

Ellen White's Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity offers a saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ,¹ taught of the Holy Spirit.² Libraries of books can be consulted about the process of disclosure (revelation), its trustworthy communication (inspiration), and the help of the Spirit for those who seek to understand and apply the message (illumination).³

Christianity has witnessed creative and destructive battles over these doctrines, few more intense than those within the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century as fundamentalism⁴ and modernism⁵ engaged each other. Seventh-day Adventists belong in neither camp.⁶ However, with a valid concern about Modernism and an ambiguity with reference to Ellen White, many Adventists aligned themselves with the fundamentalists. Especially since 1970, when Ellen White studies entered a new phase, this lack of clarity has threatened the unity and mission of Adventism.

¹Jn 17:3; 1 Jn 5:20.

²Jn 14-16.

³I acknowledge the formative influence of Raoul Dederen on my thought in these areas while I undertook MA and MDiv studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1970-1972.

⁴Fundamentalism has many positive elements; the verbal inerrancy of the Bible is not one of them. Such other fundamentalist doctrines as dispensationalism, secret rapture, Keswick holiness, immortality of the soul, and an eternally-burning hell do not cohere with Adventism.

⁵Some observers suggest that "modernism is dead," and the present threat to Adventism is "the pluralistic, postmodern world view." See the *Adventist Theological Society Newsletter* 8 (September 1997): 1-2.

⁶For a North American perspective on evangelicalism, see Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon, GA: Mercer UP 1997).

Unrealistic concepts of inspiration caused many Adventists to adopt extreme positions with reference to Ellen White's ministry,¹ including reversionist attitudes. The Adventist of fundamentalist inclination, confronted with a massive amount of new information, tends to elevate an idealized past as normative for the present, requiring a strong continuity (even identity) with that past. Therefore, historical data may be seen as the cause of unnecessary problems; primary sources may appear to initiate doubt about the leading of God; probing questions may seem threatening, with even their asking categorized as evidence of lack of faith. Thus judgmental groups tend to form on the edges of the church and mount a guerrilla war, firing salvos at people and institutions.

The polar opposite to reversion is a rejectionist stance, which declares the past is so unreliable in view of present knowledge or so irrelevant to present needs that separation from it is essential. Historical data may be grasped as a weapon with which to attack the church (as in the writings of Gregory Hunt and Wallace Slattery); primary sources may be used by the rejectionist in an attempt to discredit claims about God's leading. During the resultant confusion some people quietly slip out of the church because they perceive the church as dishonest, or congregations may divide when the advocacy of opposing ideas fragments relationships, or militant individuals may leave Adventism in anger and direct long-range missiles back at the body of Christ.

Meanwhile, the church and its institutions experience turmoil. At a time when there is an enormous need to comprehensively support creationism, great effort may be expended to prop up a peripheral idea—the chronology of Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656). When health and educational institutions need creative help to express Adventist values to patients and students, they may be threatened by well-meaning authors and administrators responding to negative reports which often turn out to be rumors. With unity under threat, bewildered leaders may grasp promising solutions offered in books like *Omega* and *Receiving the Word*, only to witness intensified conflict and a tarnishing of the church's credibility.² Adventist ministers, historians, scientists, and religion teachers at times find hazardous the professions for which they prepared with great effort and outlay. Accountability is essential, as is a creative tension between academic freedom and academic responsibility. But to be

¹I am indebted, for a way to name these three categories, to Robert M. Johnston, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Biblical Period: Reflections on an Elusive Category," address to the Andrews Society for Religious Studies (Dec. 1981) 10.

²*Omega* is skillfully written, but is based on grossly inadequate historical research. *Receiving the Word* has a penchant for naming people and placing them in negative categories without due care as to their actual position.

effective, these professionals and their institutions also need accurate understanding from laity and leaders if the church is to proceed coherently with the fulfillment of its mission.

Consensus on the role of Ellen White would go a long way toward resolving many such tensions within Seventh-day Adventism. All the evidence needed to facilitate this objective is on the church's corporate desk; in fact, it has been there for fifteen years. A need remains in the church for a more faithful, informed, and unifying application of the writings of Ellen White. To that end the church needs to understand the reversionist and rejectionist options, and consciously adopt and promote a transformationist stance.

During her seventy-year ministry Ellen White developed a symbiotic relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From 1915 to about 1970, partly because of unresolved issues in the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism, many Adventists came to use Ellen White's writings as an all-encompassing and authoritative encyclopædia of faith and practice. The years 1970 to 1982 brought to light a wealth of fresh information which, lacking adequate interpretation/application, created a "Great Bereavement" in Adventism. Therefore, from 1982 to the present, diversity has marked the Adventist understanding and application of the writings of Ellen White. Thus it seems appropriate to seek to enhance the church's future by a more consistent and unifying approach to this crucial subject.

I have tried to understand and apply Ellen White's writings during forty years of ministry—as pastor, evangelist, religion teacher, director of an Ellen G. White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Center, academic administrator, historian, and hospital chaplain. Nothing in this paper claims qualitative newness, only urgency. Surely all who lead the church want to find common ground on which to press forward together, fulfilling the mission given us by Jesus Christ.

ELLEN WHITE STUDIES SINCE 1970

Ellen Gould Harmon White was born in a Maine farmhouse on November 26, 1827, and died in her California home (Elmshaven) on July 16, 1915. Between 1844 and 1863 she "helped the sabbatarian Adventists to keep their Advent hope alive and coalesce as a group; between 1863 and 1888 she expanded Adventist understanding of religion to include health, education, and missions, among other things; and between 1888 and her death in 1915 she turned Adventist attention toward Christ and prevented the church from

pursuing several theological aberrations that had arisen in its midst.”¹

Historians are wary about “what if” questions, but it is useful to meditate on what might have happened to the early sabbatarians without Ellen White’s first vision; her counsels on publishing, organization, health, and education; her mediation on the issue of salvation during the 1888 crisis and thereafter; and her stabilizing counsel in the first difficult decade of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the church has been deeply influenced by the “great books” in which Ellen White revised and expanded her earlier writings on such themes as the war between Christ and Satan (*The Conflict of the Ages* series, 1888–1917), Christian education (*Education*, 1903), and the health message (*The Ministry of Healing*, 1905).

Although her voice was silenced in 1915, Ellen White’s writings continued to speak powerfully to the movement of which she was a co-founder. Currently more than 100 of her book titles are in print; over 4,600 periodical articles have been republished; near 60,000 typewritten pages of letters and manuscripts are available in a chain of research centers serving the major geographical areas of the world. More recently, computer technology has made most of Ellen White’s writings readily available for research in institutional libraries and individual homes; thus the process of discovery has been democratized. At the present time some people claim that this little lady (Ellen White was a mere five-feet-two inches tall!) should be dismissed from any significant role in the Adventist movement. Others still contend that her writings are a definitive encyclopedia on every topic that is essential for last-day Christians. Neither of these views is adequate. A wealth of research impinges so dramatically on our understanding of Ellen White’s life and ministry that there is an urgent need to reassess and present her role coherently in the light of facts largely unknown before 1970.

The unprecedented developments which occurred during the 1970s and 1980s relating to Ellen White were influenced by a cluster of powerful forces. Too often Adventists assumed, when they spoke of “the truth” or “the message,” that their church’s beliefs formed a fixed body of doctrine. It is important to list for consideration some of the factors which initiated or sustained the processes of change which have occurred in recent years:

1. The development of accredited educational institutions in the early decades of the twentieth century, and particularly the provision of graduate education beginning in the 1930s, played a crucial role in driving these processes.

¹Gary Land, writing in the *Student Movement*, May 6, 1982: 4

2. The graduate education of ministers and teachers by persons who had themselves undertaken university programs became a significant factor by the middle of the twentieth century.
3. After the publication of the *SDA Bible Commentary* between 1954 and 1957, the church at large began to interpret the Scriptures more faithfully in the light of the meaning and syntax of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages in which they were written, and to demonstrate a growing respect for the context and historical setting of the biblical statements which were quoted in Sabbath Schools, sermons, and church publications.
4. Two missionaries from the United States to Africa (Robert Wieland and Donald Short) were among those who forced the church from 1950 to begin a reassessment of its presentation of the gospel.¹ Further, during a long series of discussions with evangelical Christians in the 1950s Adventists accelerated the process of honing their self-understanding and their expression of cardinal doctrines about Christ and salvation.
5. During the early 1970s the General Conference moved to establish an archival center at its headquarters and to create a chain of research centers to serve the various geographical areas of the earth. Thus, for the first time, primary sources for the study of SDA history become quite widely available. This new reality was bound to have a creative influence on the thought and practice of the church.
6. By 1970 these developments were becoming influential in a number of spheres, not least in the maturation of Adventist historiography. The need for a comprehensive reassessment of Adventist history would become apparent from the writings of a group of well-trained historians: Jonathan Butler, Everett Dick, Ron Graybill, George Knight, Gary Land, Don McAdams, Ron Numbers, and Richard Schwarz, to name a few. The work of biblical scholars, scientists, and systematic and historical theologians would have similar importance.
7. However, the church was not welcoming to those who saw a need to revise certain aspects of its self-understanding.² More than any other organization, the Association of Ad-

¹This process came to a constructive climax with the publication of the "Dynamics of Salvation" statement in the *Adventist Review*, July 31, 1980:3-8.

²Jonathan M. Butler, "The Historian as Heretic," introduction, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, by Ronald L. Numbers, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008) 1-41 illustrates some of the perils inherent in the vocation of the historian of Adventism.

ventist Forums took responsibility for publishing the studies which impinged on Ellen White and her ministry. By presenting a variety of perspectives, *Spectrum* informed the ongoing discussion. Although it was blamed for some articles which seemed experimental or even rejectionist, time has shown that the church greatly needed to keep at the forefront of the dialogue and be involved in the processes of discovery and interpretation which were occurring.¹

Between the Great Disappointment of 1844 and the time of Ellen White's death, a mutually beneficial relationship developed between the church and its prophet, marked by a remarkable degree of consensus in the church's understanding of her ministry. The following seven statements suggest some of the important ideas on which this symbiotic relationship was based. As a minimal commitment, any well-informed, loyal Adventist might be expected to believe and teach that:

1. Ellen White's writings make a striking appeal to timeless truth.
2. They contain many unique elements.
3. Her writings on health placed Seventh-day Adventists on vantage ground by relating bodily health to basic spiritual well-being and by pointing out numerous paths to right living.
4. She made copious and effective use of the Bible in her writings.
5. She often helped the church develop and express its theology.
6. She retained control over her literary output.
7. Her writings reveal a remarkable literary beauty.²

During the first century of the church's existence, difficult questions were posed about the life and ministry of Ellen White, often by people outside of or on the fringes of Adventism. By 1951, Francis Nichol had gathered these questions and appended answers in a large volume entitled *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, to the general satisfaction of the church. Nichol's book renewed an earlier wall of defense around Ellen White, built by Uriah Smith during

¹Seventh-day Adventists, despite the excellence of *Ministry* and the transformed *Adventist Review*, must still depend on such publications as *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* for some vital aspects of the information they need about the church they love and support.

