

A Reply To Criticism: Part I
"The Use of E. G. White's Writings
in Interpreting Scripture"
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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Every newsletter generates between 200 to 500 responses, mostly consisting of notes of appreciation for the information provided. I also receive a healthy number of critical comments from subscribers who disagree with some aspects of my research. Both types of responses are welcomed. They alert me to what people like or dislike about my newsletters.

The responses to the last newsletter (No. 86) on "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy," surpassed my fondest expectations. During the first 24 hours over 1000 messages poured in from all over the world. Some readers told me that they stay up much of the night to read the lengthy essay. The flow of responses continued for several days.

Over 95% of the messages received were very positive. Readers expressed appreciation for the new insights gained into the following topics discussed in the newsletter: the partnership that is developing between the Papacy and Islam, the striking similarities between distinctive beliefs and practices of Catholicism and Islam, and especially the possible prophetic link between the Papacy and Islam as two possible manifestations of the power of the Antichrist.

MY CONCERN OVER THE CRITICAL COMMENTS

Comparatively speaking the number of critical responses were few in number, not more than 30. But they are significant to me because they were written mostly by committed Adventists whom I respect. For example, one lengthy response came from a former theology student of mine who is now serving as a pastor. He wrote a passionate response, reminding me that he accepted the Sabbath after attending my Sabbath Seminar. Later he came to Andrews University, partly as a result of my encouragement. He was delighted to seat in my Bible classes.

After reassuring me of the positive impact that my life, research, and teachings have had on his life, he expressed his genuine disappointment over my proposed new interpretation of the prophetic period of 1260 days. Reading his message I could sense that his confidence in me as a committed Adventist scholar was badly shaken. He felt that I was abandoning a foundational prophetic pillar of our Adventist Church.

Let me assure you that this and similar messages have caused me to do some serious soul searching. The awareness that my proposed new interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy, may weaken the confidence that some sincere fellow believers have in my ministry of research, causes me a great deal of concern and pain. The reason is that I view my calling to Biblical research as a calling to strengthen the faith of my Adventist fellow-believers, not to weaken it. The strengthening of the faith, however, should not preclude a fresh reexamination of traditional teachings in the light of the normative authority of Scripture.

The challenge that I am facing is twofold. On the one hand I want to be pastoral by being sensitive to our traditional interpretations, but on the other hand I want to be true to the need to reexamine and strengthen some of our traditional interpretations. Maintaining a proper balance between the two requires much wisdom and grace.

“A STAMPEDED PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION”?

It is unfortunate that some see my proposed new interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy, as “a clear case of stampeded prophetic interpretation.”¹ My intent is not to stampede, but to strengthen our interpretation of this prophetic period. As you recall, in the last newsletter I suggested that the prophetic period of three and a half years or 1260 days, could be a figurative time reference that represents the time of domination and persecution of both the Papacy and Islam. During this troublesome period God’s people are reassured of divine protection and ultimate restoration.

In the next newsletter we will examine each of the seven texts where the prophetic period of the 1260 days is found (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:2; Rev 11:3; Rev 12:6; Rev 12:14; Rev 13:5). A study of the context of each text will show that this time prophecy can hardly be delimited by the traditional dates of 538 to 1798. Incidentally, this is the ONLY time prophecy in the Bible given in three different ways: three and a half years, 42 months, and 1260. Could there be a reason for the three different designations of the same prophetic period? I shall attempt to answer these questions in the next newsletter.

Some have suggested that my proposed interpretation weakens the prophetic role the papacy as the historic Antichrist. In other words, they feel that in a subtle and deceptive way I am whitewashing the papacy, by minimizing her prophetic role. This allegation is based on a gross misunderstanding of my previous newsletter, where I have shown that the Papacy has played the major role of the prophetic Antichrist by persecuting God’s people and promoting false teachings.

What I have proposed in my previous essay is simply to expand the prophetic role of the Antichrist by including Islam as well. I believe that this inclusion can help us to see from a broader historical perspective the historical outworking of the Great Controversy between Christ and the Antichrist. It can also help us to make sense of the unprecedented historical growth of Islam which is still continuing today in many countries. During my recent visit to England I was told that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the country.

In America, according to the first comprehensive survey of the Moslem presence, during the past 10 years Muslims have built over 1200 mosques from coast to coast. The number of Americans who considers themselves Muslims is estimated to be between 6 to 7 million.²

If the current growth of the Moslem presence, power, and terroristic activities, represents a 14 centuries historical continuum which is foreseen in prophecy, then there is no reason for ignoring its past and present outworkings. Why should we as Adventists put all our eggs in the Antichrist basket of the Papacy? Let us never forget that Satan works through a variety of agencies to accomplish his evil purposes.

ONLY A PROPOSED INTERPRETATION

To reassure fellow believers, like my beloved former student currently serving as pastor, who feel somewhat betrayed by my attempt to depart from the traditional interpretation of the 1260 as running from 538 to 1798, let me clearly state at the outset that what I am suggesting is ONLY A PROPOSED INTERPRETATION, not a dogmatic position. What I am doing is THINKING ALOUD, hoping to discover if there is any merit in some of the thoughts that lately have engaged my mind. Your constructive criticism will cause me to modify or possibly even to abandon this PROPOSED interpretation. I am always prepared to read sensible criticism.

Suggesting a tentative interpretation should not be considered as an act of betrayal of the Adventist faith, as some have indicated in their messages. For me a growing Adventist Christian is a truth seeker, not just a reflector of traditional views. It is unfortunate that far too many Christians accept blindly the traditional teachings of their churches, without ever stopping to ask if they are biblical sound.

THE BLINDING EFFECTS OF TRADITION

A good example of the blinding effects of tradition is the case of Dr. James Kennedy. As you recall in ENDTIME ISSUES Newsletter No. 79, I spent countless hours exposing Dr. Kennedy's blatant misinterpretations of Bible texts and misquotations of early Christian documents. I was surely hoping and praying that he would read my analysis with an open mind. His response clearly indicated that he is not prepared to reexamine his views, no matter how faulty they are. Why? Simply because he is a Presbyterian minister committed to uphold Calvin's teachings. For him, what Calvin taught is the final word, whether his teachings are right or wrong.

Calvin and Luther made significant contributions to the rediscovery of the Plan of Salvation as a divine gift of grace, and not a human achievement. But they also taught significant errors. For example, both Calvin and Luther taught that the principle of Sabbathkeeping consists in observing one day in seven, and not necessarily the seventh day.³ This teaching is blindly accepted today by countless million of Catholics and Protestants, who never stop to check if it is biblical. Fortunately, there are few responsible scholars who have checked this teaching and found it to be unbiblical.

One of them is Donald Carson, editor and contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, produced under the sponsorship of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge University, England. He wisely acknowledges that "If the OT principle were really 'one day in seven for worship and rest,' we might have expected OT legislation to prescribe some other day off for the priests. The lack of such confirms the importance in OT thought of the *seventh* day, as opposed to the mere one-in-seven principle so greatly relied upon by those who wish to see in Sunday the precise NT equivalent of the OT Sabbath."⁴

It is encouraging to see that there are some scholars who reject as unbiblical the popular reduction of the Sabbath Commandment to the principle of one day in seven. The fact remains, however, that the vast majority of Christians accept the traditional teachings of their churches without ever questioning their biblical soundness. For them, upholding tradition is more important than exploring Biblical truth. I faced this reality constantly while growing up in Rome, Italy. In any discussion with my Catholic relatives and friends, I was always reminded that for them TRADITIO was more important than SCRIPTURA.

