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Burry, James H., M.A.

Andrews University, 1992

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE ELLEN WHITE'S
CONCEPTS OF REVELATION, INSPIRATION, "THE
SPIRIT OF PROPHECY," AND HER CLAIMS
ABOUT THE ORIGIN, PRODUCTION AND
AUTHORITY OF HER WRITINGS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
James H. Burry

August 1991


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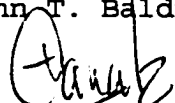
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August 9, 1991
Date approved

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ABSTRACT

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Chair: P. Gerard Damsteegt

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE ELLEN WHITE'S CONCEPTS OF REVELATION, INSPIRATION, "THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY," AND HER CLAIMS ABOUT THE ORIGIN, PRODUCTION AND AUTHORITY OF HER WRITINGS.

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Name and degree of chair: P. Gerard Damsteegt, Dr. Theol.

Date completed: August 1991

Problem

Questions persist about the authority and role of the writings of Ellen White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since the church accepts her as a prophet, this study seeks to determine Ellen White's concepts involving the processes of revelation, inspiration and the usage of the phrase "spirit of prophecy." Her claims about the origin and authority of her writings then help to determine a more consistent usage for the spirit of prophecy.

Method

A descriptive systematic approach begins with computer CD-ROM word studies on Ellen White's concepts of revelation, inspiration and the phrase "spirit of prophecy." After determining these concepts, they serve as presuppositions for investigating her claims about the origin and resultant authority for her writings.

Results

Ellen White's basic concepts of revelation, inspiration and "spirit of prophecy" differ slightly from current definitions held by many Adventists. These answer almost every question that has come up about her writings. The origin and authority she claims for her writings are consistent with her presuppositions about the basic concepts. However, the authority claimed for Ellen White's work is more extensive than what is generally supposed. Several recommendations are made for adjusting the SDA Church position regarding her writings.

Conclusion

An internally consistent position about the writings of Ellen White is possible if her understanding about the revelation-inspiration process and the origin of the spirit of prophecy are considered. The authority of her writings in the church and the proper role for them in biblical interpretation should be determined in this light.

To my wife, Una, without whom I perhaps
never would have started this thesis,
and certainly never would have
finished it

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AR</u>	<u>Adventist Review</u>
EGW	Ellen G. White
<u>GC</u>	<u>The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan</u>
PPP	Pacific Press Publishing Association
RH	Review and Herald Publishing Association
<u>R&H</u>	<u>The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald</u>
<u>1SM-3SM</u>	<u>Selected Messages</u> , vol. 1-3
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
<u>1T-9T</u>	<u>Testimonies for the Church</u> , vol. 1-9

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years several voices have begun to argue against the traditional understanding and usage of the written works of Ellen G. White, which are commonly referred to as the "spirit of prophecy" within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church.¹ Adventist leaders publicly acknowledge that her written works continue as an "authoritative source of truth."² In the last few years there has been a flurry of affirmations of the spirit of prophecy as well. However, in private, some Adventists agree with evangelicals, repudiating the claim that the spirit of prophecy constitutes a reliable guide for the interpretation of the Bible.³

¹Robert W. Olson, One Hundred and One Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, 1981), 36.

²[P. Gerard Damsteegt, ed.], Seventh-day Adventists Believe (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association [RH], 1988), 216. The statement is quoted from the official church position about the spirit of prophecy. This book comprises a brief exposition of all twenty-seven of the SDA fundamental beliefs.

³Ibid., 228, which quotes from Ellen G. White (EGW), Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (5T) (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association [PPP], 1948), 5:665. Note: All references to passages written by Ellen

These subtle variations can develop into a divisive issue when a difference of opinion arises about the correct exposition of a biblical passage. For example, a new interpretation of Scripture, contrary to the historic SDA understanding, may be demonstrated through purportedly sound exegesis or historical study while a seemingly contradictory quotation from Ellen White may support the traditional SDA understanding of the same data.¹ The effect of this dilemma is highly polarizing because those who support a traditional view may see no conflict between the spirit of prophecy and the Bible, yet they might be accused of elevating the interpretation of Ellen White above the results of careful academic study. Followers of the traditional view may ever after treat exegetes and theologians with suspicion. On the other hand, followers of the new interpretation often develop a condescending attitude and subsequently sit as judges upon the spirit of prophecy. The latter may even leave the SDA Church if they

White are taken from the most readily available published source of a quotation. Only one of any identical passages will be referred to, so as to avoid repetition.

¹For instance, see the recent article "Does Our Past Embarrass Us?" Ministry, April 1991, 7-10. Arthur N. Patrick, analyzing recent historical studies concludes that "her [Ellen White's] doctrinal understandings underwent both growth and change during her lifetime of ministry." This statement is alarming to most traditionally-minded Adventists who would cite EGW statements such as: "There is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written" (EGW, Selected Messages, 3 vols. [3SM] [Washington, DC: RH, 1980], 3:52).

conclude the writings of Ellen White are undependable. They could say she even admits fallibility.¹

Presuppositions or original assumptions are often recognized as playing a vital role in exegesis and biblical interpretation.² They play an analogous role in the understanding of Ellen White's written testimonies. The problems outlined above stem from the fact that her writings are purported to have originated in the Lord, Who is infallible and uncontradictory. Subtle variations in prior assumptions about the nature of the spirit of prophecy and the process of the production of it, consequently lead many SDA leaders to disagree as to its authority.³

Purpose of This Study

In order to address the challenges described above, this study attempts to discover Ellen White's viewpoint concerning several presuppositions involving the concepts of revelation, inspiration and the phrase "spirit of prophecy." The resultant implications will be addressed while considering Ellen White's opinion about the origin,

¹See EGW, 1SM, 37 about infallibility.

²Fernando Luis Canale, A Criticism of Theological Reason (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 283-286. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, Integrative Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1987), 163-164.

³For documentation of this confusion, see the Glacier View questionnaire in the next chapter. Facts are taken from Olson, One Hundred and One Questions, 35.

authority and intended role of her writings.

It is the author's purpose to analyze Ellen White's own statements about the problem. This methodology is expected to be the best approach for the following reasons:

1. Ellen White's works contain abundant information about the spirit of prophecy and prophetic inspiration.
2. Since the origin and authority of Ellen White's works are called into question, a proper systematic approach should begin by considering her own understanding of what she has written.
3. Her ministry is purported to manifest the divine gift of prophecy and this is stated in the doctrinal position of the SDA Church.¹ As a matter of consistency, Ellen White's published statements should be consulted on these important issues.

The working hypothesis of this study is: A study of Ellen White's own understanding on these issues will help to place the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the road toward a more consistent hermeneutic for the spirit of prophecy.

Methodology, Limitations

This study is not a deductive demonstration concerning the validity of Ellen White's prophetic claims. Those concerns lie outside the scope of this study and will

¹[Damsteegt], Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 216. Also "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook (Hagerstown, MD: RH, 1991), 7.

remain a matter of personal conviction. This thesis is an academic investigation. It will proceed in such a way that careful observation will enable a reader of any background to follow the progression of the research and at the end of the study arrive at the same conclusions concerning the position of Ellen White about the spirit of prophecy.

The investigation follows a descriptive systematic approach, moving from an analysis of the basic concepts toward the general principles involved. At the conclusion there will be some evaluation with the intention of pointing toward a consistent foundation for SDA understanding about the spirit of prophecy. The time restraints for this present endeavor preclude delineation of a complete hermeneutic for the use of the spirit of prophecy.

Explicit steps in the methodology are as follows: A review of contemporary research about the spirit of prophecy will be conducted in which the publications of others that impinge on the current study will be arranged and discussed. Many helpful pamphlets, articles and books on the subject matter are available through the Ellen G. White Estate at Andrews University.

The results of an exhaustive survey of the entire published works of Ellen White utilizing the CD-ROM media and a computer-based search program will serve as the major contribution toward the exposition of her own understanding of the basic concepts involved. These concepts involve

Ellen White's perception of the revelation-inspiration process, what she meant in using the term "spirit of prophecy" and why she claimed this title for her works.

The investigation will proceed to determine Ellen White's understanding about the origin of her writings. Then the authority of the spirit of prophecy will be investigated together with its intended function in the church.