²For a discussion of these points in the context of Adventist history, see my article, "Does Our Past Embarrass Us?" *Ministry*, April 1991: 7-10. Note that one correspondent stated this article was "dangerous" and "deceptive"; the editor suggested that "Credibility is enhanced when the church is candid about the problems it faces." See *Ministry*, August 1991, 2; December 1991, 4. Cp. *Ministry*, June 1992: 27.

the 1860s through articles in the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and republished in a similar book, entitled *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*. But Nichol's wall, which seemed adequate in 1951, crumbled in the 1970s. Why? A few illustrations of the new questions, this time mainly asked by people within the church, show how some of the factors noted above impinged on the church's understanding of Ellen White and her ministry.

1. Richard Lewis looked exegetically at Rev. 14:12 and 12:17, questioning our use of the expression "Spirit of Prophecy" with exclusive reference to Ellen White and her writings.¹
2. Frederick Harder suggested that Ellen White "was not writing history, she was interpreting it," and that she learned history "by ordinary means, but the activity of God in the historical situation was seen by revelation."
3. Roy Branson and Herold Weiss called for Adventists to "discover the nature of Ellen White's relationship to other authors" and to "recover the social and intellectual milieu in which she wrote."
4. William Peterson highlighted the reality of problems in Ellen White's selection and use of historical materials relating to the French Revolution.
5. Ron Graybill, after a careful analysis of primary sources, concluded that Ellen White did not engage in historical research on the French Revolution; instead she followed one major source, Uriah Smith.
6. Donald McAdams carefully evaluated manuscripts which revealed how Ellen White constructed sections of *The Great Controversy*, noting that she made extensive use of historical sources.
7. Ronald Numbers, after an exhaustive investigation of Ellen White's writings on the theme of health, concluded that she derived important health reform ideas from contemporary health reformers. The strong contrary opinions which Numbers' book evoked did not invalidate this major conclusion from his research.
8. Late in the 1970s, Walter Rea began to press upon the church substantial but sometimes exaggerated claims of Ellen White's literary dependence. In a 1957 thesis, Ruth Burgeson noted in some detail the literary relationship between John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Ellen White's depiction of the same events. Later, in 1971, Raymond Cottrell wrote a long paper on historical conditioning in the Bible and the

¹For a fuller discussion and documentation of this and the following six points, see Donald R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s," *Spectrum* 10 (March 1980): 27-41.

writings of Ellen White. Because we failed to observe the warnings which were implicit in such studies as those by Burgeson and Cottrell, we were not prepared for the more extensive revelations which Rea broadcast in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

These presentations and others similar to them uncovered a large quantity of data previously unknown even to serious students of Ellen White's life and writings. Indeed, by early 1982, when the first International Prophetic Guidance Workshop convened at the church's world headquarters, it was as though a huge basket of new information cards had been dumped on the church's corporate desk. These cards required careful sorting and interpretation so that the new information could be fitted into coherent patterns, a process which remains to some extent as a challenge for the immediate future.¹

During the last two decades, many in the church have experienced a form of bereavement due to the breaking of their long-held and cherished picture of Ellen White and the consequent attenuation of a pervasive yet valued source of authority in their personal lives and in the church. All the classic symptoms of grief have been painfully evident in the church, including, in particular, denial, anger, and depression.

The history of this period demonstrates our slowness as a church to create a coherent alternative to the traditional picture of Ellen White; thus we have prolonged the problems associated with the "Great Bereavement." There was an urgent need to provide sensitive pastoral support to ministers, teachers, and other members. For those of us who led the church to provide this, we needed to quickly grasp the implications of the evidence and give constructive leadership in the discovery and adoption of viable new patterns of thought. The lapse of time allowed the already-mentioned extreme responses to flourish: *reversion* and *alienation/rejection*. The first of these responses claimed that the new research and discussion were evil, that they raised questions which should not be asked, and thus such investigations should be prevented or discontinued. Alienation/rejection, on the other hand, claimed that the new evidence exposed Ellen White and her ministry as a great deception, a cause for disregarding her writings or leaving the church entirely.²

¹One of the issues is whether or not Ellen White is "canonical." See Arthur N. Patrick, "Ellen Gould White and the Australian Woman, 1891-1900" (MLitt thesis, U of New England 1994) 120-1; Roy Adams, "A Prophet for Our Time," *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1992: 8-11.

²These responses are placed in an historical context by my unpublished paper, "The Minister and the Ministry of Ellen White in 1982."

Clearly the far better response, *transformation*,¹ needed to be adopted with energy, involving a comprehensive reassessment of Adventism in general and Ellen White in particular.² Of course, every generation must reformulate its religious tradition for itself if it is to adequately take ownership of its faith. However, a cluster of factors made this process more urgent than usual, beginning in the 1970s. But the need to actively lead the church toward a comprehensive new picture of Ellen White and her ministry was given such a low priority that for many the church seemed either uncaring or dishonest, factors which in part account for the loss of 180 ministers in the South Pacific Division alone. There needed to be an open dialogue in the church in which lay people and specialists participated in the task of redrawing a composite and comprehensive picture of Ellen White and her ministry, a need which remains as a priority for the twenty-first century. Church leaders can facilitate but they cannot control this process. Our hesitancy to give active leadership in this process thus far has allowed the understanding and consequent benefit of Ellen White's prophetic ministry to decline markedly. To lose an understanding of our heritage is to lose a clear sense of our identity.

The summary of what a loyal Adventist might be expected to believe and teach before 1970 is no longer viable for any well-informed person who tells the truth. Modification of the seven statements along the following lines is essential in order to fit now well-known facts.

1. Ellen White's writings make a striking appeal to timeless truth even though they are historically conditioned to a significant degree.
2. They contain certain unique elements even though they are related in an evident way to both the Adventist and the non-Adventist literature of her time.
3. Her writings on health placed Seventh-day Adventists on vantage ground by relating bodily health to basic spiritual well-being and by pointing out numerous paths to right living, even though she reflected some of the inaccurate ideas of her Adventist and non-Adventist contemporaries.
4. She made copious and effective use of the Bible in her writings even though she employed Scripture in a variety of ways, not all of which express the meaning and intent of the Bible.

¹See Fritz Guy "The Future of Adventist Theology: A Personal View" (unpublished paper, 1980).

²For a constructive early attempt, see George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism: An Interpretive Study of Ellen White, Education and Related Issues* (Washington, DC: Review 1985).

5. While she often helped the church develop and express its theology, her doctrinal understandings underwent both growth and change during her seventy-year ministry.
6. She retained a position of control over her literary output, but her literary assistants and advisers had more than a minor, mechanical role in the preparation of her writings for publication.
7. Her writings reveal a remarkable literary beauty, but her use of sources and the role she assigned her assistants/advisers indicate that this literary excellence should not be used as a proof of her divine inspiration.

The need for such adjustments rings a death-knell for Adventist fundamentalism.¹ We cannot proceed effectively as a movement without Ellen White, nor can we retain her credibility and ours without addressing the known evidence. Clearly, the past informs the present, thus continuity with it is essential. Historical information is to be welcomed as a basis for accurate understanding. Primary sources may enable the believer to search for a better understanding of the interaction between the human and the divine. Hence, the church needs to prize research into its heritage as a means for effective growth in knowledge and faith.

In April 1982 I flew across the United States. For the first time in my flying experience there, visibility was excellent. From the warm sky above Los Angeles I saw the serene Pacific Ocean and the vast sprawl of the City of the Angels hugged by mountains. I saw the blot of Las Vegas; the life-giving waters of the Hoover Dam; the huge scar of the Grand Canyon; the Rocky Mountains wrapped in white; ribbon-like rivers; billiard-table prairies; the stain of Chicago whitened with snow; the vast waters of Lake Michigan; the confused land-forms of Pennsylvania. So upon this journey I saw a panorama of a vast continent bounded by ocean, contoured by mountains, watered by lakes and rivers, enriched by plains, scarred by human technology.

You may ask me to draw a street map of Las Vegas; to state the depth of the Grand Canyon; the location of the John Hancock Center in Chicago; the types of trees in the Appalachian Mountains. In response, my mistakes would be numerous.

You might ask a thousand other simple questions about the continental United States which I could not answer. You might, therefore, be tempted to deny my experience. You might discount

¹When these revisions were discussed by the Spirit of Prophecy Resource Committee of the South Pacific Division in 1982-3, consensus was reached that they were accurate, but (after a statement by a Union Conference president) it was decided that no one outside the Resource Committee should have access to them.

my claim that I saw a panorama of a great country absolutely beyond the vision of a surface traveler. You might, therefore, discredit the fact that through the miracle of jet transport I was shown a useful vista of *landmarks* and can now better interpret a vast *landscape*.

I believe that, for the benefit of Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White was given a jet-aircraft vision of crucial realities in an age of spiritual surface travel. She saw landmark truths: God as the One whom to know is to love;¹ health as the right arm of the third angel's message;² education as having to do with the whole person and "the whole period of existence possible to man";³ history as moving toward a supreme confrontation between good and evil that will climax in the universal declaration that God is love,⁴ as well as other distinctives precious to Seventh-day Adventists. She was shown these features of truth so that she could encourage and guide the Advent people in charting their journey heavenward.

It is a tragedy that some Seventh-day Adventists are either claiming too much or too little for Ellen White's ministry. Those who claim she gives us an authoritative, detailed, surface survey in all respects have no way to handle certain data clearly present in her writings. Those who deny her spiritual gift and assess her as a fraud and a false prophet forfeit the enduring value of her prophetic vision. Either way there is a conflict and disillusionment at the end of the road.