It is unfortunate that even a few Adventists are victims of the same blind acceptance of tradition. They strongly believe that what the pioneers or Ellen White taught, is the final word. Any attempt to reexamine the traditional teachings of the church with the intent to strengthen them, is seen as a betrayal of the faith. This conviction was clearly expressed in several replies to the last newsletter.

The most outstanding example is a formal response to my newsletter prepared by Kevin D. Paulson and entitled: "STAMPEDED INTERPRETATION: A Reply to Samuele Bacchiocchi, 'Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy.'" Paulson is an articulated writer and editor of a conservative Adventist magazine, QUO VADIS. Currently he is serving as Evangelist for the Greater York Conference.

I have chosen to reply to Paulson's critique for two reasons: First, he states compellingly the same critical comments made by other respondents. Second, he prepared his reply for publication and/or circulation among his email subscribers. In fact, some of his readers have already contacted me to find out if I will reply to his critique. If you wish to receive the full text of his reply, feel free to contact him directly. His address is: Kevin Paulson <kevin@quovadismagazine.org> Before responding to some of Paulson's critical remarks, I wish to inform you about the new layout of this newsletter.

NEW LAYOUT OF THE NEWSLETTER

Subscribers from different parts of the world have urged me to place at the end of the newsletter all the announcements about my weekend seminars and the special offers on my books and recordings. This will make it possible for them to print copies of the newsletter, without having first to delete the announcement section.

In response to these legitimate requests, I have decided to place at the end of the newsletter the information about the schedule of my weekend seminars as well as the special offers on my research resources. This means that now you need to scroll to the end of the newsletter to find out the schedule of my seminars as well as the special offers on my publications and recordings.

The only items that will be included at the beginning of the newsletter are reports on some significant developments that I do not want you to miss. For example, in this newsletter I will include a brief Sabbath report that came in by mail.

May I express my heartfelt gratitude to the many faithful subscribers who print out many copies of each newsletter to pass out to their church members and friends. The result is that every week I receive between 150 to 200 new subscriptions. The growing interest for these Bible studies challenges me to devote more time and efforts to their preparation. The procedure to subscribe to this newsletter is simple. Just email me your request at <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>

SABBATH REPORTS

The greatest satisfaction of my ministry of Biblical research, is to see how the Lord uses the printed page and spoken word to bring conviction to the heart of sincere people. During the past few years I have received reports from many parts of the world about ministers, church leaders, and scholars who have accepted the Sabbath after reading my Sabbath books or viewing my videos.

One of these reports reached me last week. Brother Richard Anderson from El Dorado, Kansas, wrote to me an encouraging letter. His church ordered a case of the book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE. He sent a copy to a Methodist minister's couple whom he knows personally. This is what happened.

"While visiting with them they told me of their decision to become Sabbathkeepers as a result of reading your book. As a Pastor, Jerry, also shared the Sabbath with his congregation. A vote was taken and unanimously everyone voted in favor of Sabbath observance.

"I wish to thank you for having taken the time to write this book. I pray that the Lord will continue to use you as a beacon of light in this world of darkness.

Sincerely
Richard Anderson

Another encouraging message came from Tom Jacovac, a most dynamic Adventist who lately has been involved in organizing major crusades overseas. You will enjoy interacting with him. He is a contagious Christian. His email address is: <tomjakovac@earthlink.net> Here are some excerpts from his email message

Dear Dr. Samuele,

I received your SABBATH SEMINAR on DVD, and I was impressed to run the series in our church—one hour every week at 2.00 pm.

Last Sabbath the members were in tears when they heard your first presentation about your search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University. Next Sabbath they want me to show them the first presentation all over again for others who did not come. So we will run 2 presentation for 2 hours.

Now I have a number of members who want to subscribe to your ENDTIME ISSUES newsletter. I keep printing them and distributing to several members who greatly appreciate them

We are planning to purchase several more DVD seminars for use in witnessing among Sunday keepers.

This week we also plan to order another case of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* which we will give away to non members and local ministers.

Please keep up the good work.
Tom Jakovac

Messages like this warm my heart and challenge me to attempt greater things for the Lord.

At the end of this newsletter you will find the announcement about the SPECIAL OFFER on the book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* and on the newly recorded SABBATH SEMINAR now available in both VIDEO and DVD.

THE OUTLINE OF MY RESPONSE

My response to the critical comments received about the last newsletter, is divided in three major parts, in accordance with the three major criticisms expressed by Kevin Paulson and several other readers. To avoid the problems caused by the length of the last newsletter (over 100 k), I will post the reply in two or possibly three installments. Many subscribers, especially overseas, cannot receive lengthy documents. The last time I had to divide the newsletter in two parts, and resend it to over 800 subscribers.

This newsletter examines the role of EGW's writings in interpreting Scripture. I have chosen to begin with this topic because of the allegation that I make a serious mistake in disregarding the inspired interpretation given by Ellen White to the 1,260 days prophecy. For some of my critics what the pen of inspiration says settles the matter. They feel that it is plain arrogance on my part to propose a differing interpretation. This is a serious charge that I cannot afford to brush aside lightly.

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER

In formulating a reply to this charge, I will attempt to answer these questions: Did Ellen White view her writings as the final authority for any prophetic, doctrinal, or historical interpretation of Scripture? Did Ellen White ever sensed the need to revise and correct what she had published? Did Ellen White engage experienced workers to help her make needed corrections? Were the corrections made "peripheral" as alleged by my critics, or substantive? Are there still corrections that need to be made in Ellen White's writings?

It is evident that the questions we are addressing in this newsletter are most sensitive and fundamental to the Adventist understanding of the relationship between EGW's writings and the Scripture. We are dealing with a critical issue that is troubling our Adventist church today. It has been for me a most painful experience to read messages from a considerable number of former Adventists who have shared with me their disillusionment with Ellen White. Some of them used to be devotee of EGW's writings and lived by their teachings. Today, however, they feel so disillusioned and bitter that they have designed websites, exclusively devoted to attack Ellen White. This saddens me because Ellen White has made and is still making today an inestimable contribution to the message and mission of our church, and to the spiritual life of millions of believers around the world.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that as a church we have failed to develop rational criteria for a responsible and healthy use of Ellen White's writings. Over the years many Adventists have come to believe that Ellen White is the final authority on prophecy, history, diet, health, education, evangelism, etc. For them Biblical research consists primarily in searching out what Ellen White has written on the subject being investigated. In fact somebody wrote to me saying that I could have saved a lot of time if I had checked what Ellen White wrote about Islam. Why? Simply because she wrote nothing about it and consequently there was no reason for me to waste my time studying a subject ignored by Ellen White.

