the origin and development of the *great controversy* (960) and it profiles the work of *redemption* (2,742). Every theme in the *Bible* (8,492) clusters around the plan of *salvation* (10,090).[55]

Outcomes and effeccts: the application of Bible study for the individual, the church, and the world

Bible study is to find application in the individual life, in the community of faith and in the church's mission for the world. God's Word received into the soul shapes thought and develops character. Truths learned are to be applied in daily experience. Every dimension of church life is to be guided by Scripture. The truth of the Bible is a trust from God.[56] A typical example of White's perception of Scripture exemplifies the mood of many expressions:

> The Bible is full of the richest treasures of truth, of glowing descriptions of that heavenly land. We should search the Scriptures, that we may better understand the plan of salvation, and learn of the righteousness of Christ, until we shall exclaim in viewing the matchless charms of our Redeemer, 'Thy gentleness hath made me great.' In the word of God we shall see the infinite compassion of Jesus. The imagination may reach out in contemplation of the wonders of redeeming love, and yet in its highest exercises we shall not be able to grasp the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of God; for it passeth knowledge.[57]

The extensive body of material so fleetingly reviewed in this section portrays White as one who stimulates biblical enquiry rather than circumventing it on the basis of superior understanding or prophetic authority. An assumption that guided in the production of the *SDA Bible Commentary,* that no comment should be seen to challenge any statement by White, is inappropriate as a rubric under which to conduct biblical enquiry in the twenty-first century, not least because of the new circumstances into which the church has been thrust.[58] More than that,

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52. See 'The Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth', in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald,* 8 and 15 November 1892, and many other references. More than 500 times in White's published writings, the context within which she refers to the Word of God includes a reference to the Holy Spirit. (Note that all such statistics usually include repetitions due to thematic compilations.)
53. Of a great many references, note especially White, *The Great Controversy,* 598. More than six hundred times Ellen White speaks of 'the truth as it is in Jesus'.
54. White's support for these sentiments is evident more from personal example than explicit injunction. Many *Signs of the Times* articles are of value in this regard, not least the following: 'The Weapon Against Satan's Delusions' 18 September 1892; 'Our Great Treasure House', 21 March 1906 to 17 October 1906. See also 'Able to Make Us Wise unto Salvation', 1 May 1907.
55. Note White, *The Desire of Ages,* 211; Nichol, *The SDA Bible Commentary,* 7:907; White, *Christ's Object Lessons,* 129; 'Build on a Sure Foundation', in *Review and Herald,* 24 September 1908. The bracketed numbers in this paragraph indicate the number of times the italicised word is used in White's published writings. By combining qualifying words with key words a mass of comment can be made more accessible.
56. From a host of potential references, note in particular 'The Scriptures a Sufficient Guide', Week of Prayer Reading for Sabbath 15 December 1888, B-209-1888, printed in 'The Ellen White Materials, Volume 1, 196–202. Compare 'The Value of Bible Study', *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald,* 17 July 1888; 'The Truth as it is in Jesus', *The Signs of the Times,* 16 June 1898.
57. 'The Beatitudes', *The Signs of the Times,* 30 May 1892.
58. As early as the 1974 Bible Conference, within the Biblical Research Institute there was recognition of 'the great variety of ways' in which White uses the Bible. See Raymond F Cottrell, 'Ellen

it is useful to understand the *Gestalt* within which White wrote, for the symbiotic relationship she sustained with the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith deeply influenced her counsel and hence the specific applications that she made of Scripture. It is as perilous to claim adequacy for the pious but uninformed studies of the theology student as it is to follow the approach of the earnest congregants. One of the most cogent expressions of the doctrine of inspiration applicable to White's corpus as well as the biblical canon has been on the church's corporate desk for over a decade.[59] Therefore, the church needs to take seriously its opportunity to offer effective pastoral care, shepherding wisely the substantial portion of its members who are unlikely to perceive adequately the dynamic nature of the development evident in White's writings, or to understand unaided the historical context that may illumine any given statement.[60] The responsibility to offer balanced pastoral leadership is enlarged by the fact that most Adventist members do not have access to the full range of thought represented in White's voluminous literary output, so their anxieties and their criticisms will often be nourished by inadequate information. One of the hopeful indicators that the church may experience enhanced unity, a clearer focus on its identity and a greater commitment to its mission in the near future is the present opportunity to implement comprehensively the South Pacific Division strategy document (1999) with reference to White's writings.

Conclusion

Carl Schurz suggests that 'ideals are like stars' in that we cannot touch them with our hands but they are useful as guides.[61] Four decades ago as an evangelist and pastor my ideals included the purpose to translate from the Hebrew and Greek originals all the texts used as bases for sermonic communication, and then to read everything White had written about these Bible passages prior to the delivery of any particular discourse. My frail hands have seldom grasped either of these ideals adequately over extended periods of time. The life of a minister and a teacher tends to be a daily response to a tumult of immediate demands. In an age when serious Bible study is too readily supplanted by lower order matters, the will to listen as prophets, apostles and Jesus Christ speak to us in their own tongues remains a worthy ideal for preachers of the Word. For Seventh-day Adventists who are moving rapidly into a world that is radically different from that of their founders, it remains a helpful ideal to seek a comprehensive understanding of the writings that witness to their rich heritage, and in particular those of the author whose prophetic ministry spanned the first seventy years of Sabbatarian Adventism. It is my hope that the cursory remarks offered in this essay may foster the development of a hermeneutic that will enhance the ministry of those who would proclaim 'present truth' with a constructive awareness of the way the Lord led and taught the Advent Movement in its earlier years.

G White's Evaluation and Use of the Bible', in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, edited by Gordon M Hyde (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 142–161.

59. Thompson, *Inspiration, op cit.*
60. See Barry D Oliver, 'The Development of an Adventist Lifestyle: Some Contemporary Implications', in this volume for a thoughtful essay that discusses related issues with pastoral sensitivity.
61. John P Neff, *Gleanings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, nd), 62.