Ellen White ever wrote with an attitude of urgency, with a sense of an imminent end for all things earthly. Since her death, Seventh-day Adventists have benefited from many attempts at surface exploration: into the historical background of Scripture: the causes of volcanic eruptions; the principles of genetics; the history of the Albigenses; the causes of cancer, cholera, tuberculosis, and so on. Adventists have had over 170 years to reflect on the Shut Door in relation to their mission; on the identity of the law of Galatians; on the biblical doctrine of salvation. While responding to the detailed insights of painstaking investigation, we must remember the abiding usefulness of Ellen White's direction-setting, panoramic vision, and those instances in which she maps in a detailed way segments of our spiritual journey. To deny a role to either her panorama or our detailed investigation is to reject part of God's gift of knowledge to humanity.

¹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1947) 22.

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1948) 1: 486.

³Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1903) 13.

⁴Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1911) 678.

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF ELLEN WHITE FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

If to be relevant is to be connected with, to have bearing upon or to be pertinent to, then Ellen White has had a profound relevance for Seventh-day Adventists. She was the church's most notable thought-leader from 1844 until her death seven decades later.¹ During the first half-century following her death, her perceived relevance for the church tended to increase.² Not only did her writings accompany the church's geographical spread and numerical growth; they were reprinted in new editions, compilations and devotional volumes: they were made more accessible by a one-volume index (1926) and a three-volume index (1962-3).³ During this period, the mood within the church maintained and, at times, increased the acceptance of Ellen White's writings as authoritative with regard to all the many subjects upon which they touched briefly or which they covered in detail. Consequently, it is necessary to look long and hard to compile a list of other authors who have as many pages in print eighty years after her or his death.⁴

However, it is evident that about 1970 the relationship between Ellen White and the church began a new phase, especially in Western societies such as North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The beginning of this phase may be identified with the publication of the June 1970 issue of *Spectrum*.⁵ Thereafter, the processes of change were imperceptible at times, but a vast difference is apparent when the 1960s are compared with the present decade. Ellen White's writings are cited less often in Sabbath School discus-

¹Or, to use the words of *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, "the most powerful single influence on the church during her lifetime"; *Micropædia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1976) 10: 651. However, it should be kept clearly in mind that sometimes Ellen White's role was to endorse the ideas of others, including both Adventist and non-Adventist authors.

²See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP 1985) for the way in which Christian theology has been shaped to meet the exigencies of widely-varying circumstances during Christian history. Pelikan's observations can be applied fruitfully to Adventist interpretations of Ellen White since 1844.

³More recently, sophisticated computer technology has given efficient access to any given expression in Ellen White's entire corpus of perhaps 25,000,000 words.

⁴The 1926 index covered 28 Ellen White books. By 1958 (my first year in the ministry), the number had increased to 51 volumes. It topped the 100 mark during the 1980s.

⁵Included was William S. Peterson, "A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen White's Account of the French Revolution," *Spectrum* 2.4 (Aut. 1970): 57-69, along several other articles relating to Ellen White. For a cogent later perspective, see Benjamin McArthur, "Where Are the Historians Taking the Church?" *Spectrum* 10 (November 1979): 9-14.

sions, sermons, periodicals, and books; fewer ministers, teachers, and members seek them avidly or read them regularly. Currently there is a lessened desire among Adventists to participate in discussions about Ellen White's role, or to allow her the former level of authority in the corporate affairs of the church, or to accept her advice as normative over individual thought and practice. But, at the same time, some Adventists lament what they identify as a fulfillment of Ellen White's prediction that Satan's "very last deception" would be to nullify her work.¹ Some church-sponsored publications still give no hint that their editors are aware of the vibrant discussions of the late twentieth century, and some independent Adventist publications constantly advocate ideas which seem absurd or dishonest to any person who has kept abreast of the relevant information.

The Noonday of Ellen White's Relevance

It is not difficult for Adventists to remember when Ellen White's writings were accepted more-or-less as a definitive encyclopædia of truth and duty for the faithful church member.² Her writings treated the full lexicon of issues in which Adventists had an interest: amusements, church organization, diet, dress, education, health, life insurance, Reformation history, sexuality, the use of time, vulcanology, and so on.³ The words "Sister White says" could guarantee the effective termination of most discussions.⁴ To cite examples is to note the pervasiveness and persistence of Ellen White's influence. For instance, the church's stance on theatre-attendance was vintage nineteenth-century Methodism as mediated to it through Ellen White,⁵ and (rather than focusing on the need to enhance discriminatory judgment) it maintained that position until almost all its youth were attending theaters. The pattern which was adopted often forced young people to ignore or challenge Ellen White and the church as represented by parents, local church officers, pastors, and educators. A comparable struggle has occurred over a plethora of similar issues: card-playing, checkers, chess, competi-

¹See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Review 1958-80) 1: 48; 2: 78.

²Some may remember the mental gymnastics which were necessary to explain how Melbourne could be in New South Wales, or how "the moon and the stars of the solar system shine by the reflected light of the sun." See *Testimonies* 8: 158; *Desire* 465; *Education* 14; Ellen White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review 1948) 50.

³The "Question and Answer File" in any Ellen G. White/SDA Research Center illustrates both the queries raised by the world church about Ellen White, and the most official responses given.

⁴See Alden Thompson, "The Scary Lady of Adventism Learns to Have Fun," *Insight*, October 2, 1993: 2-4.

⁵The church seldom differentiated between live theater and cinema.

tive sports, cricket, dancing, tennis, and more. Thorny issues such as adornment (hats, make-up, jewelry) could be cited as other examples, as could a range of health issues. Thirty years ago, if committed Adventists wanted to know whether or not cheese was suitable for human consumption, they were likely to go to Ellen White for the answer, as some did when they needed to know whether or not to eat mushrooms, or whether red clover was an effective cure for cancer. Similar examples could be multiplied, but it is clear that a decreasing number of Adventists think in those terms today.

Of even greater importance, Ellen White defined doctrine for Adventists in a less ambiguous way than the Scriptures were able to do. For instance, the intense debate in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States during the 1950s and 1960s over the human nature of Christ during the incarnation focused on Ellen White statements, not Bible texts. The church's costly struggle to support the chronology developed by Ussher has been motivated by Ellen White's statements rather than by biblical data.¹ A similar comment can be made about the interpretation of "Adventist" passages of Scripture.² Hiram Edson's insight initiated a principal Adventist interpretation of Hebrews on October 23, 1844; his view was given normative authority by Ellen White. Thus, for more than a century, Hebrews was interpreted mainly as a tract written for Adventist times. Only since 1980 has it been recognized by many Adventists

¹The Geoscience Research Institute was established in 1958; its activities have included study tours for administrators, ministers and teachers in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The church was told plainly, in 1979, by the Adventist best equipped at the time to comment on the matter, that there is no biblical basis for any date preceding the birth of Abraham. Thus, the Adventist who wants to believe in Creation about 4,000 B.C. "would be better to say that he bases his defense on the several statements of Ellen White." Siegfried H. Horn, "Can the Bible Establish The Age of the Earth?" *Spectrum* 10 (November 1979): 19. It is clear that we have not "heard" well Gottfried Oosterwal's message in "Crossing a Chasm: The Adventist Believer Between Faith and Science," *Andrews University Focus*, Summer 1982: 14-7.

²It should be noted that, in common with some other Christian groups, Seventh-day Adventists developed a sense of ownership with respect to certain biblical passages or ideas. See Arthur N. Patrick, "Christianity and Culture in Colonial Australia: Selected Catholic, Anglican, Wesleyan and Adventist Perspectives, 1891-1900" (PhD diss., U of Newcastle 1991) 86-87. In 1974 the church was made aware of a dozen different uses of Scripture made by Ellen White. See Raymond F. Cottrell, "Ellen G. White's Use of the Bible," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee 1974) 154-161. It is of interest that the editor excised important material from the article, but the piece remained ground-breaking for its time.

as a New Testament tract which has particular relevance for the last days.¹

The word *relevance* defines a major concern of this chapter. The connection with, and the bearing or pertinence of Ellen White for the church is now different from how it was perceived three decades ago. This fact gives the church a challenge and an opportunity to better reassess the ministry of Ellen White constructively in view of changed knowledge and new circumstances. Stark alternatives are apparent. One of these is to deliver Ellen White into the control of fundamentalist minds who might increasingly isolate her ministry (and themselves) from reality. Another is to allow her relevance to be actively denied or to quietly die amongst informed members.² If a viable alternative to these extremes is to be promoted successfully, it will require more painstaking care and transparent integrity than has generally been manifested since 1970.

The Nadir of Ellen White's Relevance

It is essential to understand why the relevance of Ellen White for Seventh-day Adventists has so diminished. While a range of contributing factors could be explored more fully than is possible here, the most important determinants are identified in Donald McAdams's review of trends which became apparent during the 1970s. McAdams pointed out that it took 55 years from Ellen White's death for Adventist scholars to begin "for the first time to examine critically her writings and to share their conclusions."³ McAdams observed that three points were clearly established during

¹Even in 1979 when Desmond Ford asked a *biblical* question, the church's first impulse was to give an *Ellen White* answer. See A. N. Duffy, "The Heavenly Sanctuary: Not One Pillar to be Moved," *Record*, December 10, 1979: 6-7.

²It is painfully apparent that in the 1980s the church in the South Pacific Division tended to lose people with brighter intellects and it has not attracted a comparable number of replacements with similar capacities. We were too diffident about sharing information with our people. Morris L. West, one of Australia's most influential authors, suggests "that honest error is a step toward a greater illumination of the truth, since it exposes to debate and to clearer definition those matters which might otherwise remain obscure and undefined in the teaching of the Church." See *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1963) in *The Vatican Trilogy* (Port Melbourne: Heinemann 1993) 174; cp. 140: "He had never been afraid of error since all his experience had shown him that knowledge was self-corrective and that a search honestly pursued might bring a man closer to the shores of revelation, even though their outline remained for ever hidden from his view."

