

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER NO. 152

“Ellen White and the Bible”

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

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Greetings from Jesolo (Venice, Italy) where my wife and I are spending a few restful days, enjoying the sunshine, the spectacular Adriatic beach, the delicious food, and visiting our relatives. I wish I could offer you a taste of the delicious Italian dishes offered by the Hotel where we are staying: Lasagne alla Bolognese, Risotto all Milanese, Melanzane (egg-plants) alla parmigiana, and a variety of mouth-watering deserts and local types of cheese. Every Buffet meal is a test of our ability to be temperate.

Last Sabbath I spoke at my wife’s childhood SDA church in Conegliano, 50 miles from Venice. The sanctuary that usually accommodates 50 people, was packed with over 100 members who came from different churches. The temperature was over 95 degree with no air-conditioning, but nobody complained about the oppressive heat. The reception and response was overwhelming.

In the afternoon we had the privilege of visiting with my wife’s two brothers, a sister, and a host of nephews. In the evening we were invited to a surprise party to celebrate my wife’s younger brother and sister-in-law 50th wedding anniversary. This was truly an unforgettable experience.

The party was held in ancient monastery, recently purchased and artistically restored by my wife's niece and her husband. The property is located on the top of a hill, surrounded by vineyards, fruit trees, and a breathtaking panorama. The estate includes a five centuries old chapel with crumbling frescoes. The local priest was invited to conduct the ceremony of the marriage vows renewal in that old cozy chapel. A local 30 members choir sang a dozen of times beautiful sacred songs, some of which are found in our Adventist hymn book.

Two things caught my attention. First, it was the quality of the music. It was hard for me to believe that such a small village could be blessed such so many outstanding singers and soloists. I was told that none of them are professional musicians, but all of them love to sing. Their music is sacred, harmonious and spiritually uplifting. There is no beat music in their repertoire. Regularly they come together as a choir to practice and then they sing at their local church or at special social events.

Catholic Reverence and Respect in the Church

The second thing that impressed me was the attitude of reverence and respect that prevailed throughout the lengthy one hour service. Though the old priest delivered a rather boring homily, making only occasional references to renewal of the marriage vows of the couple in front of him, all the 70-80 person in attendance listened very attentively. At least half of them were young people or young adult couples. Surprisingly most of them were eager to receive the Eucharist (wafer) at the end of the Mass.

During the banquet that followed, I had the opportunity to dialogue with some of the guest. It was evident that they knew very little about the teachings of their own Catholic Church, but they welcomed the opportunity to learn Bible truths. They were surprised to learn that most

of the Catholic unbiblical teachings derived from the pagan dualistic view of the mortal body and immortal soul. They wished that I could organize a Bible study group.

This experience taught me two lessons. First, Catholics show more respect than Adventists for their church service. No whispering in the church, only meditation and contemplation. Second, there are many sincere Catholics who are sincerely seeking to know and to do the revealed will of God. The challenge of our Adventist church in Western European countries like Italy, is to devise new methods to reach these sincere people.

No measurable Adventist church growth has taken place during the past 30 years among the indigenous population of Western European countries. The prevailing perception seems to be that people are either too indifferent or too superstitious to accept our Adventist message. Such a mentality has led to a paralyzing fear to evangelize.

Yet the fact remains that the spiritual needs of Europeans are the same of the Americans, Asians, or Africans. New methods need to be devised . One method that could be used to break the impasse, is to capitalize on wedding or funeral opportunities to share our sympathy, love, message with people. My point is that we cannot just hope and wait that one day some sincere souls will show up at our church door. Instead, we need to go out and reach people where they are, even at their weddings to celebrate their joys or at their funerals to share in their grief.

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UPDATE ON NEW BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET*

The response to the announcement of Prof. Graeme Bradford's newly released book *MORE THAN A PROPHET* and of his CD/DVD album, has surpassed our fondest expectations. During the past 10 days we have mailed over 2000 copies of the book to church members, pastors, and church leaders.