Working Definitions¹

Definitions used throughout this study for the three basic types of operation of the Holy Spirit are as follows:

1. Revelation is the divine transferral of facts, messages, ideas or understandings (content), from God into the mind of a human (a prophet). This is herein taken as a reference to "special revelation," not general or natural revelation or the common sense of anything revealed.
2. Inspiration is the divine process which enables a prophet to accurately communicate a revelation to others. This includes both spoken and written communication, which in ancient times produced the Bible.
3. Illumination is the common personal experience of spiritual understanding which is obtained through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

¹These working definitions are based on those employed by Dr. Fernando Canale, Professor of Systematic Theology, in his class "Revelation and Inspiration" at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary, Andrews University, autumn, 1990.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF MAJOR STUDIES ABOUT THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Discussion of the Spirit of Prophecy in Historical Perspective

The Crisis Over the Spirit of Prophecy

Current opinions about the spirit of prophecy are varied among Seventh-day Adventists. Responses to the causes of dissention have been frequent and repetitive although they are seldom according to a systematic method. The viewpoint of Ellen G. White has rarely been carefully applied to the questions that arise about the spirit of prophecy. Even when her perspective on a discussion has been considered, it has been a matter of cursory review.

The frequency of the recent affirmations of the spirit of prophecy in official denominational publications, attended by a remarkable lack of new substance, is indicative of a struggle within the church. For an example, consider Fred Veltman's profession of belief in the spirit of prophecy at the conclusion of his report on Ellen White's use of sources in The Desire of Ages. He writes in Ministry magazine that he found "compelling reasons for

viewing her as a nineteenth-century prophetic voice" and, "Her voice . . . deserves to be heard today in those timeless messages that speak to the realities of our world at the end of the twentieth century."¹ This assertion is rather unsubstantiated, with only one mention of his knowledge of the biblical text and a paragraph about his study in the spirit of prophecy. Basically he is only supporting his position as still in harmony with the accepted viewpoint.

At about the same time as the origination of this study by Veltman, Neal C. Wilson, president of the SDA Church, declared, "In spite of what some would have you believe, there is no internal upheaval or major crisis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church."² Nevertheless, at the end of the same article he finds it necessary to present another strong affirmation:

I have heard the ring of truth in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. Our mandate is to preach from the Bible, enriching our sermons by insights on the gospel found in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. I believe with all my heart that Ellen White was an inspired messenger of God. . . . I must conclude that she is a reliable teaching authority and that she is a part of God's continuing revelation and corroboration of a doctrine and truth.³

¹Fred Veltman, "Personal Postscript," sidebar to "The Desire of Ages Project: the Conclusions" Ministry, December 1990, 15.

²Neal C. Wilson, "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," Adventist Review (AR), 20 March 1980, 8.

³Ibid., 10.

The recent proliferation of loyalty statements such as these would usually only occur under a crisis situation. In such a predicament, leaders feel constrained to declare their position. Thus, rather than mollifying the situation, Elder Wilson almost confirmed the opposite conclusion: There is a major crisis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church!

A Brief History of the Issues Involving the Spirit of Prophecy

From the very start of Ellen White's ministry, there is ample evidence of opposition against her work. Before their confidence was strongly established, several of the pioneers of the SDA Church even admitted personal opposition to her visions at one time or another. In perhaps the first publicized case, Joseph Bates states that he "for a long time" was "unwilling to believe" the visions were from God and "sought opportunities . . . to question and cross question her . . . to get if possible at the truth." Further into the same article he frankly confesses his changed attitude, writing with conviction, "I believe the work is of God."¹

References indicate there were several individuals who never did come to believe in the visions of Ellen White.

¹Joseph Bates, "Remarks" in A Word to the 'Little Flock' by James White (Brunswick, ME: n.p., 1847), 21. Facsimile reproduction published at Hagerstown, MD by RH, n.d.

The first such instance dates back to 1845 when Joseph Turner claimed the visions were the result of mesmerism (hypnotism). He claimed he could mesmerize her at will, prevent her from having a vision or even from telling one in his presence.¹

In the early days of the denomination some of the pioneers were candid enough to admit an occasional question about the source of inspiration for Ellen White's works. For example, Uriah Smith mentioned his temporary lapse of confidence right in the Review and Herald:

Considerable handle, I understand, has been made in some directions of the fact that the editor of the Review has been troubled over the question of the visions, has been unsound on that question, and at one time came very near giving them up. It strikes me that this is quite a small amount of capital to work up much of a trade on - "came very near giving them up"; - but didn't! I also, at one time came very near getting run over by the cars, and rolled into jelly; but I didn't, and so continue to this day. Some have met just such a catastrophe. The difference between them and myself is that they did, and I didn't. Some have given up the visions. The difference between them and myself is the same - they did, and I didn't.²

The list of those who did "give up the visions" (the writings of Ellen White), must be nearly endless for several have published against them. The first major book dates back to 1866, written by B. F. Snook and William H.

¹EGW, Spiritual Gifts, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858), 62-63. He tried, but was unable to affect her when she called for protection from another angel.

²Uriah Smith, "Personal," R&H, 22 November 1887, 15.

Brinkerhoff of the "Marion party," former SDA conference leaders in Marion, Iowa.¹ Almost every four years another author criticized Ellen White's work, such as H. E. Carver in 1870,² Miles Grant in 1874,³ and then A. C. Long in 1883.⁴ One of the most notable critics would be D. M. Canright who in 1887 began with a series of articles in the Michigan Christian Advocate.⁵ Others from the early years of this century who were outspoken against the spirit of prophecy include Ballenger, Fletcher, and Conradi. More recently, several new challengers have arisen, notably Jonathon Butler, Ron Numbers, Walter Martin, Desmond Ford, Walter Rae, Wallace Slattery and Ingemar Linden.

Speaking at a general discussion for leaders and college Bible and history teachers in 1919, the General Conference President unpropitiously confused the situation.

¹B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God (Marion, IA: Christian Publishing Association, 1866).

²H. E. Carver, Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined (Marion, IA: Hope of Israel Office, 1870).

³Miles Grant, The True Sabbath. Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions (Boston: Advent Christian Publishing Society, 1874).

⁴A. C. Long, Comparison of the Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate Press, 1883).

⁵His most famous publication is D. M. Canright, Seventh-day Adventism Renounced after an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith, 2nd ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1889).

After insinuating several questions about the writings of Ellen White and receiving cautious inquiries, he blatantly compromised them by acceding to rumors about plagiarism charged against the author. Then he denigrated her with a patronizing allegation:

Now take that "Life of Paul." - I suppose you all know about it and knew what claims were put up against her, charges made of plagiarism, even by the authors of the book, Conybeare and Howson, and were liable to make the denomination trouble because there was so much of their book put into "The Life of Paul" without any credit or quotation marks. . . . I supposed it was Sister White's own work. The poor sister said, "Why, I didn't know about quotations and credits. My secretary should have looked after that, and the publishing house should have looked after it." She did not claim that that was all revealed to her and written word for word under the inspiration of the Lord.¹

W. W. Prescott, also a respected leader in the denomination at the time, quoted W. C. White during the same discussion as saying that whole chapters of the original Great Controversy were written by assisting secretaries.²

¹A. G. Daniells, "Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible," Spectrum, May 1979, 51-52. This article and another one by Daniells, "The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History," (Spectrum, May 1979, 27-44) are copied verbatim from the transcripts of two discussions by General Conference officials and college Bible and history teachers on 30 July and 1 August 1919 right after the Bible Conference of 1919 at Takoma Park, MD. Both are reprinted from The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 21 August 1919.

²Ibid., 56. Evidently Elder Prescott had some strong differences with some statements in Ellen White's The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (GC) (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association [PPP], 1950) and he endeavored for many years to get W. C. White to equivocate about them. See his letter to W. C. White, 6 April

Unfortunate statements such as these by Daniells and Prescott fly in the face of documented facts¹ but they clearly show that questions about the spirit of prophecy have been an important issue for years.

Current Position Statements About
the Spirit of Prophecy

Today the inner struggle over the spirit of prophecy has come to a crisis regarding the use of the spirit of prophecy while interpreting the Bible. Robert Olson in the same issue of Ministry with the Veltman study states, "We cannot use Ellen White as the determinative final arbiter of what Scripture means. If we do that, then she is the final authority and Scripture is not. Scripture must be

1915 and following discussion in Olson, One Hundred and One Questions, 82-86.