³See McAdams 27. In the 1970s the church was made aware that crucial issues had been known and discussed in 1919, but then put aside. Such actions were no longer possible in the age of photocopiers, audio-cassettes, and ham-radio networks, let alone (more recently) email. For an insightful account of a leading Adventist who nurtured a realistic understanding of Ellen White's ministry, see Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Shaping of Adventism: The Case of W. W. Prescott* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP 1992).

the first ten years of this process: "Ellen White took much material from other authors"; "Ellen White was a part of late nineteenth century American culture and was influenced by contemporary health reformers, authors and fellow Adventist church leaders"; and "Ellen White was not inerrant." He suggested that the significance of these conclusions could hardly be overemphasized because "Ellen White is so central to the lives of Seventh-day Adventists that her words impinge on practically every area of Adventist teaching and practice both institutionally and individually." Thus he warned, "[t]o consider her words as possibly derived from someone else and not necessarily the final authority introduces an element of chaos into the very heart of Adventism that makes all of us uneasy."¹

Uneasiness was only one of the outcomes resulting from the discoveries of the 1970s.² As already noted, some Adventists adopted a *reversionist* stance—being deeply threatened and wishing to stop the process of inquiry they retreated into the safety afforded by a denial of evidence. Others moved into an *alienationist* or *rejectionist* position—being unready or unable to incorporate the new facts about Ellen White into a coherent system, they were alienated from her ministry altogether. Some abandoned the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well;³ and a number of those who left Adventism forfeited Christianity and their belief in God. The median position was a *transformationist* stance which required the reformulation of ideas to accord with the new data. Because that response is, in many ways, more difficult than either of the others, the need for it still beckons us through circumstances in the church. That need to is the motivation for this paper.⁴

¹McAdams 39, 40.

²For an analysis conditioned by its historical context, see Patrick, "Ellen Gould White and the Australian Woman" 112-125.

³See, for example, Wallace D. Slattery, *Are Seventh-day Adventists False Prophets? A Former Insider Speaks Out* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed 1990).

⁴My conviction is that to understand Ellen White in the light of Scripture and history will enable us to perceive and present an ongoing relevance for her ministry. The constant process which is required to maintain truth as "present truth" was well described by Guy in "Future" 2. In dealing with "the activity of theological reflection and construction" within the Adventist community of faith, Guy says: "This activity consists of an ongoing consideration of the bases, definition, and implications of beliefs such as those listed above, and may include (1) reformulation, as eternal truth is understood afresh in the language of each different culture and each new generation; (2) clarification and specification, as new questions arise and require a more careful investigation and more precise answers; (3) elaboration, as the church enlarges its thinking by probing deeper and looking farther; (4) application, as the ongoing course of human history produces new situations; (5) reinterpretation, as further study and the witness of the Holy Spirit indicate that the Biblical revelation means something slightly different from what it has been understood to mean."

"An Element of Chaos"

As noted above, McAdams used a strong expression to portray the effect of the new information relating to Ellen White when he suggested that to lose her as the final authority in the church was to "introduce an element of chaos into the heart of Adventism." Chaos can be beneficial if it leads to a better ordering of reality. But some earnest leaders and members still expect Ellen White to be used in the pre-1970 mode. Let us test the viability of this fundamentalist expectation in the light of a series of possibilities suggested in the following scenes (or scenarios), constructed so as to be *realistic* even though they are not *real* (actual).

Scene 1. A student, researching a graduate thesis on religious factors in the French Revolution elects to use *The Great Controversy* as a major source. The student gives a work-in-progress report to the graduate students and faculty members of the university's department of history, affirming Ellen White's skill in choosing and using historical materials.¹ Subsequently, the departmental chairperson receives a letter from the European History professor questioning whether the student should be allowed to proceed with graduate study. The ensuing debate is aired on a *Sixty Minutes* program. It becomes clear that one of the most important Adventist books is "not usable as an independent source of authority on matters relating to time, place, or details of an historical event."²

Scene 2. A local conference family ministries director is assisting a young couple who are experiencing sexual incompatibility. He loans them *A Solemn Appeal Relative to Solitary Vice, and the Abuses and Excesses of the Marriage Relation*,³ encouraging them to follow the counsels written by Ellen White. The wife is a relative of the state president of the Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, with whom she shares the information. After reading *A Solemn Appeal*, the state president leads the association of marriage and family counselors to strongly oppose a conference application to open and maintain a family crisis center.

¹For relevant sources, see McAdams.

²Ronald D. Graybill, "Historical Difficulties in *The Great Controversy*." (unpublished paper 1978) 7.

³Ellen G. White, *A Solemn Appeal Relative to Solitary Vice, and the Abuses and Excesses of the Marriage Relation* (Battle Creek, MI: Adventist 1870). Key Ellen White materials from this book were later made available to Australasians under the title *A Solemn Appeal*, but, like other Ellen White statements which seemed to have diminishing relevance for the church, the latter book has been allowed to go out of print. Some of its ideas are included in more recent compilations, however. For an historical treatment, see Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008) 76-219; Malcolm Bull and Keith, Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana UP 2007) 162-81.

Scene 3. A systematic theologian from one of the church's tertiary institutions presents a paper at a international conference of theologians on the truth of Ellen White's earliest writings about the closure of the door of mercy in 1844.¹ The paper is passed on to the referees of the association's journal. One of the referees of the journal is a member of the team which is reviewing the college's accreditation and reporting on this matter to government funding agencies. The referee rejects the article and protests the continuance of accreditation.

Scene 4. A conference of medical specialists hears a paper by an Adventist colleague on the need for contemporary medical practice to adopt as normative all the counsel given in the writings of Ellen White.² The specialist is accredited to practice at a church-related hospital which is subsequently featured on a radio program entitled *The Investigators*.³ The patient clientele of the hospital drops dramatically.

Scene 5. At an international conference of geologists, an Adventist scientist distributes a 63-page compilation, *Ellen G. White Statements Relating to Geology and Earth Sciences*,⁴ as supplementary reading for his lecture on the importance which these truths have for professionals. He subsequently lodges a request to present a paper at the next conference of the same society, and questions why his request is declined.

Scene 6. An Adventist academy teacher discusses Ellen White's statements on wigs and wasp waists over lunch with her hairdressing and dressmaking students.⁵ Subsequently, she is disappointed

¹See Robert W. Olson, comp., *The "Shut Door" Documents* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1982).

²Note both the presuppositions and the content of *Medical Science and the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1971). The deepest problem with the booklet is that it claims an inerrant Ellen White, failing to recognize that an extended list of inaccuracies could be cited from her writings. Cp. Robert W. Olson, *Inerrancy in Inspired Writings* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1982). Note also the way in which studies by Graeme Bradford and others indicate that the church has long lived with a false expectation that the gift of prophecy implies an inerrancy which is not to be tested by the community of faith.

³Think of how the Australian Consumers' Association might handle this situation in *Choice* magazine!

⁴Ellen G. White, *Ellen G. White Statements Relating to Geology and Earth Sciences* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1982). Cp. Paul A. Gordon, *The Bible, Science, and the Age of the Earth: The Testimony of Ellen G. White*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: White Estate, 1981).

⁵See, for instance, "Words of Christian Mothers," *The Health Reformer*, Oct. 1871: 121; Nov. 1871: 154-7. Ellen White links "artificial braids and pads" to a range of difficulties including "recklessness in morals." She also notes that "wasp waists may have been transmitted to them [young women] from their mothers."

when none of them accept her invitation to attend the screening of a film, *Ellen White: Prophetic Voice for the Last Days*.

Scene 7. A local conference church ministries director is approached by a young person who is deeply concerned about an impulse to masturbate. The counselor loans the young person a compilation of Ellen White's writings which highlight the extensive list of diseases caused by masturbation (in the case of both males and females) including the "inward decay of the head."¹ A few days later, the youth expresses a deepened anxiety and confusion to the conference president. Soon after this conversation, the young person commits suicide. The church ministries director and the president are called to give evidence at the coroner's inquest, an event which provokes national publicity.

Scene 8. An English student presents an essay contending that the literary beauty of Ellen White's writings is an evidence of divine inspiration.² The essay discusses a number of examples, noting Ellen White's use of the phrase "the greatest want of the world" and highlighting choice excerpts from *The Desire of Ages*. The professor who is marking the essay has on file articles³ about Ellen White's relationship with other authors, plus "How *The Desire of Ages* was Written," and "The Family Bolton Story."⁴ The essay is presented to academic referees who advise that it should not receive a passing grade. Several young people drop out of the local Adventist church during the ongoing debate.

Scene 9. A group of geneticists is discussing the place of humans amongst mammals, especially hominids. An Adventist presents as needed truth Ellen White's statements about "the amalgamation of man and beast," urging his colleagues to read Uriah Smith's interpretation of her statements as published in *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, and then put into book form and sold widely at Adventist camp meetings with James White's endorsement.⁵ The Adventist subsequently is disappointed when the geneticists do not

¹See *A Solemn Appeal* as placed in an historical context by Numbers 184-95. Contrast the counsel given by Robert Schwindt in *Insight*, Oct. 21, 1980: 11.

²See Gladys King-Taylor, *Literary Beauty of Ellen G. White's Writings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1953). Many times this argument has been extended to "prove" divine inspiration, in that a person with only a few years of formal education could not write as well as Ellen White did without supernatural aid.

³Roger W. Coon has collected many relevant articles; see Roger W. Coon, comp., *The Writings of Ellen G. White: Anthology of Recently Published Articles on Selected Issues in Prophetic Guidance*, 3 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: SDA Theological Seminary 1992).

⁴See also Warren H. Johns, Tim Poirier, and Ron Graybill, *Henry Melville and Ellen G. White: A Study in Literary and Theological Relationships* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1982); note also the Fred Veltman research reports.

⁵For sources, see Patrick, "Past"

support his application for a teaching appointment in their branch of science.

Scene 10. An Adventist presents a paper demonstrating the claim that Ellen White's life bears remarkable evidence of the supernatural. The examples cited include the Big Bible, visions as sources for the section of *The Great Controversy* dealing with John Huss, and the Furrow Story. The writings of A. G. Daniells, Ron Graybill, Donald McAdams, and Milton Hook have been read by the scholar who rejects the paper for publication.

Scene 11. An Adventist ministerial association secretary presents a paper to an evangelical history association on the biblical truth about perfection as portrayed in the pre-1888 writings of Ellen White.¹ The president of the association subsequently advises that an article on Ellen White should not be included in the association's dictionary of nineteenth-century evangelical thinkers.

Clearly, neither Ellen White nor Adventism would emerge from these encounters as either winsome or credible. The unease which we feel about projecting our prophet into such dilemmas indicates our need to address the issue of her relevance with great care.