Several pastors have shared with me their painful loss of members who recently left the church primarily over the question of Ellen White. Some of these members have been influenced by the countless number of websites that attempt to prove that Ellen White was a false prophet because she made mistakes or because she borrowed material from other sources. If you search in GOOGLE for "Ellen G. White Critics," you will find a listing of 5,460.00 website. You could spend your lifetime reading the attacks against Ellen White.

One pastor told me that he wished that *MORE THAN A PROPHET* had been available five years go when a local elder influenced about 35 members to leave the church with him, especially because of unresolved questions about Ellen White.

A sister from the Northwest told me on the phone that she had been praying for several years for a balanced study on Ellen White that would help members attacking Ellen White, to appreciate both her divine inspiration and her human limitations. She went on saying: "As soon as I heard of the released of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, I felt that prayer has been answered. She ordered immediately a case of 30 copies of the book together with Prof. Bradford's CD/DVD album at the

special offer of \$170.00, instead of \$850.00. She plans to give a copy of *MORE THAN A PROPHET* to each family who has recently left the church. May the Lord richly bless this reclaiming ministry.

The response from Conference leaders has been equally encouraging. About 25 Conference Presidents and Ministerial Secretaries have requested review copies. Several Ministerial Secretaries have ordered sufficient quantities of *MORE THAN A PROPHET* to donate to all their workers.

Your personal effort to promote this timely study among your church members, is greatly appreciated. Your members will gain a fresh appreciation of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. To facilitate your endeavors, we offer you *MORE THAN A PROPHET* by the case of 30 copies for only \$5.00 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$25.00 per copy.

Furthermore, we offer you Bradford's new CD/DVD album with all his publications and live video lecture on Ellen White, for only \$20.00, instead of \$100.00. This means that for \$170.00 you can order the package of 30 copies of *MORE THAN A PROPHET* and the accompanying CD/DVD album. The regular price for this package is \$850.00. For further details and order information click:

http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=bookstore&Product_Code=SP-30GBP&Category_Code=specials

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

The preparation for the two hours video taping of the lecture on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE* is on target. During the past few days of our "Italian Vacation," I have read half-a-dozen of books and a

pile of articles, which examine *The Da Vinci Code* from different perspectives. A basic outline is already emerging in my mind, but I will continue to collect nice slides of documents, persons, and places, in order to bring to life the powerpoint presentation.

God willing, the video taping will take place on Wednesday, August 30. The *Da Vinci Code* raises a number of questions of particular interest for Seventh-day Adventists. My plan is to devote the second part of the lecture to a discussion of the endtime prophetic significance of the neo-pagan forms of worship promoted by people like Dan Brown. I will keep updated about the progress of this project.

AUSTRALIAN LECTURE TOUR: NOVEMBER 17-27, 2006

From November 17 to 27, 2006, God willing, I will be in Australia, speaking at two rallies. The invitation has been extended to me by Elder Neil Watts, President of the South Queensland Conference. The invitation is co-sponsored by sabbatarian Churches of God in the Brisbane area. The SABBATH CONFERENCE will be held at the Brisbane Adventist Academy Auditorium from July 24 to 26.

Plans are under way to have a similar rally in Sydney on the previous weekend of November 17-19, 2006. A couple of churches have shown an interest to invite me. Within the next few days I should receive a formal invitation from one of the Sydney's Adventist churches. I will keep our Australian subscribers updated in the next newsletters.

Australia holds a special attraction for me, because during the previous five visits I received a great reception and response from our Adventist believers. Australian love to engage in theological discussions, and they do not hesitate to express their disagreements, even to a visiting scholar. It is most challenging and rewarding to speak

Adventist rallies in Australia. You can count on keen listeners and respondents. I look forward to another blessed experience.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

<http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET

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

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

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

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

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

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

"Ellen White and the Bible"

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.

Should differences in the interpretation of Bible texts or teachings, be resolved by appealing to EGW's writings? Should Adventists determine the meaning of a Bible text by examining the text in its context, or by seeking for all the statements in the Spirit of Prophecy

that mention that text? Should EGW's writings be used as the exegetical authority of the Bible? Did Ellen White want her writings to be used as the final authority in the interpretation of biblical texts or teachings? Did James White and those Pioneers who were closely associated with Ellen White believe and teach that her writings should be accepted as the final inspired authority of the Bible?