It would be presumptuous to think that this newsletter will change the mind of those who blindly believe that they can find in Ellen White's writings answers to all their questions. The most I can hope to accomplish is to lay the foundation for developing some sensible criteria for the proper use of EGW's writings in Biblical interpretation. Dealing with this divisive issue is very risky. This may explain why most Adventist scholars and church leaders prefer to ignore it. But, placing the issue under the rug only means postponing to the future the search for answers to questions many are asking today.

I anticipate that this newsletter will alienate a good number of current friends. This is not an encouraging thought. I wish I could avoid it, but my commitment is to be biblical rather than politically correct. May I kindly ask you to hold your judgment until you have had the opportunity to read my responses, which include at least the next newsletter.

THE SEVENFOLD PROPHECY OF THE 1260 DAYS

In the next newsletter I will respond to the objections raised against my tentative interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy. My plan is to analyze the sevenfold prophecy of the three and a half years, 42 months, 1260 days. The procedure I will follow is to consider each of the seven texts where this time prophecy is found (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:2; Rev 11:3; Rev 12:6; Rev 12:14; Rev 13:5). This is a unique prophecy that is mentioned seven times in the Bible, with three different time designations, all of them adding up to three and a half years.

Through a careful analysis of the context of each text, I will attempt to define the various characteristics of this prophetic period given in each text. This definition will help us to determine if all the given characteristics of this prophetic period can be legitimately fitted in our traditional Adventist interpretation which delimits this prophecy to the period of the papal domination from 538 to 1798. The aim of this study is not to discard our traditional interpretation, but possibly to broaden it by including the historic antichristian manifestation of Islam.

If space allows, the next newsletter will also include my response to my critics, who contend that the uprooting of the three horns of Daniel 7:20, refers exclusively to the establishment of Papacy supremacy. Our analysis of the text and of the relevant historical developments, will show that the antichristian power of Islam can be legitimately included in the historical outworking of the Little Horn Antichrist.

The ultimate aim of this study is to help us appreciate more fully the prophetic outworking of the controversy between Christ and the Antichrist during the Christian era until our times. This is a fascinating subject to explore both biblically and historically.

You might be interested to learn about a major study recently published on this subject. The title of the book is *CHRIST AND ANTICHRIST IN PROPHECY AND HISTORY*. The author, Edwin de Kock, is a retired Adventist professor from South Africa, now living in Texas. He has done a masterful job in reconstructing the historical setting of the controversy between Christ and the Antichrist. In many ways this study is an apologetic defense of the historical Adventist interpretation of the Antichrist. When completed the study will consist of three volumes.

I do not agree with everything de Kock wrote, but, as a church historian, I am very impressed by his historical reconstruction of events related to the outworking of the Antichrist. You can order now the first volume (390 pages) by contacting the author directly: Edwin de Kock, P O Box 2325, Edinburg, TX 78540-2325. E-mail: edwdekock@aol.com. Tel. (956) 583-2859.

Please remember that what I am submitting for your consideration is ONLY A PROPOSED INTERPRETATION, that may need to be modified, or even rejected, if proven to be devoid of biblical and historical support. Our common goal should be to come to a fuller understanding of biblical truths relevant to our lives. To accomplish this goal, it may be necessary to revise some of our traditional Adventist interpretations. This should not distress us because we are committed to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

THE ROLE OF EGW'S WRITINGS IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

A most serious criticism leveled by several respondents against my study on "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy," is that my proposed interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy openly contradicts Ellen White's exclusive application of this prophecy to the period of papal supremacy from 538 to 1798. I will quote the comments of Kevin Paulsen, which are representative of several other respondents.

Paulsen begins his critique of my essay, saying: "Yet another challenge is being posed to historic Adventist prophetic interpretation--and from what many would consider an unlikely source. Samuele Bacchiocchi, noted Adventist scholar and author of various books on current denominational issues, now claims he is convinced that the Antichrist of Bible prophecy includes Islam as well as the Roman papacy, and that--in his view--the stated characteristics of Daniel's little-horn power more accurately reflect Islam than the papacy, specifically with regard to the uprooting of the three horns (Dan. 7:8,24) and the 'time and times and the dividing of time' (Dan. 7:25) during which this power would rule.

"Perhaps most seriously of all, when confronted by a respondent with Ellen White's clear endorsement of Adventism's historic dates for the 1,260-year prophecy, Bacchiocchi sought to weaken this fact by claiming that Sister White was 'committed to search for truth and recognized her limitations.'"⁵

Paulsen concludes his critique with these words: "Samuele Bacchiocchi has contributed many years of fine scholarship to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His books defending the Sabbath, the non-immortality of the soul, and our historic positions on such issues as alcohol, adornment, and rock music, have been a great blessing to Adventists throughout the world. But by seeking to alter our historic stand regarding the Antichrist prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, he has stepped into theological quicksand. His position contradicts the clear statements of Inspiration, as well as the plainly-documented facts of history."⁶

A Serious Criticism

These statements contain a serious criticism that need to be addressed. The implication is that by submitting an alternative interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy, I am rejecting the authority of Ellen White and undermining the positive contributions my books have made in defending historic Adventist positions. If this allegation were true, then no Adventist has the right to reexamine the traditional Adventist interpretations. We must accept them as Biblical sound, even if we find flaws in them.

Is this what it means to be a committed Adventist? Are Adventists close-minded Christians who blindly accept their traditional teachings without ever testing their biblical soundness? If this were true, then those who accuse us of being a cult are not far from the truth. But this is not what I have been taught during the years I attended the Adventist Academy in Italy, Newbold College in England, and Andrews University Theological Seminary in the USA. Furthermore, this is not what I heard and taught during the 36 years of teachings at Andrews University and overseas. What I always heard and taught is that Adventists are THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK. We test our beliefs and practices first and foremost by Scripture. Let us honor this fundamental distinction of our Adventist church, and avoid becoming victim of a cultish mentality.

My Deep Respect for Ellen White's Writings

In formulating a response, I wish to state at the outset my deep respect for the writings of Ellen White. During the past 15 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. This we do by rereading one of the previous Spirit of Prophecy's devotionals. For example, this year we are

rereading *Our High Calling*, which was EGW's devotional book for 2001. The reason is simply. Ellen White speaks to the spiritual needs of our souls better than other contemporary writers.

The important role that Ellen White plays in our devotional life should serve to dispel the allegation that I fail to respect Ellen White by submitting a tentative new interpretation for the 1260 days prophecy. The question is: Does 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 interpretations? Did she expect Adventists to accept whatever she wrote without questioning? I do not believe this to be the case. To prove my point, I will submit two lines of evidences: (1) Ellen White's own understanding of the relationship of her writings to Scripture. (2) The 1911 revision of the *Great Controversy*.

Relationship Between EGW's Writings and Scripture

To my knowledge Ellen White never taught that her writings have the same normative authority of Scripture for defining church beliefs and practices. She unequivocally stated: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. . . . Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline"⁷

What impresses me about Ellen White is her humbleness and respect for the normative authority of the Bible. She never claimed to be an infallible authority to be accepted without questioning. She wrote: "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true, and in him is no variableness, or shadow of turning"⁸ A proof of the recognition of her fallibility and limitations, is provided by the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy*. Shortly we shall see that in preparing this revision she asked responsible workers to help her remove disputed statements and to make the necessary corrections.