¹The American publishers of the book Ellen White used when writing Sketches from the Life of Paul (Battle Creek, MI: RH, 1883) verified in writing that they never had any objection to her publication and there certainly was no claim of plagiarism such as that mentioned by Elder Daniells. cf. Francis D. Nichol, Ellen G. White and Her Critics (Washington, DC: RH, 1951), 456.

The statement by W. W. Prescott is inaccurate as Elder White regularly supported his mother's writings by minimizing her dependence upon other works, e.g. W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, "Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White" (St. Helena, CA: The Ellen G. White Estate, 1933), 14-15. Here he claims that only five or ten pages of text in Ellen White's Sketches are copied verbatim from W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson's Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1852). Walter Rae, currently the most outspoken critic on this issue, documents twenty-two pages of rather loosely paraphrased text (roughly 7 percent of the total 334 pages) in his book The White Lie (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982), 331-352.

permitted to interpret itself."¹ There is a subtle insinuation here that there is some contradiction between what is written in the Bible and the spirit of prophecy. If this is admitted then theologians and exegetes would be placed in the strange position as somehow above that of an avowed prophet. Yet Adventists have traditionally held that the spirit of prophecy in no way contradicts Scripture!² Which way shall we have it?

Colin and Russell Standish write that many supporters of a new brand of theology entering the SDA Church "totally deny Sister White's role in the church" and "some have gone to the extent of burning her writings or throwing them away." Their position, quite different from Olson's, is tersely stated, "In rejecting the spirit of prophecy, the supporters of the new theology have ultimately rejected the Bible."³

¹Robert W. Olson, "Olson Discusses the Veltman Study," interview by David C. Jarnes, Ministry, December 1990, 17. The Veltman study was initiated shortly after Walter Rae began publishing his criticism of the spirit of prophecy.

²For example, in one of the first published apologetics about the spirit of prophecy, Uriah Smith wrote, "These manifestations do in the strictest manner accord with the teachings of the word of God" (Uriah Smith, "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?", R&H, 13 January 1863).

³Colin D. Standish and Russell R. Standish, Deceptions of the New Theology (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1989), 128-129. See also the previous footnote; Uriah Smith took the same basic position.

At the Glacier View meeting of prominent SDA administrators and theologians on August 15, 1980, a revealing survey was taken. The anonymous results showed a striking difference of opinion. Affirmation of the inspiration of Ellen G. White and doctrinal authority of her writings was registered by 91 percent of the respondents. However, a question as to whether her writings were equally or less authoritative in relation to the Bible obtained a very divided response: fifty-six respondents replied the spirit of prophecy was less authoritative while thirty-five registered their opinion that it is equally authoritative!¹

Ultimately the controversy takes a bolder form: outright accusation versus veneration. Referring to Ellen White and those who "perpetuate a myth" about her writings, Walter Rae (until recently an SDA pastor), writes,

The worst lies that are told are often the ones told in religion--because they are told in a way that the assumption is that God endorses them . . . That [they] become harmful, wrongful, and even evil does not usually occur to those zealous persons who promote legends in the name of God.²

Thus he characterizes the writings of Ellen White and affirmative statements about them, as lies which can perpetrate an evil influence. The converse opinion is so strikingly different that one might wonder if the same

¹Robert W. Olson, One Hundred and One Questions, 35. The Glacier View meetings were called to consider several doctrinal challenges brought forward by Desmond Ford.

²Rae, 22.

writings are in mind. Recently republished in the Adventist Review, George Butler's voice was heard again from an 1876 article about the spirit of prophecy:

I pity the person who can read these testimonies, and not perceive the true spirit of piety they contain. Their minds must be blinded by hatred, or their hearts hardened by resisting the influences of heaven. In my very soul I feel that they have been to me a great source of spiritual strength and instruction. They are specially adapted to meet a want of the present time. They expose the special sophistries of Satan, through which he is bewitching the people of this age. It is no wonder to me that he hates them, that he spares no pains to make bitter war upon them, and that he employs agents filled with rancor to do it.¹

These differences of viewpoint on the use of the spirit of prophecy are nothing new. Similar differences in opinion have been noted since the beginning of the denomination. James White wrote in 1870, "we regard the visions of Sr. White as given by the spirit of God. But the use which we make of the doctrine of spiritual gifts, and particularly of the visions of Sr. White, are very generally misunderstood."²

Four Categories of Questions About the Spirit of Prophecy

In the following discussion, the questions about Ellen White and her writings are grouped into four major areas:

1. The question of whether the spirit of prophecy

¹George I. Butler, "A Voice from the Past," AR, 21 April 1983, 7, reprinted from R&H 7 September 1876.

²James White, "Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White," R&H, 15 February 1870.

- represents what one would expect of a true prophet.
2. Certain individuals accept some of Ellen White's published works and hold reservations about other writings. This selected use is like a dissection of the spirit of prophecy.
 3. There are suggestions that the spirit of prophecy may have a limited application to the time of Ellen White or only to the North American culture.
 4. Opinions differ as to whether the spirit of prophecy should be used as a doctrinal standard or only as inspired pastoral counsel.

Is the Spirit of Prophecy Truly Prophetic in Nature?

Accusations against the prophetic claims of Ellen White recently have centered around two assumptions: (1) a prophet's writings are inerrant; (2) a prophet communicates only original information that comes from direct special revelation. In this connection, sometimes challengers will resort to quoting the Ellen White statement, "I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title."¹

The first assumption stated above, that a prophet's

¹EGW, 1SM, 32. She also said she had no controversy with those who call her a prophetess, that her "commission embraces the work of a prophet," but that it "includes much more than this name signifies." She called herself a "messenger" (see also 31-36). The reason why she made no claim to the title of prophet is explained on these pages.

writings are expected to be inerrant, leads to questions about the editing of Ellen White's works and some possible errors in detail that are not generally publicized. She did occasionally edit her statements concerning what was shown her in vision. More surprisingly, she sanctioned numerous minor revisions for a republication of her book Great Controversy in 1911. These facts have proved to be a point of contention in some minds.¹ The argument is suggested: "If prophetic writing is expected to be perfect, how can it be improved upon?" The conclusion follows that she must not be a real prophet.²

If it can be proven that there is even the slightest error, the same conclusion is reached, that there was no prophetic inspiration. This train of thinking has led some to minutely inspect the spirit of prophecy to discover some error in detail (e.g. a point of historical minutiae or whether she accurately numbered the rooms at the Paradise Valley Sanitarium³).

Disputes also regularly surface about whether Ellen White had visions containing doctrinal messages which were later altered. The epitome of this type of difficulty is

¹For details of all changes, see the statement made by W. C. White before the General Conference council, 30 October 1911 which was endorsed in a letter by Ellen White, both reproduced in Arthur L. White, The Ellen G. White Writings (Washington DC: RH, 1973), 186-192.

²See Rae, The White Lie.

³EGW, 1SM, 38.

the recurring question about the old "shut door" teaching which to many people this seems to have been repudiated later.¹ Aside from casting doubt on her writings as a doctrinal authority, these allegations also reflect the concern about the supposed inerrancy of prophetic writing.

Under the second assumption, Ellen White's sources of information become suspect which are other than by direct original impress of the Holy Spirit. Critics usually impugn her about the use of sources written by other authors, her use of secretaries, and possibilities of influence from those around her. The conclusion follows that if uninspired people were involved, then Ellen White's writings do not measure up to the standard one expects of a prophet.

Examples of difficulties arising from this presupposition are numerous. For an illustration, in his 1980 Los Angeles Times interview, Walter Rae claims that Ellen White included information in her writing that was taken from sources other than directly from God.² On the converse

¹For the latest thorough discussion about this issue see P. Gerard Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 104-135.