Importance of Prof. Graeme Bradford Essay

These important questions are addressed in chapter 24 of Prof. Graeme's book *MORE THAN A PROPHET*. The chapter is entitled "Ellen White and the Bible." I am posting this chapter in this newsletter, as a follow-up to the last newsletter No. 151, which presented two chapters from the same book dealing with "The Credibility of Ellen White."

To refresh your mind, in the last newsletter Bradford presented 10 reasons why people closely associated with Ellen White during her 70-year ministry, firmly believed in her prophetic gift, though they were well aware of several weaknesses in her life.

He also discussed the controversial question of the literary dependency of Ellen White. He showed that borrowing from other sources was a common practice in the nineteenth century. In the case of Ellen White, she used historical sources, not to approve or correct them, but to teach the way of salvation. She never claimed to be an authority on history or theology. In fact, she asked for help both in gathering the information and in correcting any inaccuracies.

In this newsletter I decided to continue our study of the authority of EGW's writings, by posting another significant chapter of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, which focuses specifically on the relationship between EGW's writings and the Bible. This is a timely study that

sheds much needed light on the whether or not EGW's writings can be legitimately used as the final authoritative and infallible interpretation of the Bible.

Do EGW's Writings Always Provide Final Answers?

I decided to post this study because practically, every week I receive email messages from fellow believers asking me if perchance I have investigated how Ellen White interprets such Bible texts as those dealing with the mark and number of the beast (Rev 13:17-18), Christ as the "only begotten Son" of God (John 3:16), the ceremonial law "nailed to the Cross" (Col 2:14), the wicked being "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10), the redeemed coming to worship in the new earth "from New Moon to Moon" (Is 66:23), or the resurrected saints "being like the angels" in the world to come (Matt 22:20), to cite a few.

Other questions often asked are: What does Ellen White teach regarding renting Adventist churches to Sundaykeeping Christians, the Persons of the Trinity, using beat music during the church service, ordaining women as elders or pastors, wearing a wedding band, working in non-SDA hospitals on the Sabbath, planning or attending a wedding or a funeral on the Sabbath, doing community services on the Sabbath like raking leaves or painting, joining ecumenical evangelical organizations as our Adventist church has recently done in some European countries, and etc.

Our fellow believers want to know what Ellen White has to say on Bible texts or current issues, because the prevailing assumption seems to be that whatever she has written on any given text or subject, should be accepted by conscientious Adventists as the final word. Thus, ultimately the concern is to find out how Ellen White interprets a Bible text or teaching, or what inspired counsel she offers on issues we face

today.

An Unresolved Contradiction

This method poses a largely unresolved contradiction between the authority of EGW's writings and that of Scripture. In theory, our general consensus is that our doctrines and practices are derived exclusively from the normative authority of the Bible. Incidentally, this is the position Ellen White herself maintained: "The Testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word of God. . . . Let us prove all our positions from Scripture and substantiate every point they claim from the revealed Word of God" (*Evangelism*, p. 256).

In practice, however, Ellen White remains for many sincere Adventists the final interpreter of Scripture. This has been evident whenever I attempted to expand or modify our interpretation of such biblical texts as Colossians 2:14 on the ceremonial law nailed to the Cross, or Revelation 13:17-18, on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*. Some rejected a priori the findings of my investigation, not because they violated the meaning of the texts in their contexts, but because they could not be adequately supported by EGW writings.

My Deep Respect for Ellen White's Writings

To respond to those who are spreading the lie that I no longer believe in Ellen White, I wish to state at the outset my deep respect for her writings. During the past 25 years, my wife and I have faithfully read EGW's writings every evening for our devotion. At the beginning of each year my wife purchases from the ABC the devotional book of the year. If the devotional book is not compilation from Ellen White's writings, chances are that we read it only for few weeks, because soon

we sense the need to go back to EGW's writings. Thus we have reread several times some of the previous Spirit of Prophecy's devotional. The reason is simple. Ellen White speaks to the spiritual needs of our souls better than other contemporary writers.