We never read that Paul, Peter, or of any other Bible writer asked competent people to help them edit their manuscripts and remove inaccuracies. Ellen White saw no problem in correcting her manuscripts, or in changing her views (like in the case of the "Shut Door"), or in asking others to help her make necessary corrections to *The Great Controversy*.

The most familiar statement of Ellen White's understanding of the relationship of her writings to Scripture, is found in *Colporteur Ministry* p. 125: "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light." Again she wrote: "The *Testimonies* are not to belittle the word of God, but to exalt it and to attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all"⁹

The sampling of statements just cited, clearly indicates that Ellen White pointed to the Scripture as the final authority for defining church beliefs and practices. She wrote: "I recommend to you dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the 'last days;' not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth."¹⁰ In this statement Ellen White clearly acknowledges that her writings (visions) are to serve, "not for a new rule of faith," but to comfort and correct those "who err from Bible truth"

The 1911 Revision of *The Great Controversy*

The 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy* provides a helpful case study to understand Ellen White's recognition of her limitations. My comments are based on a 14 pages document supplied to me by the E. G. White Estate office of Andrews University. The document is entitled "The 1911 Edition of *The Great Controversy*. An Explanation of

the Involvements of the 1911 Revision.” This document, which is readily available to any interested person, contains a statement read by W. C. White (Ellen White’s son) before the General Conference Council on October 30, 1911. Ellen White approved the statement of her son in a statement signed on July 27, 1911.

The need for a revision of *The Great Controversy* was precipitated by two factors: (1) The old plates for reprinting the book were worn out and new plates were urgently needed (2) Some people challenged some of the historical data and they wanted references for the historical quotations.

W. C. White offers us an instructive account of how the revision was done. Essentially the process was carried out in two steps. First, they asked anyone who questioned the accuracy of statements found in *The Great Controversy*, to submit their objections in writings. Second, Ellen White instructed competent workers in Europe and America to search in libraries for the books needed “to verify the quotations and to correct inaccuracies found.”¹¹ She thanked the brethren who devoted countless hours in libraries searching the needed material.

To establish the extent of the changes that were made, it would require a comparative analysis between the old and new editions of *The Great Controversy*. In this moment I have no time for such a laborious project. The report of W. C. White clearly suggests that some significant changes were made.

He writes: “On pages 50, 563, 564, 580, 581, and in few other places where there were statements regarding the papacy which are strongly disputed by Roman Catholics, and which are difficult to prove from accessible histories, the wording in the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily obtainable.”¹²

Willingness of Ellen White to Make Corrections

What amazes me is the willingness of Ellen White to make the necessary corrections. She went as far as to ask the various publishing departments and canvassing agents, both in America and overseas, to submit in writing their request for any correction to be done. To me this shows that Ellen White recognized that in her writings there were inaccuracies that needed to be corrected.

When reading the account of the participation of European and American researchers in locating documents needed to correct some of the historical statements that “were questioned and challenged,” one gets the impression that Ellen White welcomed the participation of those who could help in making the necessary corrections in the new edition of *The Great Controversy*. She expressly stated: “I am thankful that my life has been spared, and that I have strength and clearness of mind for this and other literary work.”¹³

If Ellen White was alive today, would she welcome the service of competent scholars willing to correct the remaining inaccuracies found in *The Great Controversy* and other publications? There is no reason to think otherwise, because she was a woman who recognized her limitations, and was committed to the search for truth.. On my part I would be glad to offer my services to her, because I can never stop thanking God for the inestimable contributions she has made to my spiritual life and to the message and mission of our Adventist church.

Ellen White was a humble and open-minded woman, fully ware of her limitations. As her son, W. C. White puts it: “Mother has never claimed to be an authority on history.”¹⁴ Again, “Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration.”¹⁵ He supports the latter by pointing to the fact that his mother corrected and revised her manuscripts.

A Look at Some Changes

A look at some of the changes that were made in the 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy*, will help us determine whether the changes were substantive or “peripheral,” as my critics contend. W. C. White provides us with a few examples. For the sake of brevity we shall consider only those statements relative to the 1260 days prophecy, since much of the criticism of my last essay revolves around my proposed new interpretation of this prophecy. We shall see that the changes made are substantive, not “peripheral.”

On page 266 of the Old Edition of *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White wrote: “The 1260 years of papal supremacy began with *the establishment of the papacy in A. D. 538*, and would therefore terminate on 1798”¹⁶ The statement is modified in the New Edition to read: “*The 1260 years of papal supremacy began in A. D. 538*, and would terminate in 1798.”¹⁷

The key phrase that was removed is “*the establishment of the papacy.*” It is evident that the editors were made aware of the fact that “*the establishment of the papacy*” did not begin in 538. In my dissertation I have shown that the development of the papal primacy began already in the second century, when the Pope exercised his ecumenical authority by imposing on Christian churches at large Easter-Sunday, weekly Sunday, and by condemning various movements like the Montanists.

The same phrase is found in page 439 of the Old Edition which reads: “This period, as stated in the preceding chapters, began with *the establishment of the papacy, A. D. 538*, and terminated in 1798. At that time, when *the papacy was abolished* and the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, ‘He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.’”¹⁸

A significant correction was made to the New Edition which reads: “This period, as stated in preceding chapters, *began with the supremacy of the papacy, A. D. 538*, and terminated in 1798. At that time, the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, ‘He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.’”¹⁹

Significant Corrections

The correction that was made in the New Edition is by no means “peripheral.” The editors recognized the glaring mistake that Ellen White made in the Old Edition, when she wrote that *the papacy was established in 538 and abolished in 1798*. Unfortunately she repeats the same mistake on page 579 of the Old Edition: “The infliction of the deadly wound points to *the abolition of the papacy in 1798.*”²⁰ The statement was corrected in the New Edition to read: “The infliction of the deadly wound points to the *downfall of the papacy in 1798.*”²¹

The historical reality is that the papacy was not established in 538, nor was it abolished in 1798. The corrected reading of the New Edition is a noticeable improvement, but it is still inaccurate. The reason is that 538 hardly marks the beginning of the “supremacy of the papacy,” nor does 1798 signals “the downfall of the papacy.” It is evident that the editorial workers who helped Ellen White to make the necessary corrections, knew little about the history of the papacy.

The development of the “supremacy of the papacy” began long before 538. In his book on *The History of the Christian Church*—which has served for many years as the standard text book for church history classes—Williston Walker devotes chapter 6 to the “Growth of the Papacy” during the fourth and fifth centuries. He points out that during this period there were influential popes like Damasus (366-384), Innocent I (402-417), and Leo I, called “the Great” (440-461), who greatly advanced both the spiritual and temporal power of the papacy.²²

For example, the last Pope mentioned, Leo I, known as “Leo the Great,” greatly increased the political prestige of the papacy by threatening with hell fire Attila the Hun, when he was approaching Rome in 451 with his terrifying soldiers. Attila obeyed the Pope and withdrew beyond the Danube. Later Pope Leo secured concessions from the Vandals when they took Rome in 452. He is called “Leo the Great” for advancing and consolidating the power of the papacy.