²John Dart, "Plagiarism Found in Prophet Books," Los Angeles Times, 21 October 1980. Rae also asserts that Ellen White was guilty of plagiarism. Both declarations question her position as a prophet of God. An excellent response to the charge of plagiarism was presented in the general SDA church paper: Roger Coon, "Ellen White's Use of Sources" and "There Simply Is No Case," consecutive articles in AR, 17 September 1981, 3-6.

side, Roger Coon in his series of articles "Inspiration/Revelation," maintains that divine inspiration does not require originality. He shows that in the Bible, inspiration involves utilization of uninspired sources as well as visions, dreams and other supernatural experiences.¹

Dissection of the Spirit of Prophecy

Some people separate the published statements of Ellen White into inspired writings and uninspired writings, or those which may be inspired in a different way. For example, George Rice distinguishes between inspired writings which are the result of supernatural revelation (visions, dreams) and inspired writings which perhaps involved more natural sources (research, interviews).² Some have reservations about anything that was not widely published, while other people reject as unapproved by the author the compiled books of quotations which were published posthumously. These questions lead to the construction of an idea similar to the "canon within the canon" idea about the Holy Scriptures. Ellen White seems to speak of something akin to this idea in differentiating between the sacred and the common in her writing. Is a

¹Roger Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works," 3 parts, The Journal of Adventist Education 44 (October-November 1981, December 1981-January 1982, February-March 1982).

²George E. Rice, Luke, a Plagiarist? (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1983), 9-28.

prophet expected to be infallible? Does that mean she considers some of what she wrote to be uninspired?¹

Limited Application for the Spirit of Prophecy

In this category the suggestion is made that the application of the spirit of prophecy may be limited. Walter Martin says that Ellen White's understanding may have been fine for her time, but that the spirit of prophecy is not relevant for today. He suggests maybe she could be a "local prophet," equivalent to those mentioned in the Bible but not represented in the canon.² Others suppose her writings to be only appropriate advice for people of North America and decidedly irrelevant to other cultures. Some leading Adventists claim, "We do not think of them as of universal application, as is the Bible, but particularly for the Seventh-day Adventist Church."³

Should the Spirit of Prophecy Be Used as Doctrinal or Just Pastoral Counsel?

The last group of questions asks whether the spirit of prophecy should be used as a doctrinal standard, or only as

¹See Arthur L. White, "Common or Uninspired Writings," (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982)

²Stated by Walter Martin, as cited by Colin Standish in John Osbourne, "The Spirit of Prophecy," tape four, Adventist Roundtable Video Series (Bonita Springs, FL: Adventist Satellite TV Network, n.d.), part 2.

³[LeRoy E. Froom, Roy Allen Anderson, Walter Read], Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (Washington, DC: RH, 1957), 89.

inspired pastoral counsel. If her writings are not considered on the same level of authority as those of the Bible prophets, how could they be used differently than those of any other Christian writer? Desmond Ford, although claiming to believe Ellen White was a true prophet, asserts that her ministry was not of the same quality as that of a Bible prophet.

Because God's attention to matters is proportionate to their importance, He has exercised more miraculous superintendence over Scripture than over the writings of Ellen G. White. This is not to speak of degrees of inspiration, but rather degrees of revelation."¹

The notion of "degrees of inspiration" has been strongly rejected historically by Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists as a whole.² Ford tries to circumvent this objection by carefully claiming "degrees of revelation" instead (it ultimately proves to be the same idea). Since he does not accept her as at the level of a Biblical prophet, he asserts that the authority of the spirit of prophecy should be limited to edification, exhortation and comfort.³ As mentioned previously, although SDA leaders agreed at Glacier View that the spirit of prophecy stood as a doctrinal authority, they were clearly divided when

¹Desmond Ford, "Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment," (document presented for discussion at Glacier View Ranch, Denver, CO, 1980), 599-600. Quoted in Olson, One Hundred and One Questions, 38.

²EGW, 1SM, 23.

³He quotes 1 Cor 14:3.

comparing it to the Bible. John Robertson succinctly portrays both sides of the problem:

In a recent publication a student reporter was seeking teacher opinion about the authority of the Ellen White books. The responses reflected differing views on this basic question. One felt that her authority for the church is like that of Martin Luther for the Lutheran Church. Another considered that Paul's listing of prophets above pastors but below apostles locates her relative importance above the pastoral level.

These two views are really quite different. One view holds that Ellen White should be considered in the prophet category. The other view places her role in the pastoral category. That difference puts the finger squarely on the issue as to the nature of her authority.¹

These ideas involve the question as to whether Ellen White acted as a spokesperson for God. What is the origin of what she wrote? Even though she may have been led by the Lord, was she influenced by others or did she include her own opinions? As Robertson concludes, these questions ultimately affect the authority of the spirit of prophecy. If a theologian uses Ellen White's writings in Biblical interpretation, she is then accused of being "the SDA Pope!"² This follows logically if her interpretation of

¹John J. Robertson, The White Truth (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1981), 41. This is an excellent rebuttal to Rae's, The White Lie.

²This accusation is discussed by John Ankerberg, "Who is Telling the Truth About Seventh-day Adventism," transcript of TV program with William Johnson and Walter Martin (Chattanooga, TN: John Ankerberg Evangelistic Association, 1985), 5. See Kenneth Samples, "From Controversy to Crisis," Christian Research Journal, Summer 1988, 14.

the Bible is held above that reached through modern exegesis, and that is Robert Olson's objection.¹

The Systematic Approach to the Study
of the Underlying Issues

A dissection of the spirit of prophecy into what was written by other authors and what is original, what is cultural and what is universal, what is inspired and uninspired, what constitutes a doctrinal statement of authority and what is merely an opinion, is exactly analogous to the historical criticism of the Bible. But rather than embarking on such an endeavor with the spirit of prophecy, the analog of which has been nearly a century developing, a systematic approach is suggested instead. This kind of method means investigating the underlying issues that give rise to the questions and deliberations discussed above.

Concerns about the spirit of prophecy can be more easily dealt with if they are seen as centered upon basic issues rather than answering questions. The problems are systematically reduced into focus and dealt with in order. Then any new question that arises will be more easily resolved on the basis of a firm understanding. Thus the four underlying issues will be researched in this systematic study in the following order:

1. Concepts: revelation, inspiration, spirit of prophecy.
2. Origin of the writings of Ellen White.

¹See Olson, "Olson Discusses the Veltman Study."

3. Authority of the spirit of prophecy.
4. Purposes and role of the spirit of prophecy.

A detailed investigation of the function of the spirit of prophecy and development of a hermeneutic for it, is beyond the scope of the present study. However, the underlying issues will be investigated so that more confident use of the spirit of prophecy can be intuitively enjoyed.

Previous SDA Studies on the
Four Underlying Issues

Concepts: Revelation, Inspiration,
Spirit of Prophecy

A thorough attempt to accurately understand and describe some relevant concepts is paramount to creating a solid basis for a systematic approach. Many of the questions about the writings of Ellen White stem from a misunderstanding of what she claimed for the operation of revelation and inspiration and the nature of the spirit of prophecy. Difficulties about such questions as those involving inerrancy, editing of her works and discrepancies in detail can usually be traced to different presuppositions about these concepts.

The SDA pioneers usually dealt with the questions regarding the revelation-inspiration issue in a way similar to the following statement by Uriah Smith:

Those who are making a specialty of opposing Sister White and her work . . . say, "We know her words are not inspired," thus covertly implying that she claims and we hold that they are. . . . Who now argues that

the words, the mere language, of even the Scriptures themselves are inspired? But further, the questioner says, "is not a word a sign of an idea: and how then can an idea be inspired, and the signs that transfer the idea from one mind to another be uninspired?"

Ans.—If there was but one word by which an idea could be expressed, this would be so . . . but when simply a scene or view is presented before a person, and no language is given, he would be at liberty to describe it in his own words, as might seem to him best to express the truth in the case. And if, having written it out once, a better way of expressing it should occur to him, it would be perfectly legitimate for him to scratch out all he had written and write it over again, keeping strictly to the ideas and facts which had been shown to him.¹

Thus the early position of the SDA church was set to accept the concept of thought inspiration rather than word-by-word inspiration. This has repeatedly been set forth in articles such as Roger Coon's and Arthur White's series.²

Peter van Bemmelen has done some extensive work on the concept of inspiration in which he compares different understandings of the concept and reveals that even the conservative Benjamin Warfield was not far removed from the SDA position of thought inspiration.³ Frederick Harder has also a doctoral dissertation which reviews what Ellen White

¹Uriah Smith, "Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas," R&H, 13 March 1888.

²Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation." See also Arthur L. White, "Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration," four parts, AR, 12 January, 19 January, 26 January and 2 February 1978.

³Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, "Issues in Biblical Inspiration," Ph.D. diss. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

said about revelation.¹ Recently Alden Thompson's book² develops some ideas originally suggested by Rice about revelation and inspiration.³ However, confusion still continues to plague this issue as a result of differing understanding about these two terms.⁴

Concerning the meaning of the term "spirit of prophecy," there is a striking dearth of significant study. What this term refers to and what it means has always been rather summarily adduced on the basis of a few Bible texts in statements similar to this:

In Rev. 19:10 the angel is quoted as saying to John, "I am . . . of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." This phrase is parallel to "I am . . . of thy brethren the prophets" in Rev. 22:9. In other words, one who had the Testimony of Jesus had the prophetic gift. The term "spirit of prophecy," as used in Rev. 19:10, must then apply to anyone who had the prophetic gift, including the angel, John, and John's brethren. Adventists believe that Ellen White had the "spirit of prophecy," and commonly use the term as a title, applying to her writings.⁵

Origin of the Writings of Ellen White

A clear understanding about the origin of the writings

¹Frederick E. J. Harder, "Revelation, a Source of Knowledge, as Conceived by Ellen G. White" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1960).

²Alden Thompson, Inspiration (Hagerstown, MD: RH, 1991).

³Ibid., see chapter 2. He refers to Rice, Luke, a Plagiarist?

⁴See introduction for the working definitions used throughout this investigation.

⁵Olson, One Hundred and One Questions, 36.

of Ellen G. White will answer many other questions such as those about her use of secretaries or uninspired sources, the idea of a "canon within the canon," infallibility and the separation of the sacred from the common. Short and repetitive testimonials about the origin of the spirit of prophecy have periodically been tendered, which usually include a few quotations gathered from the writings of Ellen White. Two examples are Wilcox's 1933 Review and Herald series¹ and Dores Robinson's article, "How the E. G. White Books Were Written."²

More often, however, an apologetic proof of her authenticity as a prophet has been presented in an attempt to answer these questions. The bulk of SDA literature on the life and works of Ellen White has been written as apologetic attempts to establish her role as a prophet of God. The first such work was published in an article by James White in "A Word to the 'Little Flock'" in 1847.³ The most popular book of this genre is Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny by Rene Noorbergen.⁴

¹Francis M. Wilcox, "Of Human or Divine Origin," R&H, 31 August 1933, 10-11.

²Dores E. Robinson, "How the E. G. White Books Were Written," Ministry, February 1980, 12-14.

³James White, A Word to the 'Little Flock', 13-14.

⁴Rene Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny (New Canaan, CT: Keats Publishing, 1974). Two more examples: Denton E. Rebok, Believe His Prophets (Washington, DC: RH, 1956), T. Housel Jemison, A Prophet Among You (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1955).

Several histories describing the production of the spirit of prophecy have recently been written and Arthur White's paper on the development of the Great Controversy approaches the issues raised in this study.¹ However, no scholarly study that fully investigates Ellen White's purported origin of the spirit of prophecy has been discovered.

The Authority of the Spirit of Prophecy

In contrast to the above, the matter of the authority of the spirit of prophecy has been dealt with frequently and occasionally at some length. This is the central issue about which the most difficult questions are clustered.

One of the first articles on this issue of authority was "Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White" by J. N. Andrews.² A useful recent example is the chapter in Robertson's book entitled "The Truth about Authority."³ Alden Thompson's recent book impinges on this subject by presenting several ambiguities of the Bible.⁴ On this

¹Arthur L. White, "Toward a Factual Concept of Inspiration II," (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1978).

²J. N. Andrews, "Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White," R&H, 15 February 1870.

³Robertson, 60-76. See also Arthur L. White, "The Position of 'The Bible, and the Bible Only' and the Relationship of This to the Writings of Ellen G. White," (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1971).

⁴Thompson, Inspiration.

underlying issue, a wealth of discussion exists, flooding the field with conflicting and intersecting opinions. Again, however, no articles have directly approached this issue of the authority of the spirit of prophecy from the perspective of what Ellen White said about it. The proper place of the spirit of prophecy in relation to the Bible and modern theology or Biblical exegesis might be clearly set.

Purpose and Role of the Spirit of Prophecy

On the last major issue, the purpose and role or function of the spirit of prophecy, questions about the breadth of authority and the application of the spirit of prophecy will be engaged. Ellen White's understanding of the intended use of the spirit of prophecy is critical. In studies that touch on this issue, usually only a few remarks have been made about the role or the purposes of the spirit of prophecy in connection with the previous question about its authority over against that of the Bible. Sometimes a few quotations from Ellen White have been included but seldom has even a short article on this issue been published. One article that speaks to the subject was written by Raoul Dederen in Ministry, "Ellen White's Doctrine of Scripture."¹ Dalton Baldwin also touches on these questions in his thesis entitled "Some

¹Raoul Dederen, "Ellen White's Doctrine of Scripture," in supplement to Ministry, July 1977, 24F-24J.

Principles of Method to be Used in Religious Research as Derived from the Writings of Ellen G. White."¹ But again it seems very little research has focused on the purposes for which the spirit of prophecy was written.

Conclusion and Justification for This Study

Many legitimate questions have been raised that have been dealt with in varying degrees, but several remain that demand a more thorough investigation. Rather than approach the questions one by one and neglect others that may be raised in the future, a more efficient systematic method will be employed to cover the gaps by investigation of the underlying issues. This study will analyze presuppositions involved before the questions about the authority and purpose of the spirit of prophecy are taken up. Only then can the proper application of the spirit of prophecy be discerned.

Through the years of repeated questions about the spirit of prophecy, several works impinging on the subject of this thesis have been produced. But although they may be useful in the initiation of a systematic study, none are adequate to fulfill the need for a consistent foundational position on the spirit of prophecy. The greatest lack is the fact that seldom has any attempt been made to discover

¹Dalton D. Baldwin, "Some Principles of Method to be Used in Religious Research as Derived from the Writings of Ellen G. White," (B.D. thesis, Washington, DC: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1956).

Ellen White's own position although she is often quoted in support of various views. This study will investigate what she herself understood about the concept and role of the spirit of prophecy, for Seventh-day Adventists believe,

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.¹

¹"Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 7.

CHAPTER III

ELLEN WHITE'S CONCEPTS OF REVELATION, INSPIRATION, "SPIRIT OF PROPHECY"

The first step in the systematic process of determining the claims of Ellen White about her writings involves understanding some basic concepts and definitions that are involved. Many of the questions about this author's work stem directly from a misconception of what she believed about the operations of revelation and inspiration and what she meant by referring to her writings as "the spirit of prophecy." Careful study to clarify what is meant by these terms is essential for subsequent discernment of precisely what Ellen White considered to be the authority and intended role of her writings.

Seventh-day Adventists in general, including Ellen White, believe in continuing direct contact between God and man rather than the cessation of direct communication since the close of the canon of Scripture.¹ This precludes the traditional Christian concepts of the complete separation between the natural and supernatural and also the more

¹[Damsteegt], Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 64-65, 219-220.

modern theory of immanence.¹ Adventists also do not subscribe to the encounter theory of revelation which limits divine revelation to an experiential and non-rational communication. Neither is the historical-critical method of dissecting the Bible used because Seventh-day Adventists believe in plenary inspiration and operate by the principle of *sola scriptura*.²

As a matter of procedure, it must be considered that in the years since the time Ellen White wrote, there have been subtle changes in the usage of certain English terms. An authoritative dictionary from her times can often be a great help in understanding her meaning when specific terms are in question.³ Exhaustive computerized searches of the entire published works of Ellen White recorded on CD-ROM media compose the major contribution toward an exposition of her own understanding of the key concepts under consideration.

¹Immanence is associated with the modern interpretations of Schliermacher and Hegel. It involves panentheism, where God is spoken of as within us.

²This means that the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice.

³For example, contemporary medical terminology is vastly different than that in professional usage one hundred years ago. Many valuable details of information about medical practice are essentially lost unless a medical professional is proficient in translating these terms into today's language.

Ellen White's Understanding of the
Revelation-Inspiration Process

Confusion of Revelation with Illumination

A study of how Ellen White used the word "revelation" helps to define her meaning and usage in reference to the concepts which are technically termed illumination and revelation.¹ Statements which impinge on three basic subject areas are covered, involving her understanding about the origin, nature and process of special revelation. These ultimately come to bear on the question of the authority of the spirit of prophecy when one considers how Ellen White applies these terms to her own experience.