Over the years I have used extensively EGW's writings, not only for our devotional life, but also for my research. My critics ignore that I have devoted an entire chapter to Ellen White's teachings, in such books as *Women in the Church*, *Wine in the Bible*, and *Christian Dress and Adornment*. In other books I usually have an extensive discussion of Ellen White's insights. For example, in my book *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, I commend Ellen White for her insights on the redemptive meaning of the Sabbath—a meaning largely ignored in Adventist studies on the Sabbath.

The question for me is not: Does Ellen White offer valuable insights and interpretations of Bible texts and teachings? My answer to this question is: **YES, ABSOLUTELY**. But for me the question is: Does my respect for the authority of Ellen White preclude any fresh investigation of Biblical or historical subjects discussed in her writings? Did Ellen White see herself as the final and infallible authority on prophetic, exegetical, theological, and historical texts or teachings? Did she expect Adventists to accept whatever she wrote as the final answer to any biblical question? In my view the answer is **NO!** This answer becomes clear as you take time to read the documentation presented by Prof. Graeme Bradford in this newsletter, drawn from chapter 24 of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*.

The Dilemma of Two Conflicting Beliefs

Our Adventist church faces the dilemma of two conflicting beliefs. As expressed in the 27 Fundamental beliefs, on the one hand we believe that “The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His

will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines” (*Fundamental Beliefs*, No. 1). But, on the other hand, we also believe that “As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provides for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction” (*Fundamental Beliefs*, No. 17).

This conflict between the Bible as “the authoritative revealer of doctrines” and EGW’s writings as “authoritative source of truth,” poses the problem of two conflicting “authoritative” sources. This problem is reflected in the statement prepared by an ad hoc committee of the General Conference, in response to requests for a clarification of the relationship between the Bible and EGW’s writings. The statement affirms that “The ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy, that her writings . . . are applicable and authoritative especially to Seventh-day Adventists.” But it also denies that “the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of the Christian faith as does Scripture.” (“The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings,” *Adventist Review* 159, December 23, 1982, p. 9).

The dichotomy remains. EGW’s writings are not supposed to be normative for interpreting scripture or formulating doctrines, yet they are inspired and authoritative. It is easy to see how different Adventists can appeal to one or the other set of statements, to defend either the authority of Scripture or the authority of EGW’s writings.

The coexistence of these two positions in our Adventist church, make it impossible to offer a unanimous answer to the question we posed at the outset: Should theological differences be resolved by appealing to EGW’s writings? In theory the answer is “NO!” but in practice the answer of many sincere Adventist is “YES!,” because for them Ellen White remains the final interpreter of Scripture.

Are Adventists Free to Pursue Fresh Investigation of Scripture?

Ultimately the dilemma we are facing is whether or not we as Adventists are free like our Pioneers to pursue a fresh investigation of Scripture. Are we locked in into a set of traditional teachings that precludes any fresh investigation of doctrinal teachings and prophetic interpretations? In discussing this issue with colleagues, I find that we have brilliant Adventist scholars today who are not free to examine Scripture because of the constraints of the Spirit of Prophecy.

To avoid unpleasant controversies, some Adventist scholars stay away from controversial research. This explains, for example, why until recent years no significant fresh study has been published on the books of Daniel and Revelation. Those few scholars who had the courage to be trailblazers, have come under considerable attacks from concerned brethren. I could share much private information on this topic.

Any religion that discourages fresh investigation and settles all differences by appealing to traditional teachings to silence differing view points, ultimately becomes victim of superstition and blind credulity. We must work together in constructive ways to ensure that this will not happen to our beloved Adventist Church.

A Case Study: The Meaning of Colossians 2:14

To illustrate the challenge I have faced in pursuing a fresh investigation of important Bible texts, I will refer to Colossians 2:14. The very first challenges I faced when my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* came off the press, had to do with my interpretation of Colossians 2:14. Concerned Adventists strongly felt that I am ignoring the clear interpretation given by Ellen White to this text, which reads:

“Having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:14).