The development of the supremacy of the papacy is a gradual process that can hardly be dated from 538. The process began already in the second century as the primacy of Bishop of Rome was widely recognized and accepted. Over the centuries various popes contributed to strengthen the supremacy of the papacy, both as a religious and political power.

But it was not until 756 that the temporal sovereignty of the papacy began, when the Frankish King Pepin waged two military campaigns against the Lombards who had extended their occupation to central Italy. Pepin liberated the territories of Central Italy, and donated them to the pope. To justify the legitimate right of the papacy to rule these territories, the famous document of the *Donation of Constantine* was fabricated at this time. The document claims that Constantine donated to the Pope the whole of Italy and other western countries. For the next thousand years this false document served to boost the temporal power of the papacy.

In 1860 began the history of “The States of the Church,” that is, the temporal supremacy of the papacy that was to last until 1870. In that year, Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia and later of Italy, with the help of enthusiastic voluntary troops who were fighting for national unity, succeeded in taking over the papal territories of central Italy and thus to unify all the land of Italy into one nation.

Inadequate Corrections

What is true for 538 is also true for 1798. In both instances the corrections are inadequate. The change in the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy* from “the abolishment” to “the downfall of the papacy,” is a noticeable improvement, but it is still inadequate. Why? Simply because 1798 does not signal “the downfall of the papacy.” The taking of Pope Pius VI, as a prisoner by the French General Berthier, marked a temporary humiliation of the papacy, but not its downfall. When Pius VI left Rome on February 20, 1798, he was an old, dying man who still functioned as Pope, though in a limited scale. He found refuge first in Siena and then near Florence, where a small Curia was organized to administer the church. In fact, before his death he planned for the election of his successor.

The imprisonment of Pope Paul VI was condemned by Russia and Austria. Both nations decided to join forces to restore the Pope to his Pontifical throne in Rome. When the French government was confronted with this new coalition and with popular uprisings, it decided to transfer the Pope to Valence, in France, where he died 40 days later, on August 29, 1799.

The death of Pius VI can hardly be seen as the “abolishment” or “the downfall of the Papacy.” It was simply a temporary humiliation of the prestige of the Papacy. In fact, Pius VI was able to give directives for the election of his successor. Few months after his death, the Cardinals met in Venice on December 8, 1799, and elected Barnaba Chiaramonti, who took the name of Pious VII, in deference to his predecessor.

The new Pope was able to negotiate with Napoleon the Concordat in 1801 and the Organic Articles in 1802. These treaties restored to the Pope some of the territories of the States of the Church and regulated the extent of the Papal authority in France.

The following years marked, not the downfall, but the resurgence of papal authority, especially under the Pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878). In 1854, Pius IX

promulgated the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In 1864 he issued the famous Syllabus of Errors, known also as "INDEX," which for many years listed all the political ideologies, religious beliefs, and publications to be rejected by Catholics (Even our Adventist books have been listed in the INDEX. I learned it the hard way while working as a literature evangelist in Italy).

The crowning event of Pius IX's pontificate was the convening of the First Vatican Council on December 8, 1869. It had a remarkable large attendance from all over the Roman world and on July 18, 1870, the Council promulgated the dogma of Papal Infallibility. This dogma has greatly enhanced the authority of the Pope, and discredits any attempt to attribute to 1798 the downfall of the papacy.

This brief outline of events suffices to show that it is inaccurate to speak of the "abolishment" or "downfall" of the Papacy in 1798. The historical reality is that the Papacy was still very much alive and soon regained her prestige and power after a temporary humiliation of few months

In my view, a more important humiliation (head wound—Rev 13:3) of the papacy occurred on September 20, 1870, when, as mentioned earlier, Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia and later first King of Italy, captured Rome and took over the States of the Church which included most of the central part of Italy from Naples to Ravenna. The annexation of these territories which the Pope had controlled since 756, was necessary in order to unify Italy into one nation.

The loss of the States of the Church in 1870 marks the end of the temporal rule of the Papacy. The Pope was no longer a political ruler with his own territory, known, as "PATRIMONIUM PETRI—The Patrimony of St. Peter." He was left only with the Vatican, the Lateran, and Castel Gandolfo—a situation which has remained unchanged to this very day. The Pope protested, excommunicated Victor Emmanuel, and declared himself "prisoner of the Vatican."

For the next 59 years, that is, until the Concordat with Mussolini in 1929 (healing of the wound), the Pope refused to accept the loss of his temporal possessions. The confiscation of the States of the Church on September 20, 1870, and the confining of the Pope inside the Vatican for the next 59 years, represents in my view a more significant (head wound—Rev 13:3) blow to the papacy than the temporary imprisonment of Pius VI in 1798 which lasted only few months. But there is no reason to debate over which of the two dates (1798 or 1870) have affected more adversely the papacy, because neither of the two events have significantly weakened the worldwide influence of the papacy.

The preceding discussion has highlighted three points: (1) The samples of corrections given by W. C. White, suggests that significant changes were made to the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*. (2) Some inaccuracies still remain that should be corrected to enhance the credibility of this powerful book which the Lord has used providentially to help countless people around the world to accept the Adventist message. (3) The willingness of Ellen White to correct historical inaccuracies with the help of researchers in America and Europe who spent countless hours in libraries seeking for the correct information, shows that she recognized her limitations and was willing to correct any mistake that was found in her writings. This gives me reason to respect Ellen White as a Christian committed to search and proclaim truth, and not to cover up her mistakes.

The fact that Ellen White acknowledged the existence of inaccuracies in her writings and engaged editorial helpers to make the necessary corrections, hardly gives us a licence to use her writings to condemn scholars, like myself, who are endeavoring to make our historical, prophetic, and theological teachings more credible.

The Need for Further Corrections

It is unfortunate that Ellen White has passed away, because the revision that was done to *The Great Controversy* in 1911 did not eliminate all the historical inaccuracies. There is still much work that needs to be done, but without her presence and approval, the E. G. White Estate has no authority to undertake this project. If a mechanism is set up in the future to make the necessary revisions to EGW's writings, we can anticipate a storm of controversies.

To illustrate the need for additional corrections to EGW's writings, I will submit a few examples that caught my attention while researching the Sabbath/Sunday question. The first example relates to her statements regarding the change from Sabbath to Sunday. Incidentally, her statements have led many Adventists to believe that this change occurred in the fourth century when Constantine promulgated the famous Sunday Law in 321.

Statements about the Origin of Sunday

This popular view is reflected in the following question people ask me almost every weekend during the questions/answers period of my Sabbath Seminar. "Dr. Bacchiocchi, you told us today that the change from Sabbath to Sunday began by 135 when the Roman Emperor Hadrian outlawed the practiced of Judaism in general and of the Sabbath in particular. But, doesn't Ellen White teach that all Christians observed the Sabbath in the early centuries and that Sundaykeeping began in the fourth century with the promulgation of the Sunday Law by Constantine? How do you reconcile the difference between the conclusion of your research and the teachings of Ellen White?"