Utilizing the CD-ROM, an exhaustive search of all the published works of Ellen White retrieved a sum total of 1669 paragraphs in which the word "revelation" was used. (That is, after eliminating all chapter and verse citations from the Biblical book of Revelation.) A survey of these showed that approximately 12 percent are also references to the book of Revelation. After eliminating all the marginally relevant quotations, over 300 references are significant to this study.

The specific word "revelation" was chosen for the search because nearly every paragraph that contained related words such as "reveal," "revealed," "revealing," or

¹See the introduction for working definitions of the three basic terms "revelation," "inspiration" and "illumination" (6).

others with the stem "reve-" referred to the common sense of any disclosure or communication. Still this common meaning constituted one of the major usages of the term "revelation," although it often referred to illumination from God or an illuminating experience. It was found that Ellen White actually used the term "revelation" in some instances as if it should be defined like the theological term "illumination."¹

It is understandable why this search showed that the two words "revelation" and "illumination" are misconstrued. Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language from 1897 describes illumination as the infusion of intellectual or spiritual light. But another definition equates illumination with inspiration, while "inspiration" is defined as including what is currently termed "revelation."² (Her usage of the terms "revelation" and "inspiration" will be discussed later.) Although these are operations of the same Spirit and at times are difficult to separate, yet Ellen White does occasionally draw a distinction between illumination and the special revelation of the Scriptures:

Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On

¹For example, see EGW, Fundamentals of Christian Education (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 386.

²Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language (Chicago: Webster's Dictionary Publishing Co., 1897), 576, 611.

the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.¹

Origin and Nature of Special Revelation²

Several quotations from the search of Ellen White's writings directly impinge on her definition of the term "revelation" in the technical sense of the phrase "special revelation." Revelation is often referred to as "light" because she saw that the two actually originate from the "same source."³ The divine impartation reveals something that was previously "unknown to human beings" and in that sense involves a cognitive encounter which traces its origin directly to God.⁴

Yet revelation is represented as distinctly different from natural cognitive encounters and human reason since it

¹EGW, GC, vii. See also idem, "Preach the Word," R&H, 3 November 1904.

²Note: Acknowledgement is appropriate here for the research and teaching of Dr. Fernando Canale. His class on revelation and inspiration served as a basis for this section, the section on the contribution of God and man, and the first two sections of the next chapter. Initial research for these two chapters was reported in a paper for Dr. Canale's class.

³EGW, Signs of the Times, 19 February 1880. See also idem, Lift Him Up (Hagerstown, MD: RH, 1988), 221.

⁴Ibid., 181. By a "cognitive encounter," it is meant that knowledge is actually transferred; it is not just an experience or "feeling."

is impossible to correctly understand nature or experience without it. "To man's unaided reason, nature's teaching cannot but be contradictory and disappointing. Only in the light of revelation can it be read aright."¹ Emphasizing this point in one instance, Ellen White employs the qualifier "external" in order to specify that the revelation is not just the common kind of understanding that comes from deliberation or reason.²

This usage is similar but more explicit than the current qualifying adjective "special." There are only two different passages where she used the phrase "special revelation". Both of these are in reference to the apostle Paul, the first one describing his unusually strong theophanic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.³ The other is saying that he did not receive divine information on a particular subject.⁴ Rather than using this phrase in the current technical sense, Ellen White meant "particular" or "unique revelation."

Significantly, Ellen White in one passage clearly differentiates between "prophecy" and "revelation." She

¹EGW, Education (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1952), 134. Heb 11:3 is quoted, "Through faith we understand."

²EGW, Counsels on Sabbath School Work (Washington, DC: RH, 1938), 37.

³EGW, The Youth's Instructor, 31 January 1901.

⁴EGW, The Acts of the Apostles, (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1911), 265-266.

indicates that as she defines it, a prophecy may include symbolic language or something that later needed to be "revealed" in order to be fully understandable.

In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end. Here is the complement of the book of Daniel. One is a prophecy; the other a revelation. The book that was sealed is not the Revelation, but that portion of the prophecy of Daniel relating to the last days. The angel commanded, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." Daniel 12:4.¹

This indicates that special revelation does not only involve a divine message that comes into the mind of the prophet. There is additional evidence that in revelation, rather than just an impulse that the prophet later interprets, Ellen White believed a cognitive encounter is necessarily involved.

Ellen White's Understanding of Revelation

The analogy of illumination by light is very close to the process of revelation in Ellen White's understanding. Special revelation is not akin to human reason or experience. It comes from without, originating in God, and is imparted by Him into the mind of the prophet. As the previous section shows, whenever she uses the term "revelation" it carries the common meaning of a communication or disclosure in addition to pertaining to a divine act. This means that Ellen White includes the normal meaning of a

¹EGW, Acts of the Apostles, 585.

cognitive operation of the mind, even when she is referring to a special impartation originating from God.

Subsequently in this study "revelation" will be used in this technical sense of referring to what is currently termed "special revelation." Careful discernment must be exercised in the study of the spirit of prophecy to discriminate this usage from the lesser meaning of illumination and the common word which does not necessarily involve the Holy Spirit at all.

Terminology: Revelation-Inspiration Process

A CD-ROM search for the stem "inspir-" produced a veritable quagmire of over 73,700 passages. The specific word "inspiration" retrieved a more manageable 1353 documents. As suggested above however, the investigation into revelation and inspiration from the writings of Ellen White was not as easy as might have appeared at the outset. Since many statements seemed almost contradictory, the study was inconclusive at first and often became confusing. The major reason is that Ellen White did not clearly distinguish between the two phases of divine communication as is followed in theology today.¹

It has been demonstrated that many basic principles

¹Refer to the working definitions in the introduction. To others, the distinction was helpful to define "revelation" as referring to the "content" of divine communication, whereas "inspiration" then refers to the total "process." See Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation," part one.

about revelation could be correctly adduced without directly engaging this problem. But the correct understanding of Ellen White's usage and meaning for the word "inspiration" can only be obtained in the light of the different definitions in her time. Again referring to Webster's dictionary of 1897, there are six definitions for the word "inspiration"; the first two describe the physical act of breathing and the last three refer to the common idea of receiving some communication or influence. The third definition is the relevant one and reads as follows:

The supernatural influence of the Spirit of God on the human mind, by which prophets, apostles, and sacred writers, were qualified to set forth divine truth without any mixture of error; or the communication of the divine will to the understanding by suggestions or impressions on the mind, which leave no room to doubt the reality of their supernatural origin.¹

The problem lies in this definition. Two different definitions are evident in this one entry, separated by the conjunctive "or." The first one conforms more or less to our present day theological term of "inspiration" while the second meaning aptly describes what is now termed "special revelation."² In the minds of the people in Ellen White's time, there was no clear distinction made between the two processes. Likewise, the contemporary definitions for revelation also combine what is today separated into two

¹Webster, 611.

²See working definition of "revelation," p. 6.

different actions of the Holy Spirit.¹ Apparently the important concern was not to distinguish between these two meanings, but to stress that there was "no room to doubt the reality of their supernatural origin."

Unfortunately, a full study on all the different definitions of revelation and inspiration is far beyond the scope of the present work. In the introduction, the working definitions were chosen according to the common usage among theologians today, but we may profitably note that they are similar to the conservative ideas set forth by Benjamin Warfield back in the same era in which Ellen White wrote. Recently Peter van Bemmelen noted:

For him [Warfield] revelation denotes the divine activity in supernaturally communicating to certain chosen instruments the truths which God would make known to the world, whereas inspiration refers to the influence of God exerted on the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, rendering the written product the divinely trustworthy word of God.²

While clearly stating his distinction, Warfield also referred to the changing usage of these terms, claiming that "exact writers" would "no longer use the term inspiration in so broad a sense" as most religious writers of the time did. His intention was apparently to more strongly "secure the trustworthy record" of the Bible by binding it

¹"The disclosure or communication of truth to men by God himself, or by his authorized agents, the prophets and apostles" (Webster, 950).