It might help to explain that historically Sundaykeepers have used Colossians 2:14 to prove that Paul teaches that the law in general and the Sabbath in particular were nailed to the Cross. Our Adventist response has been to argue that what was nailed to the Cross in Colossians 2:14, was not the moral, but the ceremonial law.

Ellen White uses several times Colossians 2:14 to support the teaching that the ceremonial law was nailed to the Cross. For example, in *Patriarchs and Prophets* she writes: “This ritual law, with its sacrifices and ordinances, was to be performed by the Hebrews until type met antitype in the death of Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Then all the sacrificial offerings were to cease. It is this law that Christ “took . . . out of the way, nailing it to His cross. Colossians 2:14.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 365).

Ellen White’s teachings that the function of the ceremonial law terminated at the Cross, is absolutely correct. This teaching is emphatically stated repeatedly in Hebrews chapters 7 to 10, where the effect of Christ’s coming is described as “setting aside” (7:18), making “obsolete” (8:13), “abolishing” (10:9) all the Levitical services associated with the sanctuary.

But, the issue is not the termination of the ceremonial law at the Cross. This teaching is abundantly clear in the New Testament. Rather, the issue is whether such biblical teaching can be legitimately supported with Colossians 2:14. Ellen White cites this text several times to support the termination of the ritual law at the Cross (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 194; *Early Writings*, p. 33; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol 6, 1094-1095; *Evangelism*, p. 598, *Selected Messages*, vol 1, p. 239). The problem is that she never attempts to exegete the text by

examining the key word *cheirographon*—*handwritings of ordinances* in its proper context. She never attempts to prove that “the handwritings of ordinances” are the ceremonial law. Historically, Adventists have followed the lead of Ellen White in maintaining that the “handwriting of ordinances” nailed to the Cross in Colossians 2:14 refer to the termination of the ceremonial law.

What Was Nailed to the Cross?

The attempts to read into Colossians 2:14 either the ceremonial law or the both the moral/ceremonial laws, are unfounded for at least two reasons. First, because in the whole of the epistle the word “law—*nomos*” is not used at all. Second, because these interpretations detract from the immediate argument (v. 13) designed to prove the fullness of God’s forgiveness. The wiping out of the moral and/or ceremonial law would hardly provide Christians with the divine assurance of forgiveness. Guilt is not removed by destroying law codes. The latter would only leave mankind without moral principles.

What was nailed to the Cross was not the “law—*nomos*” but the *cheirographon*, a term which occurs only in Colossians 2:14. Its meaning has been clarified by its occurrence in apocalyptic literature where *cheirographon* is used to designate the “record-book of sin” or “the certificate of sin-indebtedness” but not the moral or ceremonial law (For examples and a discussion, see my treatment in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 1977, pp. 347-351).

By this daring metaphor Paul affirms that through Christ, God has “cancelled,” “set aside,” “nailed to the cross” “the written record of our sins which because of the regulations was against us.” The legal basis of the record of sins was “the binding statutes, regulations” (*tois dogmasin*) but what God destroyed on the Cross was not the legal ground (law) for our entanglement in sin, but the written record of our

sins.

The function of the metaphor of the nailing to the Cross the record of our sins, is simply to reassure believers of the totality of God's forgiveness. There is no reason therefore for Christians to feel incomplete and to seek the help of inferior mediators, as taught by the Colossians' false teachers, since Christ has provided complete redemption and forgiveness. Interested readers are welcomed to read the extensive analysis of this text in both *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* and *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*.

Gradual Acceptance of New Interpretation

Initially this interpretation was challenged by concerned Adventists who viewed it as a rejection of Ellen White's clear use of Colossians 2:14. What these concerned brethren ignored is that Ellen White uses the language of the text to state a fundamental truth that the ceremonial law was nailed to the Cross, but she makes no attempt to exegete the text. The reason is simple. As Prof. Bradford's chapter explains, she never claimed to be an exegete. She uses Bible texts homeletically to proclaim religious truths, not exegetically to explain their meaning.