A New Morning for Ellen White's Relevance

A community of faith cannot prosper over time unless it values the truth. To suppress or to deny facts is not constructive. In their heart-of-hearts, many Adventists know that the traditional picture of Ellen White is at best a distortion of truth, or, at worst, a complicated fabrication of fact and fiction.² Some of them see the administrators of the church as sometimes still giving ambiguous signals. White Estate personnel were brought to the South Pacific Division to share information in the early 1980s, but few key administrators attended their meetings, nor did they encourage those who

¹During the first four decades of their denomination's existence, Adventists sought to correct an imbalance in Christian thought. However, in so doing, they often seemed to speak as though all Scripture orbited the truth of the Second Advent. Since 1888 they have more adequately recognized that Scripture forms an elliptical orbit around the two comings of Christ.

²It is worth noting with sadness that a number of former Adventists are currently undertaking professional therapy to "recover" from their experience in Adventism. Central to the dilemma of some is the former authority of Ellen White as mediated through what they now perceive as a harsh educational system. One former member has kept a daily diary since childhood, including a day-by-day record of his canings and "hard labor" sentences, and noting the times when he was caned above the limit of six strokes. For some current attitudes toward caning, see *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 5, 1994: 23. Observe the comments by Lowell Tarling, Norman Young, Robert Wolfgramm and Genna Levitch in *On Being*, June 1993: 20-21; Sep. 1993: 57, Oct. 1993: 65; Nov. 1993: 63; Dec. 1993: 68.

sought to understand and interpret the data which was presented.¹ The same Division sent representatives to the first International Prophetic Guidance Workshop held in 1982,² but then prevented the data presented at that important gathering being made available. A Spirit of Prophecy Resource Committee was established to disseminate information, but minimal new data were disseminated. Thus the information which became available in the era of discovery (1970-1982) was not shared effectively with the church at large.³

This allowed rumor to burgeon and confidence in the church and its leaders to plummet. Perhaps similar patterns were duplicated in other parts of the world. Thus, deep-seated but unacknowledged cognitive dissonance has troubled the church, with some members charging the administrators with being "soft" in their support of Ellen White, and others charging them with telling less than the truth about Ellen White. A church whose historic concern is to discover and share "the truth" cannot afford to be grudging in its admission of evidence, or to be seen as willingly ignorant or carelessly duplicitous. Therefore, I would like to think that discussions like the ones I would like this chapter to stimulate might offer hope to those who want the church to make a more constructive attempt to reassess the significance of its heritage.

To highlight a few of the opportunities for Adventists to affirm an ongoing relevance for Ellen White with reference to issues which are important for the church and its mission today, let us present eleven scenes (or scenarios) which in some ways parallel those given above, but which open up the possibility of quite different outcomes. While only a few topics can be touched upon here (history, sexuality, biblical interpretation, health, science), and

¹In fact, because I offered the solutions since published in "Does Our Past Embarrass Us?," the South Pacific Division President and Secretary had me dismissed without trial as Director of the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Center at Avondale College in 1983. It seems that no informed person in the church now questions the essence of the article.

²This was the high point in the entire history of the church, insofar as the availability of data for Ellen White studies is concerned. It marked an essential consensus on the basic facts which were relevant for Adventists to know about Ellen White. No significant new information has emerged since that time. Much detail has, however, confirmed conclusions of which the keenest researchers were aware by that time.

³Thus in today's polarized context, it is more difficult to unite the church constructively. The substance of part one of this paper was well received by the Sydney Adventist Forum in 1991, and repeated by request at an inter-departmental council at the South Pacific Division headquarters during 1992. The substance of parts two and three was presented at Trans-Tasman Union Conference seminars in 1994 and 1995. Pastor Graeme Bradford has been particularly effective, with the support of his administration, in updating the church through seminars.

even then only in a brief way, the principles advocated could be applied widely.

Scene 1. A student presents a paper to the graduate students and faculty members of a university on the way in which Ellen White developed the "Great Controversy" theme in books published under her name between 1858 and 1917. The professor of European History subsequently writes a letter to the departmental chairperson recommending the student be advanced to candidacy in the department of history. The ensuing discussion leads to a renewed interest in Ellen White amongst members of the association of Adventist university students.

Scene 2. An Adventist marriage counselor reviews the development of family theory amongst Seventh-day Adventists, giving specific attention to Ellen White's influence. The review is accepted as meeting one of the requirements for membership in the association of marriage and family counselors, and engenders support for the family crisis facility being planned by the local conference.

Scene 3. A systematic theologian reads a paper at an international conference of an association for theological studies dealing with the way in which the development of a Seventh-day Adventist theology of mission has been influenced by Ellen White. The paper is subsequently published in the association's journal and initiates a series of letters on the biblical basis for cross-cultural missionary endeavors.

Scene 4. A conference of medical specialists receives and approves for publication in its proceedings a paper by an Adventist specialist on the symbiotic relationship between mind, body, and spirit as portrayed in the writings of Ellen White. Subsequently, a State Minister of Health shows an interest in the way in which holistic health-care shortens the length of hospital stays.

Scene 5. An Adventist geologist presents a professional paper at an annual conference of Christian geologists on the search for meaning in nature, making reference to creationist ideas as expressed by Ellen White. The Adventist is subsequently accepted as a presenter for the next annual conference.

Scene 6. An Adventist academy teacher discusses the way in which Ellen White's ideas have influenced the dietary habits of North Americans, Australians, and New Zealanders. Several students accept her subsequent invitation to view the film, *Ellen White: Prophetic Voice for the Last Days*.

Scene 7. An Adventist counselor assists a ministerial student who is deeply disturbed about an impulse to masturbate, outlining relevant principles from Ellen White's writings and emphasizing the way in which peace-of-mind can come from following her advice to focus on Jesus and Scripture. The student's adjustment is en-

hanced by participation in a fellowship group and by reading *The Desire of Ages* as background for an essay entitled "To Know God is to Love Him." Not only does the student graduate, he proceeds to an effective youth-oriented ministry.¹

Scene 8. A graduate student presents a paper (in a seminar series on nineteenth-century literary figures) on Ellen White's method as author of the major volumes which bore her name between 1851 and 1917. The paper is subsequently accepted for publication in a professional journal.

Scene 9. After a conference paper entitled "Time, Charles Darwin, and the Ascent of Man," an Adventist presents a paper on "Time, Ellen White, and the Descent of Man." Both papers are accepted for publication in a symposium on the response of Christianity to nineteenth-century anthropology.

Scene 10. An Adventist delivers an address entitled "Toil and Charisma in the Life of Ellen White: 1891-1900" to a conference sponsored by scholars devoted to the study of colonial Christianity. The address analyzes the combination of hard work and supernatural influences which can be documented in Ellen White's colonial experience. The center accepts the text of the address for distribution as one of its occasional papers.

Scene 11. The referees of an evangelical history association's journal accept, with only minor editing, an article by an Adventist which contends that Ellen White meets the fundamental criteria for inclusion in the association's forthcoming evangelical dictionary of biography.

Clearly Ellen White and Adventism could emerge from these encounters as winsome and credible. The relative ease which we feel about projecting our prophet into such contexts indicates that she can have an ongoing relevance for our movement and its mission.

The Core of the Matter

A number of conclusions may be drawn from this discussion. If the church's mission is to be fulfilled, Ellen White cannot be secreted from the realities of the contemporary world as a private concern of Seventh-day Adventists. The long list of theses presented in many parts of the globe to credible institutions of higher learning demonstrates that her children are becoming adults.² We need to carefully evaluate a whole range of issues impinging on her ministry.

¹I have more experience as a chaplain supporting dying persons than as a counselor dealing with this dimension of living.

²See Gilbert Abella and Vera May Schwarz, "Dissertations, Theses and Major research Papers Related to the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (Loma Linda: Loma Linda Research Libraries 1988) 207-18.

There is a great need to proceed with modernizing her language if we expect many of our youth to have any interest in reading her writings, or if we want more than a few new converts to actually read her books. Her writings must be interpreted in their historical and cultural contexts: to give a young person *Messages to Young People* will usually be counter-productive, to give a young couple *Adventist Home* will often destroy their openness to Ellen White, to distribute *Counsels on Diet and Foods* will stop many Adventists from further reading of Ellen White. In other words, Ellen White's counsel on the need to consider the "time and place" of her counsels is increasingly pertinent. We would do well to take the essence of her counsel and follow her method; for instance, being aware of the link between health and religion we must go beyond her writings to Scripture and science, distilling and then implementing the best that is known on how to live. In place of our backwardness in recognizing the spiritual giftedness of all God's children, including women, we might note the significance of Ellen White's ordination which was so apparent that no Adventist man dared lay hands upon her.¹ We ought to ask how Ellen White responded to the issues relating to human values and human rights, including the treatment of individuals and groups by churches and governments.² Instead of engaging in endless controversies about music and worship, we should focus on *worship* of our Creator and celebration of the divine handiwork combined with a healthy ecological concern. Further suggestions of constructive emphases we might explore are given later in this presentation.

The Apostle Paul's warning about dispensing with childish things may be applied to the Adventist experience. The time-honored patterns of authority which held the church together until the 1960s would totally destroy it if used in Western cultures in the present. Therefore, in the providence of God, the church since 1970 has been engaged in a crucial process of maturation. It now has the potential for a new approach to its mission, flowing from a different relationship with its prophet. Our impetus must be to implement the great emphases of her nurture rather than to bore her spiritual children to death with matters which are irrelevant to

¹Cp. Steven G. Daily, "The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth Century America" (DMin project, School of Theology at Claremont 1985).

²In mooting this point in a letter dated March 16, 1994, Eric Magnusson observes: "I see this as one of the major issues for religion today and I think it was a sufficiently big issue for EGW for that to be one of her continuing areas of influence. Churches, ours included, are being judged by society on their performance as they deal with and treat human beings. They're not all getting the verdict they want."

them. (Few things are as irrelevant to the young as the total recall of the old!)

If Ellen White were present today, she might enjoin Adventists to leave behind some of their favorite controversies—How accurate was James Ussher? What fires volcanoes? Is bedroom drama compatible with the drama of salvation?—and be faithful to the big picture. That is one of the powerful messages which we can derive from the way the Lord has led and taught us through her ministry.¹ But what *is* the big picture as far as Ellen White is concerned? What is the panorama she has given the Second Advent Movement?