Before answering this question, let me quote the relevant statements which are found on pages 52-53 of *The Great Controversy*. She wrote: "In the first *centuries the true Sabbath had been kept by all Christians*. They were jealous for the honor of God, and believing that His law is immutable, they zealously guarded the sacredness of its precepts."²³

Did Sunday Observance Originate in the Fourth Century?

This statement poses some problems, because the term "centuries" in the plural suggests that for at least two or more centuries the Sabbath was observed by "all Christians." Apparently Ellen White believed that all Christians observed the Sabbath until "the early part of the fourth century [when] the emperor Constantine issued a decree making Sunday a public festival throughout the Roman Empire."²⁴

According to Ellen White, Constantine was urged to promulgate a Sunday law by "the bishops of the church, who, inspired by ambition and thirst for power, perceived that if the same day was observed by both Christians and heathen, it would promote the nominal acceptance of Christianity by pagans and thus advance the power and glory of the church."²⁵

The reference to the promulgation of the first Sunday Law by Constantine in 321, is historically accurate. We also have reasons to believe that "the bishops of the church" influenced the emperor to promulgate the first Sunday Law, since we know that he favored the Catholic church in many ways, by financing the construction of Cathedrals and eventually donating his own imperial Lateran palace to the Pope.

What is problematic is the impression many people get from EGW's statements that the Sabbath was observed "by all Christians . . . in the first centuries" until "the early part of the fourth century [when] the emperor Constantine issued a decree making Sunday a public holiday."²⁶

Surprisingly even some of our leading evangelists believe, on the basis of Ellen White's statements, that Sundaykeeping began in the early part of the fourth when church leaders urged Constantine to promulgate in 321 the famous Sunday Law.

This popular view has exposed our Church to much undesirable criticism. Non-SDA scholars and church leaders like Dr. James Kennedy, accuse our church of plain ignorance, by teaching that Sundaykeeping began in the fourth century, when there are irrefutable historical evidences that place its origin two centuries earlier.

I have spent countless hours explaining to Dr. James Kennedy and to professors who viewed the recent NET satellite programs, that this popular Adventist view is not reflective of Adventist scholarship. No Adventist scholar has ever taught or written that Sunday observance began in the fourth century with Constantine. A compelling proof is the symposium *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, produced by 22 Adventist scholars and published by the Review and Herald in 1982. None of the Adventist scholars who contributed to this symposium ever suggest that Sundaykeeping began in the fourth century.

The earliest documents mentioning Sunday worship go back to Barnabas in 135 and Justin Martyr in 150. Thus, it is evident that Sunday worship was already established by the middle of the second century. This means that to be historically accurate the term "centuries" should be changed to the singular "century." This simple correction would enhance the credibility of *The Great Controversy*, because it is relatively easy to defend general Sabbath observance during the first century, but it is impossible to do it for the second century.

When my dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* first came out, some concerned Adventists accused me of rejecting the authority of Ellen White by promoting an earlier origin of Sunday in the second century. I am facing the same accusation today from those who feel that I am rejecting the authority of Ellen White by proposing an alternative interpretation to the 1260 days prophecy.

For me the issue is not what Ellen White says about the origin of Sunday in the fourth century or about the establishment of the papal supremacy in 538, but whether such statements are historically accurate. The historical data are abundantly clear. We noted earlier that the development of papal supremacy began long before 538. The same is true for Sunday worship which began earlier than many Adventists believe. Should this fact distress us? NO! Why? Simply because the Devil was not on vacation during the first three centuries. Already during the Apostolic age all sorts of heresies were troubling the church. It would have been surprising if the Evil One would not have attacked Sabbath observance before the fourth century, when this institution is so vital to maintain a healthy relationship with God.

Did Sunday Originate with the Power of the State?

Another inaccuracy in Ellen White's account of the origin of Sunday, is her claim that the change was accomplished by the Pope with the "power of the state." She writes: "It was on behalf of Sunday that popery first asserted its arrogant claims; and its first resort to the power of the state was to compel the observance of Sunday as 'the Lord's Day.'"²⁷

Apparently Ellen White believed that it was through "the power of the state" that the pope asserted his arrogant claims by compelling the observance of Sunday. She expresses this belief again later on, saying: "Royal edicts, general councils, and church ordinances sustained by secular power were the steps by which the pagan festival [day of the Sun] attained its position of honor in the Christian world."²⁸

Both statements just cited are inaccurate, because the secular power of the state did not influence or compel Christians to adopt Sunday during the second and third centuries. At that time the Roman emperors were rather hostile toward Christianity. They

were more interested to suppress Christianity than to support church leaders in their promotion of Sunday worship. The bishop of Rome could not have resorted to “the power of the state to compel the observance of Sunday as ‘the Lord’s Day.’” Eventually, beginning with the fourth century, some Roman emperors actively supported the agenda of the church, but this was long after the establishment of Sunday observance.

In my dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* I have shown that the Bishop of Rome did indeed pioneer the change in the day of worship, but he did it without the help of the Roman government. What precipitated the need to change the Sabbath to Sunday, was the anti-Jewish and anti-Sabbath legislation promulgated in 135 by the Emperor Hadrian.

In 135 Hadrian Outlawed Sabbathkeeping

After suppressing the Second Jewish revolt, known as the Barkokoba revolt (132-135), which caused many casualties, the Emperor Hadrian decided to deal with the Jewish problem in a radical way by suppressing the Jewish religion. Hitler was determined to liquidate the Jews as a people and Hadrian was committed to suppress Judaism as a religion. To accomplish this objective Hadrian outlawed in 135 the Jewish religion in general and Sabbathkeeping in particular.

It was at this critical moment that the Bishop of Rome took the initiative to change the Sabbath to Sunday in order to show to the Roman government the Christians’ separation from the Jews and their identification with the cycles of the Roman society. But, at this time the Bishop of Rome could not call upon “the power of the state to compel the observance of Sunday as the ‘Lord’s Day,’” because in the eyes of the Romans Christianity was still a suspect religion to be suppressed, rather than to be supported.

If Ellen White were alive, I would love to seat down with her and share all this historical information that is missing in *The Great Controversy*. I have no doubt that she would be grateful for the opportunity to learn more about how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity, and to update her account in *The Great Controversy*. After all, she was a truth-seeker who recognized her limitations and gratefully accepted the help from competent people.

The problem of the existing inaccuracies in *The Great Controversy* is partly due to the workers who assisted Ellen White in revising *The Great Controversy*. These helpers were not very familiar with church history, and consequently they fail to catch some of the glaring historical inaccuracies still remaining. Let me give two more examples.

Was the Sabbath Condemned by Ecumenical Councils?

The first example is the reference to the “vast councils” that allegedly attempted to “press down” the Sabbath in order to exalt Sunday in its place. She writes: “Vast councils were held from time to time, in which the dignitaries of the church were convened from all the world. In nearly every council the Sabbath which God had instituted was pressed down a little lower, while the Sunday was correspondently exalted.”²⁹

The first part of the statement is correct because between 325 and 787 there were seven ecumenical councils attended by church leaders from all over the Roman world. These ecumenical councils are known as: Nicaea I in 325, Constantinople I in 381, Ephesus in 431, Chalcedon in 451, Constantinople II in 553, Constantinople III in 680, and Nicaea II in 787.