The recognition of this fact has led to a gradual acceptance of new historical and biblical interpretations. For example, today, I do not know of any scholar who uses Colossians 2:14 to teach the termination of the ceremonial law at the Cross. The reason is simple. They recognize that this is not what the text is talking about. There are plenty of other texts that can be used to support such teaching.

This positive development gives me the courage to continue my ministry of Biblical research. It is my conviction that Adventists are committed to search for truth. To use Ellen White to stifle any new

investigation of Bible teachings run contrary to her clear teachings, as Prof. Bradford shows. It is this commitment that ultimately allows our church to grow in the understanding and experience of Bible truths.

Bradford's study you are about to read throws much needed light on this controversial question of the use of Ellen White in interpreting the Bible. If you find this chapter from *MORE THAN A PROPHET* very enlightening, may I encourage you to promote this timely book with your church members? To facilitate your promotional endeavors, we are offering *MORE THAN A PROPHET* by the case of 30 copies for only \$5.00 per copy, instead of \$25.00. This means that you can order 30 copies for only \$150.00, instead of \$750.00. In addition, we offer you the new CD/DVD album with Prof. Bradford's writings and live lecture on Ellen White, for only \$20.00, instead of \$100.00. You will see that after viewing of Prof. Bradford's live DVD lecture on Ellen White, most members will be most eager to purchase copies of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*.

“Ellen White and the Bible”
Graeme Bradford, D. Min.,
Retired Professor of Theology
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Many gifts are given to the church to help keep unity and protect against heresy: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by waves, and blown here and there by

every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4: 11-14).

When Ellen White spoke out against errors that would confuse the church and cause harm to the relationship members had to Christ, she was doing what prophets are called upon to do. However, the same can be said for other gifts such as the gift of being an evangelist, a pastor and a teacher. It is important to remember that these and the teachings from these gifts must be in harmony with God’s final revelation in Christ as found in the Scriptures. The final court of appeal must always be the Bible.

This was the strong conviction of her husband, James White, who wrote: “There is a class of persons who are determined to have it that the *Review* and its conductors make the views of Mrs White a test of doctrine and Christian fellowship . . . What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. White’s views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the *Review* has ever referred to them as authority on any point. . . . It’s motto has been, ‘The Bible, and the Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty.’ . . .

“Every Christian is therefore duty bound to take the Bible as the perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position.”³⁹⁵

He could see that, very early in Adventism, some were inclined to give her writings an authority over and above the Scriptural authority for the work of a prophet. “They conclude that if it be true that God is reviving some of the gifts, ‘for the comfort of his people, and correct those who err from Bible truth.’ That all errors would at once be corrected by these gifts, and the church be saved the trouble of searching the Word for truth to expose error. . . . They would put the gifts where they do not belong. . . . The revival of any, or all of the gifts, will never supersede the necessity of searching the Word to learn the truth.”³⁹⁶

The Bible Is the Foundation of Faith and Practice

His comments highlight an important principle—the Bible is its own interpreter and every Christian is free to study the Bible (guided by the Holy Spirit) to find truth for themselves. The following points support James White in his stand:

1. Jesus left a promise to His Church. “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:25-26)
2. Recognising this point and practicing it is part of being Protestant. The Catholic Church tried to impose upon Christians the role of the pope as the infallible interpreter of Scripture. This concept was rejected by Protestants, because it violated the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Besides, once you have any external authority telling you what the Bible means, you make that authority more powerful than the Bible itself.
3. The Bible is a completed book. Hebrews 1:1 gives the reason for this, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. . . .” The generation of Jesus’ day were taught by Christ and individuals wrote down what they had learned. Jesus was the fullest, most complete revelation of God. Nothing that comes after Him will ever add to or eclipse the revelation of God in Him. All that comes after will be but a reflection of the light that shone through Him. Therefore the work of prophets is to call people back to study and obey that final, complete, revelation in Jesus. The work of prophets is to point out duties already revealed and neglected.
4. It is the position of Ellen White herself: “Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim from the revealed Word of God.”³⁹⁷ To the delegates of the General Conference in 1901, she said, “Lay Sister White right to one side: lay her to one side. Don’t you never[sic] quote my words

again as long as you live, until you can obey the Bible. When you take the Bible and make that your food, and your meat, and your drink, and you make that the elements of your character, when you can do that you will know better how to receive some counsel from God. But here is the Word, the precious Word, exalted before you today. And don't you give a rap any more what 'Sister White Said' [sic]—'Sister White said this,' and 'Sister White said that,' and 'Sister White said the other thing'. But say, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.'³⁹⁸