It is not easy to summarize the contribution of her fruitful life in a few words, but we must try.

Seventh-day Adventist faith is enveloped by two expressions in Revelation 14, “the everlasting gospel” and “the faith of Jesus.” We live near the conclusion of the great war between righteousness and sin, identifying with Jerusalem over against Babylon. Ours is the faith of Israel: we are to worship the God of creation and exodus with the openness of the psalmists and the faithfulness of the prophets. But all the promise of the Old Testament meets fulfillment in the New. Thus, ours is the faith of the new Israel, centered in Christ and faithful to the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. We are, therefore, to be catholic in an authentic sense: our message is for every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Not only is it shaped by an understanding of those who first spread the faith, it is taught by those who preserved the truth during ages of darkness, reformed it in the sixteenth century, and revived it in the eighteenth. In addition, behind us is the glow of Millerite Adventism; before us is Jesus, Author of our guidebook and Finisher of our faith.²

To be God’s remnant in Ellen White’s terms is to be eclectic in relation to both Jewish and Christian faith, to be reformist in relation to our culture, and to be mission-focused in all that we do.³ To be faithful to her nurture is to orient ourselves by the timeless landmarks of truth which guide God’s pilgrim people from Eden

¹Essentially, the more we get the big picture in focus, the more likely our constituents will be to listen when we affirm an ongoing relevance for the mother of the church. However, for our people to “own” Ellen White, we must invite them to process the relevant information and express their consequent understandings—that is, we need to reactivate the process which formed Seventh-day Adventism in the beginning, what Fritz Guy calls “the dialogue and dialectic of a community.”

²This paragraph is a frail attempt at interpreting Revelation 14:6-12 in the light of “the conflict of the ages,” the controlling idea in Ellen White’s writings from 1858-1915. This was her over-arching concern, her emphasis on faith, that is, *truth*.

³This is the principal purpose of her testimonies, her exhortations which emphasize Christian practice, that is *duty*.

lost to Eden restored: creation (the Sabbath), covenant (Sinai), Calvary (redemption), Olivet ("Go ye into all the world"), and Mount Zion (the Kingdom of God). It is to make truth more precious than life, as did the faithful souls of past ages,¹ yet to identify with the "present truth"—that Jesus is the Lamb slain, the Mediator of the tabernacle which God pitched, and the Advocate to which all judgment is committed. Our life-quest is "the truth as it is in Jesus,"² our life-style is to be one of "disinterested benevolence"³ in this needy world as we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus."

HOW, THEN, SHALL WE USE THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN WHITE?

John and Charlotte Pocock,⁴ earnest Sunday-keeping Christians, migrated from England to Australia late in the 1880s. During 1892-3, an evangelistic series conducted in Parramatta (a suburb of Sydney) by Robert Hare and David Steed astonished them with the truth that the seventh day is the Sabbath, and they commenced keeping Saturday immediately. The 1890s were difficult enough for parents with a growing family, given the country's pervasive problems with a depressed economy. Sabbath-keeping created a serious employment problem for John Pocock: Saturday was the busiest day of the week for his trade, coach maintenance and repair; all his skills as a cabinetmaker, coachbuilder and wheelwright now seemed useless. John Pocock built a small home on a rocky hillside north of Sydney, meanwhile eking out a meager living and evangelizing his neighbors with the help of Ellen White's books.

The Pococks' relationship with Ellen White was strengthened while the Avondale School for Christian Workers was being pioneered at Cooranbong. As one of the tradesmen working on the college buildings, John Pocock lived in Ellen White's "Sunnyside" home for about seven months. At that time Ellen White was busily writing about the life of Jesus and supporting the mission of the

¹Note Ellen White's use of the expression "faithful souls," some thirty-one times. See especially Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific 1911) 11: "From the beginning, faithful souls have constituted the church on earth."

²There are many names for our Lord, perhaps seventy in the Old Testament and 170 in the New. In her writings, Ellen White uses "Jesus" 47,114 times and "truth" 53,144 times. In 776 instances she juxtaposes the words "truth" and "Jesus." She employs the word "present" some 13,830 times, and speaks of "present truth" 2,452 times. Thus it is safe to say that she gives emphasis to both "present truth" and "the truth as it is in Jesus."

³Ellen White's use of this term enjoins us to pattern our ministry after the selfless example of Christ Jesus.

⁴See Mary Pocock-Stellmaker and Joan Minchin-Neall, "The John Pocock Story," *Adventist Heritage* 15 (Spring 1992): 15-25.

Seventh-day Adventist church in Australasia and overseas with constant testimonies. According to John Pocock, by breakfast time (7:00 AM), she had up to 40 handwritten pages ready for her secretaries to transcribe. His memory may have inflated the number of pages, but perhaps not, in view of the fact that sometimes Ellen White commenced writing before midnight, though more often about 3:00 AM. On April 2, 1899, the Pocock family moved from the Sydney region to Cooranbong so the husband and father could continue work on the college buildings, and the children could be educated there. On August 13, 1900, the Pococks wrote a page for the album which was presented to Ellen White as she embarked for North America after nine years in the Antipodes.

Amelia Patrick and her three young sons, Charles, Sydney, and William, met Ellen White at the 1898 Brisbane camp meeting. Amelia, a widow and a recent convert nurtured in the faith by A.G. Daniells, was encouraged by Ellen White to transfer to Cooranbong for the education of her sons. After being a neighbor of Ellen White and the Pococks, Amelia Patrick also wrote an entry in the album of 1900.

Hence my mother, Bertha Emma Pocock (1902-1986), and my father, William Nelson Patrick (1892-1972), were profoundly influenced by their parents' accounts of Ellen White's ministry. To this early nurture was added the vigorous emphasis given to Ellen White's prophetic gift during my years at Avondale College. These two influences were reinforced immediately after my graduation in 1957 by the first-ever Seminary Extension School in Australasia, at which Elder Arthur L. White offered a course entitled "Prophetic Guidance." It is understandable, then, that one of my goals as a young minister was to have in my library a copy of everything which Ellen White ever wrote, to read all the comments she had penned on any passage of Scripture on which I proposed to preach, and to determine every issue of Adventist faith and practice in harmony with her counsel.

Four decades later I still have a passion to understand and apply Ellen White's prophetic testimony, to benefit my own spiritual journey and that of the church. But it is essential to recognize the research in Adventist heritage and the writings of Ellen White which has been undertaken by Seventh-day Adventists during the past three decades. My purpose in the final section of this chapter is to ask, *In view of all we now know, how shall we use responsibly the writings of Ellen White to equip ourselves and our church for the mission God has for us in the twenty-first century?* Toward this end, we shall contrast two symbols: that of the all-encompassing encyclopædia and that of the pioneer explorer.

Ellen White's Writings as an All-Encompassing Encyclopædia

You can imagine the eagerness with which I greeted the 1962-3 publication of the three-volume *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*.¹ We now had a better way to find published references to a given Bible text or subject. Further, the treasure-trove of Ellen White's writings was being augmented by new compilations, then by collected volumes of articles, and (much later) by the publication of manuscript releases and sermons. Thus, increasingly, her encyclopedic coverage of Adventist thought and practice was being extended, and, as even more comprehensive indexing was developed, it was becoming more and more accessible to Adventists worldwide.

Let us explore, then, the viability or otherwise of using Ellen White's writings as an all-encompassing, authoritative encyclopedia.

Amalgamation of Man and Beast. Ellen White often proclaimed God as the Creator of life and beauty, and Satan as the destroyer of life and loveliness. In 1864, within a discussion of those larger themes, she told the newly-organized Seventh-day Adventist Church:

Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.²

This understanding of amalgamation, implying the interbreeding of humans and animals, created a vibrant debate during the 1860s. Uriah Smith weighed in on Ellen White's side, dealing with this and 51 other issues in a series of articles in *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. Smith's series was soon collected in a book which James White endorsed strongly and sold widely at camp meetings.³ Smith not only defended the notion that interbreeding between animals and humans had occurred—he went on to affirm that the results could be clearly seen amongst nineteenth-century people-groups. Such an explanation of racial characteristics is unthinkable to us, by reason of what we now believe to be scientific fact. But as late as 1870, the paragraph from *Spiritual Gifts* was grammatically adjusted, yet it was essentially unchanged as it was

¹*Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific).

²Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 3: *Important Facts of Faith, in Connection with the History of Holy Men of Old* (Battle Creek, MI: Adventist 1864) 75; cp. 64.

³See Uriah Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Adventist 1868).

republished in the first volume of *The Spirit of Prophecy: The Great Controversy between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*.¹

Geology and Earth Sciences. Ellen White often commented on the Genesis accounts of Creation and the Flood. Sixty-three pages of these comments have been collected under the title, "Ellen G. White Statements Relating to Geology and Earth Sciences."² Most scientists with a knowledge of the scientific subjects treated would be unwilling to seriously consider some of Ellen White's remarks as sustainable. Note, for instance, the problems inherent in her statements about earthquakes and volcanoes.

God causes large quantities of coal and oil to ignite and burn. Rocks are intensely heated, limestone is burned, and iron ore melted. Water and fire under the surface of the earth meet. The action of water upon limestone adds fury to the intense heat, and causes earthquakes, volcanoes and fiery issues.³

Health Sciences. Ellen White, from 1863 onward, demonstrated a deep interest in the subject of health. Partially response to her counsels, Seventh-day Adventist have developed a worldwide system of clinics and hospitals which in most instances win a profound respect from the communities they serve. What would be the effects if we literally followed Ellen White's ideas with reference to the causes of certain diseases, the influence of heredity, or the application of such nineteenth-century ideas as vitalism? For instance, observe the following quotation which infers that acquired characteristics are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Some women have naturally small waists. But rather than regard such forms as beautiful, they should be viewed as defective. These wasp waists may have been transmitted to them from their mothers, as the result of their indulgence in the sinful practice of tight lacing, and in consequence of imperfect breathing.⁴

History. From 1858 to her death, Ellen White's literary efforts concentrated more often on the cosmic war between Christ and His angels and Satan and his angels than upon any other theme. As an eager student in History I at the University of Queensland in the 1950s, I wrote an essay on the development of religious toleration in Europe, using *The Great Controversy* as a major source. At the next residential school I was perplexed when essays were returned

¹See Smith 78, 69. For further documentation, see Patrick, "Past." Note the way in which the term "amalgamation" is used by Ellen White in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 23, 1892; Ms. 65, 1889; and *Manuscript Releases*, 16, 247. See also W. C. White, letter to L. E. Froom, Jan. 8, 1928, White, *Messages* 3: 452.