The problem is with the second part of the statement which speaks of the Sabbath as being “pressed down a little lower” in almost every general council. In all my reading of the seven ecumenical councils, I have not found a reference to the Sabbath/Sunday question being debated in such councils. Presumably the reason is that Sunday observance was no longer a debated question— it had become widely accepted by Christians.

The Sabbath/Sunday question seems to have been debated in some smaller regional synods where the Jews influenced local Christian population to observe the Sabbath. For example, the Canon 29 of the Synod of Laodicea (about 364), says: "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, rest then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ."³⁰ Eventually strict laws were passed by Eastern emperors prohibiting any form of Jewish proselytism, particularly as it related to Sabbathkeeping.³¹

Did the Waldenses Observe the Sabbath?

A second example of existing inaccuracies in *the Great Controversy*, is the reference to the observance of the Sabbath by the Waldenses. Ellen White wrote: "Through ages of darkness and apostasy there were Waldenses who denied the supremacy of Rome, who rejected image worship as idolatry, and who kept the true Sabbath. Under the fiercest tempests of oppositions they maintained their faith."³²

This statement suggests that Sabbathkeeping was common among the Waldenses. Most likely Ellen White believed that *only some* of the Waldenses kept the Sabbath, because later she writes about them saying: "Some of whom [Waldenses] were observers of the Sabbath."³³

Did some of the Waldenses observe the Sabbath? I spent several hours searching for an answer in the two scholarly volumes *Storia dei Valdesi—(History of the Waldenses)*, authored by Amedeo Molnar and Augusto Hugon. These two books were published in 1974 by the Claudiana, which is the official Italian Waldensian publishing house. They are regarded as the most comprehensive history of the Waldenses. To my regret I found no allusion whatsoever to Sabbathkeeping among the Waldenses.

Sabbathkeepers or Sandal-Wearers?

The same search for historical evidences of Sabbathkeeping among the Waldenses has been conducted by other Adventist scholars. What they have found in some documents are references to the *insabbati*, a common nickname for the Waldenses. In the past some uninformed readers have taken this term to mean that the Waldenses were Sabbathkeepers. It is possible that Ellen White was influenced by this old interpretation.

Unfortunately the term *insabbati* has no connection to Sabbathkeeping. As Adventist Church Historian, Daniel Augsburg explains in the symposium *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, the Waldenses were often called *insabbati*, not because they kept the Sabbath, but because they wore sandals. "The Latin word for *sandals* is *sabbatum*, the root of the Spanish *zapato* and the French *sabot*. The sandals were an outward sign of their being imitators of the apostles in living the *vita apostolica* and the justification of their preaching the gospel."³⁴ In other words, the Waldenses were often called *insabbati*—(sandal-wearers), because many of them wore sandals cut away at the top in their itinerant ministry of preaching the Gospel.

Another inaccurate statement about the Waldenses is found in *The Great Controversy* pages 65-66: "Behind the lofty bulwarks of the mountains . . . the Waldenses found a hiding place. Here the light of truth was kept burning amid the darkness of the Middle Ages. Here for a *thousand years*, witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith."³⁵

The problem with this statement is that the Waldensian movement was established by Peter Valdes in 1173. This means that the Waldenses did not exist for "a thousand years," during "the darkness of the Middle Ages." It is surprising that the editorial helpers did not catch this inaccuracy. It was simply a matter of checking the name "Waldenses" in a *Dictionary of Church History*.

The sample of statements we have just examined, suffice to show that there are still inaccuracies in *The Great Controversy* that ought to be corrected. A new revision would enhance its credibility among knowledgeable readers and would strengthen its evangelistic effectiveness. How can such a revision be accomplished today so many years after the death of Ellen White? No one can give an answer because any attempt to correct existing inaccuracies in EGW's writings is bound to stir up much controversy. Those Adventists who through the years have falsely accused me of rejecting the authority of Ellen White for daring to propose new interpretations, would be quick to accuse the editorial board of tampering with the Pen of Inspiration.

The examples of inaccuracies discussed so far, have been of a historical nature, mainly because of the accusation that I commit a most serious mistake by ignoring "Ellen White's clear endorsement of Adventism's historical dates for the 1260-year prophecy." I have tried to show that this accusation has no merit because it is based on the mistaken assumption that 538 and 1798 mark respectively the beginning and the downfall of the supremacy of the papacy.

We have found the historical interpretation of these dates is grossly inaccurate, because the papal supremacy was not established in 538, nor was it abolished (downfall) in 1798. In view of the existing problem, my attempt to resolve the dilemma we are facing today by proposing an alternative interpretation that does justice to the sevenfold prophecy of the 1260 days, should be seen as a welcome step in the right direction, rather as a most serious mistake. After all, Adventists are committed to search and proclaim truth, and not to cover up traditional inaccurate interpretations.

Does Colossians 2:14 teaches that the Ceremonial Law was Nailed to the Cross?

To conclude our discussion on the use of EGW's writings in interpreting Scripture, I wish to submit a final example of theological nature. The previous examples were historical in nature, mainly because they were better suited to respond to the criticism that I am committing a serious mistake by rejecting "Ellen White's clear endorsement of Adventism's historic dates for the 1,260-year prophecy."

The final example relates also to my research on the Sabbath. Over the years I have been repeatedly accused by concerned Adventist of ignoring the clear teachings of Ellen White in some of the things I wrote about the Sabbath.

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."³⁶

Ellen White's teachings that the function of the ceremonial law terminated at the Cross, is absolutely correct. This teaching is emphatically and repeatedly stated 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.

The issue is not the termination of the ceremonial law at the Cross, but 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.³⁷ 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.

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.³⁸

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*.

Initially this interpretation was challenged by concerned Adventists who viewed it as a rejection of Ellen White's clear use of Colossians 2:14. Over the years, however, the resistance has subsided. Today I do not know of a single Adventist scholar who still hold to the traditional interpretation of this text.

Time and again I have seen in our Adventist church a gradual acceptance of new historical and biblical interpretations. This is what gives me the courage to continue my ministry of Biblical research. It is the conviction that Adventists are committed to search for truth, not to cover up questionable historical interpretations. It is this commitment that ultimately allows for the acceptance of new interpretations, when they are proven to be biblically and historically sound.

CONCLUSION

In this newsletter I have attempted to examine the role of Ellen White's writings in interpreting Scripture without laying down hard and fast rules. Instead, I have followed the procedure first to establish how Ellen White related her writings to the Scripture, and second, to ascertain the steps she took to correct the inaccuracies found in the older edition of *The Great Controversy*.

Two major conclusions emerge from this investigation:

First, Ellen White never claimed that her writings have the same normative authority of Scripture for defining church beliefs and practices. She unequivocally stated: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed."³⁹ Consistently she recommended "The Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged."⁴⁰

Respect for Ellen White's recognition of the exclusive and normative authority of the Bible, demands that any investigation that attempts to understand more fully the teachings of the Bible, should be tested by its faithfulness to the biblical text, not by EGW's statements regarding the subject. Obviously EGW's statements must receive serious consideration, but they should not preclude any fresh investigation of Biblical texts.