5. This is the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as stated in what the church affirms and denies about the authority of Ellen White's writings. Notice a few significant points from the 10 affirmations and the 10 denials on our position regarding the authority and function of Ellen White's writings.

“Affirmations.

“3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.

“Denials.

“3. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.

“4. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.

“6. We do not believe that the Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.

“7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.”³⁹⁹

Fritz Guy is clear on this point: “The ministry of Ellen White does not define, control, or restrict an Adventist understanding of scripture. That is, what she wrote does not determine in advance the results of Adventist scriptural exegesis; nor did she ever intend her work to be so used. She did not suppose that scripture needed her explanation to make it intelligible; and she did not claim that her understanding was the definitive interpretation of the canonical text. She never said, ‘Let *me* tell you what the Bible means.’ She never

claimed that her articles and books constituted the definitive commentary on scripture.’ . . . A prerequisite to any serious exegesis is the recognition that one does not already know ahead of time what the text is going to say; *and no Adventist should be embarrassed if a fresh, careful listening to scripture discloses something different from what it said to Ellen White a hundred years ago*” (emphasis added).⁴⁰⁰

Ellen White Used Scripture Homiletically, not Exegetically

6. Ellen White’s use of Scripture is usually that of an evangelist or homiletician, not an exegete. She can use the same text of Scripture at times in harmony with the context and intended meaning of the writer. At other times she can use the same text out of context with a different meaning to the intention of the biblical writer. Robert Olsen gives the following two examples:⁴⁰¹ Ecclesiastes 7:2. In harmony with the context and meaning, she wrote, “God made man upright; He gave him noble traits of character, with no bias toward evil. He endowed him with high intellectual power. . . .”⁴⁰² Out of harmony with the context and original meaning of the writer she wrote, “Among the first things to be aimed at should be a correct position both in sitting and in standing. God made man upright, and He desires him to possess not only the physical but the mental and moral benefit, the grace and dignity and self-possession, the courage and self-reliance, which an erect bearing so greatly tends to promote.”⁴⁰³

Nahum 1: 9. “The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin. And its utter extermination, which in the beginning would have brought fear to the angels and dishonor to God, will now vindicate His love and establish His will...Never will evil again be manifest. Says the Word of God: *‘Affliction shall not rise up the second time.*”⁴⁰⁴ [Emphasis added]. An astute reader will recognize that this passage from Nahum is talking of the destruction of Nineveh and not with the final disposition of sin from the universe.

There is no evidence to suggest that when she was commenting on a passage of Scripture that the meaning she was giving was the one and only true meaning. To the examples of Olsen we may add her use of the parable of the ten virgins as found in Matthew 25:1-13. In *Christ Object Lessons* she interprets it as meeting its application when Christ returns.⁴⁰⁵ However in *The Great Controversy* she applies it to the time just before the 1844 disappointment and states that it illustrates the experience of the Adventist people.

She is not using 1 Corinthians 2:9 correctly when she applies it to the glories of the new earth. “Paul had a view of heaven, and in the discoursing on the glories there, the very best thing he could do was to not try to describe them. He tells us that eye had not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him. So you may put your imagination to the stretch, you may try to the very best of your abilities to take in and consider the eternal weight of glory, and yet your finite senses, faint and weary with the effort, cannot grasp it, for there is an infinity beyond. . . .”⁴⁰⁶

The next verse states, “but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” The verse in context is talking about a present experience in the life of the believer whereby they are able to know and better understand God and his purposes, than the person who does not know God. The point being made is that the spiritual person understands, but the unspiritual cannot understand through their natural senses. The subject of the new earth is not Paul’s point in this passage.