²van Bemmelen, Issues in Biblical Inspiration, 331-332; cf. 249.

under the supposition of verbal inspiration (in contradistinction to thought inspiration).¹

It is evident that the author subscribes to the same broad definition of the term common in her day. For example, review the quotations of Ellen White previously cited in this section in regard to the term "revelation". The term "inspiration" was used by Ellen White at times in a way that can be understood as referring to the narrower definition of today, but at other times it was employed in a way that could only mean what is now termed "revelation."²

She generally uses the word "inspiration" as described by her contemporaries, including both processes of revelation and inspiration. This usage can be clearly seen in the following quotation: First she uses the term "inspiration" to describe the process of "revelation." Then she also includes an act which is commonly referred to today as "inspiration."

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with

¹John E. Meeter, ed., Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol 2 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970-73), 615-616, as quoted by van Bemmelen, 241-242; cf. 287-288.

²EGW, 1SM, 22.

the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.¹

Ellen White did not distinguish between the two terms under consideration; rather, she often used the words interchangeably.² This is not to say that she indistinctly perceives the various actions of the Holy Spirit in revelation and inspiration. On the contrary, she occasionally quite precisely separates the two processes (although not using today's two theological terms).

The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.³

For Ellen White the broader meanings were attached to the words "inspiration" and "revelation," each including some of our more restrictive theological usage of the other term. This was appropriate for her time. To separate out the two terms so distinctly when speaking of a prophet's work is not ordinarily necessary and it perhaps may be an artificial distinction to which none of the ancients would have resorted. Consequently, the broader understanding of the terms "revelation" and "inspiration" will be

¹Ibid., 21. For the more common and indistinct usage see for example 15, 17.

²Interestingly, EGW even connected the two terms into one phrase: "The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses. Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book" (EGW, GC, v).

³EGW, ISM, 25. See also *ibid.*, 36-37.

appropriate to keep in mind as remaining faithful to the milieu in which Ellen White wrote, thereby minimizing distortion.

Contribution of God and Man

Presupposing God as supreme, necessitates that in any revelation to humankind there must be some limitation. If it is assumed that He is infinitely greater than us in every way, then there must be some restriction of God's self-exposition whenever He communicates to human beings. Ellen White explains this basic constraint by saying that humans have "limited comprehension," "finite minds," and thus can never fully comprehend the Infinite; there are "mysteries that are incomprehensible."¹ Ellen White contends that special revelation is not only thus generally restricted, but what is revealed also goes through a type of transformation depending on the mind of the individual prophet.

As presented through different individuals, the truth is brought out in its varied aspects. One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appre-

¹"God is to be acknowledged more from what He does not reveal of himself, than from that which is open to our limited comprehension. If men could comprehend the unsearchable wisdom of God, and could explain that which He has done or can do, they would no longer give Him reverence, or fear his power. In divine revelation God has given to men mysteries that are incomprehensible, to command their faith. This must be so. If the ways and works of God could be explained by finite minds, He would not stand as supreme" (EGW, General Conference Daily Bulletin, 18 February 1897).

ciation; another seizes upon a different phase; and each, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind--a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all.¹

In addition to the limitation of human thought, the revelation especially suffers through the constraints of human language when communicated to others.

The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory.²

Difficulties arise from the fact that though "the truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God,'"³ "human hands" are involved. Thus "the varied style . . . presents the characteristics" of the prophet. Ellen White says this "presents a union of the divine and the human."⁴ The actual operation is described as God the author who gives the revelation while the various penmen do the writing.

The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have them-

¹EGW, GC, vi.

²EGW, 1SM, 22. See also 19, 21; GC, v-vi.

³2 Tim 3:16

⁴EGW, GC, v-vi. See also 5T, 747.

selves embodied the thought in human language.¹

Notice that the mind of the prophet is not supposed to be "cast in an iron mold"² or "cramped" as the common concept of inspiration implies by entailing detailed dictation, word by word.

Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold.³

How in Ellen White's concept is the communication any different from the common work of an ordinary writer? As evidenced in the above quotations, the work is done under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit and thus retains the divine hallmark.

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God.⁴

Notice that this concept which is termed "thought inspiration" is incompatible with the concept of "verbal inspiration" as it is commonly considered to mean "dictation." Significantly, a search through the CD-ROM

¹EGW, GC, v. See also 1SM, 16.

²EGW, 1SM, 22.

³Ibid.

⁴EGW, GC, v-vi. See also GC, ix.

media confirmed that Ellen White never employs the phrase "verbal inspiration."¹ In fact, her son William C. White made a statement to the General Conference saying, "Mother has never laid claim to verbal inspiration . . ." and neither did most other SDA leaders.² A year later he wrote a letter to S. N. Haskell to counter this "verbal inspiration" theory. In the corner of the letter Ellen White wrote, "I approve of the remarks made in this letter."³

However, the issue becomes a little more difficult when one concedes that Ellen White uses the term "dictation" six different times when referring to inspiration. For example, she refers to "the Scripture record given by John, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit."⁴ These quotations would seem to contradict what is said above.

¹Technically, the search was made for the two words, "verbal" and the stem "inspir*," with the connector symbol "adj" which commands that the search be limited to only when they are found adjacent to each other. The asterisk indicates that the word may be terminated with any suffix, here including the word "inspiration." Thus the search string is "verbal adj inspir*." A search for the word "verbal" returned twenty-seven paragraphs which also yielded no significant usage.

²EGW, 3SM, in the appendix to the volume, 437. The statement was made when presenting the newly revised edition of GC on 30 October 1911 and was subsequently often repeated by him.

³Arthur White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), 365-366.

⁴EGW, Fundamentals of Christian Education, 406. See also idem, Early Writings of Ellen G. White (Washington, DC: RH, 1945), 90; GC, 557; Sketches, 18; 4T, 180; idem, This Day With God (Washington, DC: RH, 1979), 352.

However, the question should be asked, "What did she mean by using the word 'dictation'?"

Resorting again to Webster's dictionary of 1897, the word "dictation" is defined as the act or practice of uttering or delivering with authority, instructing what to say or write, ordering, suggesting to the mind or prescribing.¹ Yet when used today, the term almost always refers to the very narrow sense of saying aloud word for word what someone else is to record, although the other meanings are still included in a dictionary. The overwhelming majority of the total of 116 quotations searched out from the CD-ROM disk showed Ellen White used the term in a much broader sense than is thought of today. She evidently meant simply that all our efforts should be under the influence of the Lord or directed by Him.

For example, she wrote, "The business meeting is to be just as much under the dictation of the Spirit as the prayer meeting."² She spoke of the reformed life of a Christian, "What Christ works within will be worked out under the dictation of a converted intellect."³ The term was used similarly to the term "illumination", "Let the affirmative of truth come forth from human lips, under the

¹Webster, 331.

²EGW, 3SM, 336.

³EGW, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1962), 54.

dictation of the Holy Spirit."¹ Still, she also uses the term in the very narrow sense four times in personal letters on common matters when describing her method of work while she was sick and unable to write. Therefore, it can be adduced that she did not contradict her rejection of "verbal inspiration" even when she uses the term "dictation" in reference to inspiration. Except in a few instances when referring to the common matters of her method of work, she uses the broader meaning of the term (e.g. "under the influence or direction").

As mentioned in the literature review, the basic position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was early settled on the concept of thought inspiration rather than verbal inspiration.² This has repeatedly been set forth in articles and books ever since the 1880s.³ Uriah Smith's reasoning can hardly be improved upon, when he answers the question, "is not a word a sign of an idea: and how then can an idea be inspired, and the signs that transfer the

¹EGW, This Day With God, 56. For different examples, see Counsels on Sabbath School Work, 158; Signs of the Times, 30 August 1999; idem, Spalding and Magan's Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White (Payson, AZ: Leaves-Of-Autumn-Books, 1985), 88.

²According to van Bemmelen, even Benjamin Warfield held that "verbal inspiration does not mean verbal dictation" so this idea of dictation is also suspect by leading evangelicals (van Bemmelen, 289).