Second, Ellen White recognized her limitations and engaged competent workers in Europe and America to help her make the necessary corrections to the new edition of *The Great Controversy*. We have found that the corrections were not "peripheral," but significant. Furthermore, there are still glaring mistakes that need to be corrected. In the light of this fact, it is unwise to criticize an Adventist scholar who proposes a new interpretation of the 1260 days that could ultimately make our Adventist interpretation more credible and defensible.

In the next newsletter I will respond to the objections raised against my tentative interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy, by examining each of the seven texts where this time prophecy is found (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:2; Rev 11:3; Rev 12:6; Rev 12:14; Rev 13:5). My ultimate goal is not to discredit our traditional interpretation, but to make our prophetic witness more credible and defensible. Thank you for the opportunity to share this research with you. Your constructive criticism is greatly appreciated.

ENDNOTES

1. Kevin D. Paulsen, "STAMPEDED INTERPRETATION: A Reply to Samuele Bacchiocchi, 'Islam and the Papacy on Prophecy.'" I received this critique via email on July 19, 2002. The response was prepared for publication and email distribution. You can request a copy at <kevin@quovadismagazine.org>.
2. The Associated Press, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/nyregion/AP-US-Muslim-Survey>.
3. For a discussion of this teaching, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, 2001, pp. 45-49.
4. Donald Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," in *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, 1982, pp. 66-67.
5. See note 1.
6. See note 1.
7. *Selected Messages I*, p. 416.
8. *Selected Messages I*, p. 37.
9. *Testimonies 5*, p. 665.
10. *Early Writings*, p. 78.
11. "The 1911 Edition of *The Great Controversy*. An Explanation of the Involvements of the 1911 Revision," p. 2
12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 4
15. *Ibid.*
16. Italics supplied.
17. Italics supplied.
18. Italics supplied.
19. Italics supplied.
20. Italics supplied.
21. Italics supplied.
22. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 1985, pp. 235-238.
23. *The Great Controversy*, p. 52. Emphasis supplied.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 447.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
30. As translated in the collection of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol 14, p. 148.
31. For a discussion of imperial laws prohibiting Jewish proselytism, see, Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Review and Herald, 1982, pp. 153-14.
32. *The Great Controversy*, p. 65.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 577.
34. Daniel Augsburger, "The Sabbath and the Lord's Day During the Middle Ages," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Review and Herald, 1982, p. 208.
35. Emphasis supplied.
36. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 365.
37. *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.
38. For examples and a discussion, see my treatment in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 1977, pp. 347-351.
39. *Selected Messages I*, p. 416.
40. *Early Writings*, p. 78.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of August 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special weekend seminar in your area. I still have a three weekends open in the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with attractive PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

AUGUST 2-3: TROY SDA CHURCH IN DETROIT

Location: 2775 Crooks Road, Troy, MI 48084

For information call Pastor David Asscherick at (586) 825-6184 or (248) 643-6766. This rally has been planned by Pastor David Asscherick for the churches in the Detroit area.

AUGUST 9-10: WESTCHESTER SPANISH SDA CHURCH IN MIAMI

Location: 9500 SW 16th Street, Miami, FL 33165

For information call Pastor Manuel Fernandez at (305) 220-3540 or (786) 457-2746. This rally has been planned for the Hispanic churches in the Miami area.

AUGUST 16-17: DALLAS SPANISH PLEASANT GROVE SDA CHURCH

Location: 7927 Rosemont Road, Dallas, TX 75217

For information call Pastor Carlos Quintana at (817) 417-5102. This rally has been planned for the Hispanic churches in the Dallas area.

AUGUST 23-24: TORONTO RALLY OF SDA CHURCHES, CANADA

Location: Mount Zion Filipino SDA Church, 140 St. Regis Crescent, Downsview, Ontario, Canada.

For information call Pastor Edwin Martin at (416) 631-6558. This rally has been planned for the Adventist churches in the Toronto area.

AUGUST 30-31: GENTRY SDA CHURCH

Location: 21090 Dawn Hill East Road, Gentry, Arkansas 72734

For information call Pastor Tim Roosenberg at (479) 736-8808

NEWLY RECORDED SABBATH SEMINAR NOW AVAILABLE IN AUDIO CASSETTES, VIDEO TAPES AND DVD DISKS

The many messages of appreciation for the newly SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR, have led me to extend the special offer until August 31, 2002. The seminar was recorded last March 15-17, 2002, at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. The response has been very gratifying. Church leaders in different parts of the world are expressing appreciation for the blessings of these timely Sabbath messages. Your personal effort to share them with your congregation is much appreciated.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert with two outstanding tenors entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS. The concert was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

This new SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR is now available in THREE FORMATS:

- 8 AUDIO cassettes,
- 4 VIDEO tapes,
- 3 DVD disks.

Each of them come in a nice plastic album with an artistically designed jacket. Your special introductory offers until August 31, 2002, are as follows:

1) SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO CASSETTES at the special introductory offer of only \$40.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$60.00. The 8 audio cassettes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until August 31, 2002

2) SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO TAPES at the special introductory offer of only \$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The price is the same for both the American and the overseas PAL system. Specify which system you need. The 4 video tapes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until August 31, 2002

3) SABBATH SEMINAR IN DVD DISKS at the special introductory offer of only \$80.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The DVD disks are compatible with all TV systems overseas. No conversion is necessary. The 3 DVD disks come in a nice triple Jewel case with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until August 31, 2002

The easiest way to order the new AUDIO cassettes, VIDEO tapes, or DVD disks, is with your credit card. You can order by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*

During the past three years *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* has helped about 200 pastors to accept the Sabbath. This has been the result of the outreach efforts of many churches that have mailed the book to their local ministers,

To help your church participate in this project, we offer this timely book by the CASE OF 32 COPIES FOR ONLY \$170.00, POSTAGE PAID. This translates to \$5.90 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.

You can order a case of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

AN INCREDIBLE OFFER ON ALL MY PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDING

Every Saturday night I offer to those who attend my seminar the complete package of all my publications and recording for ONLY \$280.00, instead of the regular price of \$825.00. I decided this time to extend the same special offer to the subscribers of our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER.

THIS IS THE LIST OF ALL THE ITEMS INCLUDED IN THIS SPECIAL PACKAGE

1. All the 16 BOOKS: regularly retails for \$305.00
2. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
3. ADVENT SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: : regularly it retails for \$60.00
4. CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
5. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO cassettes or 3 DVD disks: regularly they retail for \$120.00 and \$140.00 respectively. Both of them come in an artistically designed album. You need to choose either the VIDEO or the DVD for the package.
6. TWO CDS: one with all my BOOKS and ARTICLES and the one with all my SEMINARS. The two CDs retail for \$100.00 each.

Your special offer for the complete list of all my books, cassettes, videos or DVDs, and CDs, is ONLY \$280.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$825.00.

You can order this SPECIAL PACKAGE by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

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