In the hand written notes taken at the 1919 Bible Conference after meeting (most likely by Prescott. Haloviak thinks this on a basis they were found in the Froom box of papers and Froom was known to be a friend of Prescott) a statement is made by someone as follows, “Sister White is not a biblical exegete. Her gift is not the gift of exegesis. *She would be the last person to go to. Are we to allow our conclusions of the Bible to be blocked?*”⁴⁰⁷ (emphasis added). Bearing in mind that she had asked some of these men (Prescott and Daniells, for instance) and her helpers to assist her in putting together her books through some difficult parts of the Bible, the statement may come from first hand experience.

Alden Thompson believes that Ellen White frequently used methods of biblical application that were commonly used among early Adventist writers. Perhaps this could explain why she used expressions from the Apocrypha in *Early Writings*. ^{This would be readily accepted by her contemporary Adventist community, to whom she was writing.}⁴⁰⁸ This is also in harmony with her comment that inspired writings “do not put God on trial in thought or word or logic”⁴⁰⁹

Jon Paulien talks of Ellen White as an interpreter of the Bible in this way, “While more study needs to be done on this question, it is my

opinion that Ellen White rarely uses Scripture exegetically (i.e. being primarily concerned with the biblical writer's intent). As was the case with the classical prophets of the OT, her main concern was to speak to her contemporary situation. This would generally cause her to use Scripture theologically and homiletically rather than exegetically. To say this is not to limit her authority. Her intention in a given statement should be taken with utmost seriousness. At the same time we must be careful not to limit the authority of the biblical writer, denying that writer's intention on the basis of a homiletical statement that Ellen White never intended to exhaust the meaning of the biblical text."⁴¹⁰

The main thrust of Paulien's paper is that we must not take an "echo" reference of Ellen White's and make it the standard interpretation of a passage. By "echo" passage Paulien means when she, as a homiletician, uses a biblical word or two out of context to apply a spiritual truth. An example of this could be where in *Ministry of Healing* she states, "In relation to tea, and coffee, tobacco, and alcoholic drinks, the only safe course is to *touch not, taste not, handle not.*"⁴¹¹ The italicised section, from Colossians 2:21, is certainly not the true meaning of the text where Paul warns against the asceticism of the gnostics. The basic principle behind what she is saying can be seen, but it is not the exegetical meaning of the passage. She uses the language of Paul to press home an important point regarding temperance.

Herbert Douglass adds: "When she commented on the Bible, how reliable was she? Understanding the limitations of finite human nature, one would expect some discrepancies. Not to have made a few mistakes would have been a first for prophets! For that reason, she never expected anyone to consider her the Bible's infallible commentator or interpreter."⁴¹²

If then she mostly comments as a homelitician and not an exegete, it is perilous to use her as an inspired Bible commentator. It also shows the weakness producing a Bible with her comments in the margin.⁴¹³

Ellen White Grew in Her Understanding of Scripture

7. Ellen White grew in her knowledge of the purposes of God and in her understanding of Scripture. We have previously seen how she could change her mind in theological areas and was open for and sought advice from others. This being the case it is possible to take some of the early Ellen White and compare the latter Ellen White statements and make it appear that she contradicts herself. Failure to allow her to grow has caused her enemies to unfairly play upon apparent contradictions in her writings. However, for those who would try to use her as a biblical commentator we ask “Which Ellen White are you going to quote? The early Ellen White or the latter?”

None of the seven points cause problems if she is seen in her true role as a Christian prophet. If we use the “Bible alone” for our source of doctrine and teachings. Fritz Guy has expressed the matter well,

“She called attention to the word. . . .

“She urged obedience to the Bible. . . .

“She showed the application of the Bible to her own time, encouraging people to be faithful. . . .

“She certainly did not claim that her own understanding was the final word, the definitive interpretation. On the contrary, she urged every person to listen to the Bible for himself . . . she insisted that ‘there is no excuse for anyone in taking the position . . . that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error.’ No one need feel uncomfortable if in serious, careful listening to the Bible he discovers that it says something a little different from what it said to Ellen White.”⁴¹⁴

ENDNOTES

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

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of July and

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