²White, *Geology*; cp. Gordon.

³See *Spiritual Gifts*, 3, 79-83.

⁴See *Review and Herald*, 31 October 1871; "Words to Christian Mothers," *Health Reformer*, Oct. 1871: 121 and Nov. 1871: 154-157; *Healthful Living*, 1897: 58.

to all the other students, but mine was not handed back. Rather timidly, I approached the lecturer, to be told my essay had already been reproduced and mailed to everyone else in the class as an example of how the assignment should be handled. I had taken Ellen White's philosophy and fleshed it out with the help of other historians. However, back then, we Adventists were also likely to settle detailed historical questions on the basis of what Ellen White said, something we now know we must avoid. Twenty years after I wrote that essay the Adventist church learned that *The Great Controversy* was not useable as a source for the details of history. Notice this account from the historian who most carefully researched this issue.

... [T]he historical portions of *The Great Controversy* that I have examined are selective abridgments and adaptation of historians. Ellen White was not just borrowing paragraphs here and there that she ran across in her reading, but in fact following the historians page after page, leaving out much material, but using their sequence, some of their ideas, and often their words. In the examples I have examined I have found no historical fact in her text that is not in their text. The hand-written manuscript on John Huss follows the historian so closely that it does not even seem to have gone through an intermediary stage, but rather from the historian's printed page to Mrs. White's manuscript, including historical errors and moral exhortations.¹

It would be decidedly perilous today to use Ellen White's writings in a way which appeared viable in earlier times.

Scripture. Ellen White was a lifelong, devout student of the Scriptures, with a remarkable breadth in her knowledge of the Word, a fact amply proved by looking at an index of the Scripture passages which are used in her writings. During the 1970s, major Bible conferences were held in various locations, including North America and Australia. One of many important issues which came to light at that time was the fact that Ellen White approached Scripture in a variety of ways, a dozen of which were identified.² A conclusion from this research is evident: we stand on very slippery ground if we give her writings exegetical control over our understanding of the intent and meaning of the Bible.

Doctrine. Between 1844 to the end of her ministry seven decades later, Ellen White developed a symbiotic relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She was present with the struggling groups of believers during the seven years when the "Shut Door" idea was a dominant explanation of 1844. She toiled with the movement as it came to terms with the identity of the law in Galatians, with a definition of clean and unclean meats, with the mys-

¹Cp. McAdams 27-41; Ronald D. Graybill, *Historical Difficulties in The Great Controversy*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: White Estate 1982).

²See Raymond F. Cottrell, "Ellen White's Use of the Bible," Hyde 154-161.

tery surrounding the nature of Christ, and with the necessity to refine its understanding of righteousness by faith. It is now clear that our earlier concepts of continuity and change in the Seventh-day Adventist movement must be updated to incorporate the fact that not only did our community of faith grow and change in its understandings, Ellen White also grew and even changed as well.¹

Education. Ellen White gave a great deal of attention from the 1870s onward to the matter of "true education." This has been enormously fruitful in its effects. But Adventists have long debated a host of issues which arise from her comments, such as the age at which children should begin schooling, variously hoping or denying that Ellen White could give us a definitive answer. The nature of these debates has frequently been destructive. Often it has been claimed that she gave us a "blueprint" for Christian education, but this symbol has proved less and less adequate as time has progressed.² In many such instances, our expectations of Ellen White have created a problem, rather than the problem being inherent in her statements.³

Inerrancy. Therefore, an important observation needs emphasis at this point. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church has come to a fuller understanding of both the content of Ellen White's writings and the religious and social context in which they were penned, we have found it necessary to stress that her writings are not inerrant.⁴ Further, in view of the traditional ways in which so many of us had used Ellen White's writings, it became necessary for the church to make and publish a specific list of affirmations and denials.⁵

There is truth which lies behind each of the seven illustrations cited above. Smith noted that Ellen White's concern in her "amalgamation" statements was to illustrate "the deep corruption and crime into which the race fell."⁶ The message that God is Creator is vastly more important than any nineteenth-century notions about the earth's crust. Ellen White has influenced, profoundly, the health of millions of people, despite the specific limitations of her health-related counsels. Since she learned history largely by ordinary means, and we have access to better sources on which to establish

¹Cp. Olson, *Shut Door*, and Ronald D. Graybill, *The Development of Adventist Thinking on Clean and Unclean Meats* (Washington, DC: White Estate 1981).

²I have attempted a constructive elaboration of this theme in my unpublished paper, "Does Ellen White Have a Crucial Testimony for Avondale in 1995?"

³In *Reading Ellen White* (Hagerstown: Review 1997) George Knight offers a comprehensive set of principles and methods for the effective interpretation of Ellen White's writings.

⁴See Robert W. Olson, *Inerrancy*.

⁵See "The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings," *Adventist Review*, Dec. 23, 1982: 9.

⁶Smith, *Visions* of 103.

our historical understandings, she cannot help us with the basics of history. But, on the other hand, she can help us in the far more important task of finding God in the mazes of history. We can rightly affirm her devotion to the Scriptures, and be challenged to go to the Bible with a desire similar to hers to learn the truth. We need to be as open to constructive change as she was, knowing we too have "many things to learn, and many, many to unlearn."¹ Further, we do well to avoid claims which her writings neither encourage nor sustain.

It is clear that Seventh-day Adventism would become an anachronism were we to adopt the writings of Ellen White as the definitive and authoritative encyclopædia of our faith and practice. In the process, we would destroy her credibility as a prophetic witness, and damage the mission of the church which was so precious to her. If the symbol of the all-encompassing encyclopedia is no longer an adequate way to depict the writings of Ellen White, is there not a more appropriate way for us to portray her writings?

Ellen White: Pioneer Explorer

Little was known by Westerners about continental Australia at the end of the eighteenth century, but by 1862 intrepid explorers had pioneered an understanding of the country's mountains, plains, and deserts. To use the maps of these explorers to find the way to the center of Sydney, the popular automobile racetrack over the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, or the internationally-known monolith in the Northern Territory would involve us in considerable frustration. Yet, without the orientation provided by the explorers, contemporary life would be impaired, if not impossible.

Seventh-day Adventists were uniquely helped by Ellen White's prophetic gift during their first seventy years. Her writings will continue to speak to us as long as time shall last,² but the longer time lasts the more challenging it will be to constructively apply them in the ongoing journey of the church. At this point, let us remind ourselves, again, of the importance of the direction-setting ideas with which section one concludes and those stated at the end of this paper, concepts which have a continuing and powerful significance for the church's thought and mission.

But there are other ways to symbolize Ellen White's work which merit exploration. Ellen White is, of all Adventist women, best fitted to be called the mother of the church. We need to recog-

¹Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern 1946) 37.

²Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Review 1958-80) 1: 55.

nize that in the providence of God we owe a great deal to her and that we will never outgrow the values which she has deeply embedded in our corporate psyche. The fact that her writings do not qualify as a comprehensive, all-encompassing, authoritative encyclopædia of Seventh-day Adventist thought and practice means that we, her children, are called to a measure of adulthood which increases constantly as we move further from the historical matrix of her seventy-year ministry. An adult attitude which accepts individual responsibility, and wisely employs her writings and the spiritual gifts presently manifested within the church, will most fully appreciate her role as the foremost explorer in our movement, one uniquely used of God to determine the essential directions of our pilgrimage in this last segment of time. That metaphor accords well with the notion that Ellen White is the mother of Seventh-day Adventism.

My mother's parents were, as I mentioned earlier, personal friends and neighbors of Ellen White. They were able to give my mother only about the same amount of formal education as Ellen White herself received. My mother nurtured me lovingly and set my direction decidedly on a long road of discovery that caused me to finish the primary schooling she did not complete, plus high school, and academic programs at Avondale College and four other tertiary institutions. The longer we lived, the less my mother and I saw and understood things in the same way.¹ But our mutual love and respect were not impaired by that reality. Often, faithfulness to the spirit of my mother's nurture demanded a radical revision of what she had taught me and what she still believed. I can never dismiss the importance of her influence upon my life, nor can I be true to her and remain bound by her categories of thought. The application to Ellen White as a spiritual mother of the church is obvious. The Christian life is (according to Proverbs 4:18) like the light of dawn that shines more brightly until that noonday when (according to 1 Corinthians 13) we put childish things behind us and the smoked glass of this life is taken away.²

For some Seventh-day Adventists it may be appropriate to symbolize Ellen White as giving "a jet-aircraft vision of crucial realities in an age of spiritual surface travel."³ Others may identify with her

¹We do well to remind ourselves just how different our culture is from that in which Adventism developed. See Jonathan Butler, "From Millerism to Seventh-day Adventism: 'Boundlessness to Consolidation,'" *Church History* 55 (March 1986): 50-64.

²It is salutary to reflect on the fact that the landmarks of early Adventism are seen by us from a different perspective 150 years later.

³Arthur Patrick, "Landmarks or Landscape," *Adventist Review*, Oct. 27, 1983:

best as the church's mother.¹ Indeed, it could be useful for each of us to give that symbol a personal application in that none of us can accomplish such a task effectively for our colleagues, due to the limitations of our knowledge about each other.

A further symbol also invites exploration. In an insightful reference to paradigms, Claire Monod Cassidy uses a metaphor which she notes has been popular since the 1940s, "The map is not a road."² Ellen White has given us a sketch map for the spiritual journey of the Advent movement. God did not give us through her a *road*, nor a *contour map* with all the details for which some of us long. What God *did* give us was, however, a map of profound significance. We must neither undervalue nor overdo the relevance of that map.

Some Priorities for the Immediate Future

There is a continuing need for a more comprehensive approach by the Seventh-day Adventist Church if we are to respond adequately to the issues raised in this paper. Several points appear to be worth consideration with reference to the church's understanding of the life and writings of Ellen White. I suggest that the church might give careful study to a range of constructive plans, including the following.

1. What steps may be taken to develop a more informed and resilient relationship between thought leaders and administrative leaders so that the kind of dialogue and dialectic which benefited the church in its early years—for example, during the Sabbath Conferences of 1848-50 and the US Civil War of 1861-65—might be re-experienced? This might benefit scholars, save administrators some of the painful investigations of institutions and ministers which they deem to be necessary at present, and build a greater sense of community and partnership in fulfillment of the church's mission.
2. Are there ways to enhance participation in the process of discovery and experimentation by White Estate personnel

¹See my article "Ellen White: Mother of the Church in the South Pacific," *Adventist Heritage* 16 (Spring 1993): 30-40. Such symbols, like others the church developed earlier (for instance, a telescope, a pilot) may need redefinition over time to accord with the increasing understanding about Ellen White. Richard Rice, "Ellen White's Writings as Religious Classics: A Response to the Current Predicament" (unpublished essay, Feb. 1984), offers creative suggestions for the use of Ellen White's writings by Adventists who have (by training and/or experience) philosophical/theological interests. Bert Haloviak, "Ellen White and the SDA Church" (unpublished essay, Oct. 1980), gives a masterful treatment of some of the ways in which Ellen White's writings were understood during her lifetime.

²"Unraveling the Ball of String: Reality, Paradigms, and the Study of Alternative Medicine," *Advances: The Journal of Mind-Body Health* 10 (Winter 1994): 5-31.

and the staff of the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centers around the world?¹ This might help to better identify both the problems and the promise of the discussion about Ellen White in relation to matters now on the church's agenda, and renew a sense of trust in the church.²

3. Would it be constructive to monitor such processes by a carefully-structured "think-tank," a group inclusive of the church's talent in administration, biblical studies, systematic and historical theology, mission, history, science, anthropology, sociology, psychology, medicine, literature, and pastoral care? This group could also generate and receive suggestions as well as explore and field-test ways to raise the level of awareness about Ellen White in the church at large.
4. Are there ways in which the church might profitably nurture (worldwide) its editors and publishing committees so it can be sure the magazines, journals, and books it supports are accurate and unifying in their content relating to the Adventist heritage and Ellen White?³
5. Could the Biblical Research Institute lead the church in an open, frank discussion of the ways in which fundamentalism has impacted the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Could this study explore the incompatibility between fundamentalism and the prophetic gift as known in the experience of Ellen G. White? Then, might the church consider how these findings should influence its activities, the way it understands related issues (including the inspiration as manifested in Scripture and Ellen White's writings), and the way it treats people?
6. Might it be fruitful for the Adventist Society for Religious Studies and the Adventist Theological Society to consider participating in an open, collegial dialogue on these issues in a search for ways in which their members might better support the unity and mission of the church with reference to Ellen White's ministry?

¹Observe some of the constructive proposals offered in *Spectrum*. Note, for instance, the implications for creation science, Ellen White studies, and historiography in the following issues: 16 (April 1985): 67; 16 (Aug. 1985): 2-31; 18 (Dec. 1987): 58-9; 18 (February 1988): 36-42; and especially James W. Walters, "Ellen White in a New Key" 21 (Dec. 1991): 12-7. Walters calls for "an already discredited authoritarian Ellen White to be replaced by a revered, authoritative Ellen White."

²A first principle of business management is to listen to consumers, a starting-point for all quality studies. Perhaps the ministry of White Estate could be enhanced by the equivalent of a market survey as it forms plans for the future.

³It would seem to be pastorally irresponsible to allow the Two-Thirds World to drift into the kind of crisis which occurred in the South Pacific and North American church late in the 1970s and onward.

7. How might the church mount a sustained effort to find and foster apt symbols which will accurately encapsulate the meaning and value of the ministry of Ellen White for Seventh-day Adventists? The symbols suggested herein—a jet-aircraft panorama, a pioneer explorer, a mother, a sketch map—might all be discarded in favor of better ones, but the importance of the task demands that serious attempts be made to find and foster adequate metaphors without delay.¹

One of the great challenges which the church faces in the twenty-first century is to understand the attitudes within the present generation of young Adventists, including those who have grown up estranged from the church's mother. These young people are potential recruits for the army which, rightly trained, may well complete the task at which those who presently lead the church have toiled so earnestly. Step-by-step the church has laid a foundation for a more comprehensive and accurate picture of Ellen White and her ministry; we need at this time to judiciously continue this endeavor.² Perhaps we can say with a Christian leader who was appointed to an important post recently, "Our greatest challenge is to live as the modern-day Christians that we are—and as those who are faithful to our founders' vision."³

As we proceed with this important agenda, we need to rise above controversy and highlight the constructive spiritual ministry

¹Men and women from a range of disciplines and perspectives have read drafts of this chapter and shaped its development by their comments. For this help I am grateful, even though I alone take full responsibility for each statement made. It is clear that so short a treatment may raise more questions than it answers in the minds of some. Steve Daily notes the need to better explore three ideas. First, Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic role given the views of prophecy that characterized nineteenth-century America inside and outside Adventism. Second, how such views fit with a biblical understanding of prophecy in the New Testament and post-New Testament eras. (See Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. [Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2000] and Graham Houston, *Prophecy: A Gift for Today* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP 1989].) Thirdly, what the implications are for us as Adventists today if we are to continue as a prophetic community and properly understand and model the gifts of the Spirit so as to fulfill our prophetic destiny. This latter issue is rather fully explored in several of Daily's published volumes.

²In planning a video to highlight the centenary of Ellen White's arrival in the South Pacific, it was decided to aim the production at this group rather than the older generation in the church. The result is the Adventist Media Center production entitled "One Hundred Year Recall," released in 1991.

³A remark by Robert K. Johnston upon his installation as Provost of Fuller Theological Seminary, March 7, 1994. In *Embracing the Spirit: An Open Letter to the Leaders of Adventism* (Takoma Park, MD: Columbia Union College 1997), Charles Scriven has well depicted the forces which are "at this moment, pulling Adventism toward the maelstrom" (3), including "flat, mechanical readings of the Bible," "theological rigidity and arrogance," and "reactive, inward-looking separatism" (16).

of Ellen White for ourselves as individuals and for the church we love. I shall conclude this paper by listing a few of the many constructive emphases which we may choose to stress in light of the attention given them in the writings of Ellen White. Such a list could be expanded readily; these suggestions are given as hints of possibilities inviting exploration.

1. *The link between the cosmology and eschatology, first things and last things.* The doctrine of creation has powerful environmental implications. Prophet though she was, with a compelling sense of mission, Ellen White exemplified a mature delight in the entire world of nature, even to pansies, peaches, and potatoes. A recovery of her comprehensive interest in this theme would speak powerfully to our age.
2. *The connection between health and religion, spiritual and physical well-being.* We are currently allowing our culture to edge ahead of us in some aspects of this endeavor; to recover the authentic voice of Ellen White could make us the head and not the tail.¹
3. *The "great controversy" theme, the controlling idea in Ellen White's entire corpus of writings.* According to Herbert Douglass, a focus on this theme would help us to better understand Ellen White and Adventist distinctives, since it is "the golden thread which binds all her writings together," and in which "she breaks out of conventional theological paradigms that cause all our internal divisions and lifts us into a new dimension of dealing with the plan of salvation."² This emphasis would also offer us perhaps the most positive way to present Ellen White's ministry, faithful to her objectives and the major findings of the research conducted since 1970.
4. *The interpretation of history.* Christianity is a teleological religion; it is directed toward a specific goal. All history is moving toward that end, and Ellen White can help us to discover and articulate the way in which the past reveals the purpose of God for the present and the future.
5. *The primacy of Scripture in the formation of doctrine.* We have yet to fully implement Ellen White's counsel by making the Bible our sole rule of faith and practice.
6. *The dynamic nature of Adventism.* We have not yet maximized the significance of our heritage. The *life* and *writings* of Ellen White are inextricably linked with the *history* and *thought* of

¹This conclusion was reinforced as I attended a number of presentations at a session of the American Academy of Religion in San Francisco, Nov. 23-25, 1997.

²Letter to Arthur Patrick, received December 1, 1997.

the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are still in the early stages of making this relationship understood in the church.¹

7. *The winsomeness of God.* In my first wide-margin Bible there are copious notes made with a mapping pen in India ink, detailing the way in which Ellen White's writings on the life of Christ assist our understanding of the Gospels. Were there two demoniacs or one at Gadara? What was the sequence of the events in the life of Jesus? Did a specific miracle occur on the way *into* or the way *out of* Jericho? I asked countless questions on that level, some of which are quite irrelevant in the light of now well-known facts.² I now believe that the main theme of *The Desire of Ages* is clearly stated on page 22: Jesus came to reveal to us the God whom to know is to love. Many of the questions which I asked of this masterpiece were no doubt important, but too many of them were outside of its purpose or what might be expected of it.
8. *The ultimacy of Jesus Christ.* Probably most Adventists would not claim that they have fully implemented Ellen White's far-reaching injunction that "of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world."³

¹I regard it as a great privilege to journey through Adventist history with students. My basic aims in this process are suggested by seven principal terms. The responsible study of Adventist history is an exciting quest for *truth*, including historical accuracy; *insight*, an understanding of how the past illumines the present and the future; *stability*, a sufficient grasp of the relevant data so that new items of information do not threaten our belief system; *identification*, a pervading sense that Adventist history is our personal heritage, and hence precious; *commitment*, a conviction that the Adventist church has a mission worthy of our best talents and energies; *awe*, faith that the God of Scripture and Jesus Christ have led and continue to lead the Second Advent Movement through Word and Spirit; *celebration*, a desire to commemorate the integrity, achievements and faith of the past—and thus to inform and inspire present.

²See Robert W. Olson, "How *The Desire of Ages* Was Written" (Ellen G. White/SDA Research Center shelf doc., May 23, 1979). Olson shows that Ellen White did not claim to know the order of the events in the life of Christ (32). If she did not claim a revealed understanding of such chronological matters, is it fair for us to claim her support of Ussher's chronology resulted from divine revelation? In exploring this issue, we would do well to consult all the relevant studies on biblical chronology, including the Andrews University doctoral dissertation by Colin House.

³Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review 1946) 188. When we show other Christians the extent of Ellen White's agreement with cardinal Christian doctrines, they are more open to heed her distinctive convictions. For one attempt in this direction, see my article, "An Adventist and an Evangelical in Australia? The Case of Ellen White in the 1890s," *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review* 12 (Dec. 1991): 42-53; rptd. (in edited form) as "Are Adventists Evangelical?" *Ministry*, Feb. 1995: 14-17.