³This position of the church was succinctly stated in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "General Conference Proceedings," R&H, 27 November 1883.

idea from one mind to another be uninspired?"¹ He answers simply that there is not merely one word to express each idea. Further, though the idea be faithfully related, if the author thinks of a better way of expressing the concept it would still be an accurate representation if the original were edited.²

Questions About Inerrancy, Errors
in Detail, Editing

From the foregoing it can be easily understood why Ellen White never used the term "inerrant" because the term would be directly contrary to her understanding of thought inspiration.³ This idea of inerrancy is more fitting to the concept of verbal inspiration. Human language is not inerrant in its communication of ideas, although the idea related may be from God and "the utterances of the man are the word of God."⁴ Ellen White states, "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself."⁵

It is inappropriate for Seventh-day Adventists to

¹Smith, "Which Are Revealed?"

²Ibid.

³A CD-ROM search proved she never used the term "inerrant."

⁴EGW, 1SM, 21.

⁵Ibid.

question the reliability of an inspired message on the basis of some supposed minor error because the denomination never claimed the type of verbal inspiration which might result in total inerrancy. It is said that Benjamin Warfield "in his later writings prefers such terms as truth, trustworthiness, and reliability in speaking of the divine attributes of Scripture" rather than inerrancy.¹ And van Bemmelen also suggests it would be more beneficial to emphasize these concepts rather than debating the mode of transmission and the absolute accuracy of the details of the written record of the Bible.²

In light of the initial assumptions of plenary inspiration and sola scriptura³ it must be granted that what is presented in the area of the subject matter of testimonies or Scripture (or any divine inspiration) is unassailable truth. Then any question of error must appear at the level of inconsequential details, largely irrelevant, or at best minimally supportive to the subject matter. For example, historical dates or biographical details of sequence may often be supportive but unnecessary to an exposition. An error in such minutiae would have no effect on the subject

¹van Bemmelen, 384; cf. 352.

²Ibid.

³See p. 33.

matter of the presentation.¹ If slight errors exist, according to the above understanding of the inspiration process, it might only be due to the limitations of the mind of the prophet or the imprecision of human language.

On a slightly different matter, Ellen White entertains a question on the transmission of the Bible which is appropriate to the issue about details: "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators [of the Bible]?"² Her answer was so simple, "This is all probable. . . . All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth."³ She means that errors in detail do not affect the truth of what is presented unless the receiver is looking for an excuse to reject it.

What about Ellen White's changing or editing her written works which are said to be divinely inspired? This practice is entirely consistent to her understanding of the inspiration process, as portrayed by Uriah Smith. Ellen

¹For example, Ellen White once wrote in an autobiography, "A special request is made that if any find incorrect statements in this book they will immediately inform me" (EGW, 3SM, 57-58, from the appendix in the first 400 copies of Spiritual Gifts, vol. 2 [Battle Creek, MI: SDA Publishing Association, 1945 facsimile]). In the preface she wrote that she had to depend on memory in many instances.

²EGW, 1SM, 16.

³Ibid. Note: she never admitted to any error in the original autographs of Scripture. She was here only addressing a question about transmission and translation.

White regularly edited and refined her written descriptions of what was revealed to her. This fact is not merely admitted, but offered by her son William as evidence of her rejection of the verbal inspiration theory.

If there were verbal inspiration in writing her manuscripts, why should there be on her part the work of addition or adaptation? It is a fact that Mother often takes one of her manuscripts, and goes over it thoughtfully, making additions that develop the thought still further.¹

Summary and Conclusion

The word "revelation," according to our working definitions,² denotes the divine communication from God to the prophet. The word "inspiration," refers to the divine process which enables the prophet to accurately communicate the revelation to the people. But it is essential to keep in mind that these are defined differently than they were in the times of Ellen White. It must be emphasized that in her usage of the term "revelation," she includes what is technically termed "illumination" as well as the common usage referring to anything that is disclosed or communicated. Her understanding of what we currently refer to as "special revelation" involves a cognitive encounter with

¹W. C. White in a statement made before the General Conference about the 1911 revision of GC. Published in Appendix A of 3SM, 437.

²See introduction, p. 6.

God where He passes information directly into the mind of a prophet.

The current theological distinction between the processes of revelation and inspiration are human attempts to define complex processes. These definitions are perhaps artificial distinctions and may be misleading or at best confusing when studying the spirit of prophecy. For Ellen White the terms are often used interchangeably. Further, it is essential to keep this lack of differentiation in mind since her usage of the phrase "spirit of prophecy" will be seen to refer to the total process of revelation and inspiration. Thus hereafter in this investigation, the phrase "revelation-inspiration" will be preferred as referring to a single process. (The distinctive words "revelation" and "inspiration" will be employed to satisfactorily investigate the purported origin of Ellen White's thoughts as separate from the process of her communication of them.)

The concept of revelation-inspiration that Ellen White holds is widely different from George Rice's "Lucan model" of inspiration, which he distinguishes from the "prophetic model" of inspiration.¹ Based on analysis of the literary sources, he confines 2 Pet 1:20-21 only to those who

¹Rice, Luke, a Plagiarist? Rice borrows the term "prophetic model" from the critic Paul Achtemeier (11). His term "Lucan model" refers to inspired works that are more the result of research than supernatural intervention (26-28).

receive revelation by supernatural experience such as dreams or visions.¹ All books of the Bible, he concludes, are not the result of "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Only the writings under the "prophetic model" were "words written by human hands whose ultimate source is God Himself."² The writings of the Bible that fall under Rice's "Lucan model," though inspired, came about from reading, oral interviews or collection of materials not produced by direct revelation from God.³ The "prophetic model" reveals a consistent God while the "Lucan model" allows the presence of inconsistencies in the writings.⁴

This type of dichotomy may naturally result from the artificial distinction between revelation and inspiration as separate processes, rather than the preferable concept which includes both in one whole process of revelation-inspiration. Ellen White refers to all Scripture as coming

¹Ibid., introduction. Rice's idea is that the single model of revelation-inspiration is inadequate to explain the different ways that the prophets wrote Scripture. He suggests that not until 1981 had anybody in the SDA Church begun to see that there were two different ways of inspiration (ibid., 15; see the dates of his references). Rice developed this model to counter Walter Rae's criticism in The White Lie (28).

²Ibid., 5, 11.

³Ibid., 14.

⁴Ibid., 19.

through the revelation-inspiration process and attributes 2 Pet 1:20-21 to the production of the entire Bible.¹

According to Ellen White, although the origin of the revelation-inspiration process can be traced to God and continues under His direct influence, it is necessarily confined by the limitations of the finite mind of the prophet and the human language employed. These limitations are acceptable within the concept of thought revelation-inspiration and are evidence of the human side of the encounter with God. Difficulties about such questions as those involving inerrancy, discrepancies in detail and editing of inspired writings then appear as a result of the "verbal inspiration" concept. Thus they become a moot issue among Seventh-day Adventists who hold to thought revelation-inspiration.

Van Bemmelen has duly noted that "the issue of inerrancy is closely related to the issues of the reliability and authority of Scripture."² Now that the concept of thought revelation-inspiration has been introduced as the understanding of Ellen White, the other three underlying issues and all the other questions can be appropriately approached.

¹For example, GC, 324. See also pp. 312, v, vii.

²van Bemmelen, 383.

Ellen White's Meaning of
"Spirit of Prophecy"

In spite of the constant usage of the term "spirit of prophecy" among Adventists as a reference to the writings of Ellen White, heretofore there has been a striking dearth of significant study concerning the concept and the meaning of this key phrase. The usage has always been rather summarily adduced on the basis of a few Bible texts, always including the statement from Rev 19:10 in which the "spirit of prophecy" is equated to the "testimony of Jesus." Hence by identifying the term on the authority of the Bible, it is considered sufficiently explained.

This is not to say that Ellen White refrained from using the same equation. She subscribed to it, and she quoted the same passage.¹ However, she used the phrase "spirit of prophecy" much more broadly than just as a reference to her own writings. Often in close association to this phrase, she employed the phrases "gift of prophecy", "spirit of Christ", "Word of God", "testimony to the church", and "witness of Christ" as well as "testimony of Jesus." Also there are numerous variations of each,

¹In four different statements, "spirit of prophecy" is equated to "testimony of Jesus": EGW, Testimonies to Ministers, 114; idem, Loma Linda Messages (Payson, AZ: Leaves-Of-Autumn-Books, 1981), 33; idem, Patriarchs and Prophets (Washington, DC: RH, 1958), 366-367; Early Writings, 230-231. See also idem, Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, (Silver Spring, MD: The Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1987), 213. These are reproduced in the appendix for reference.

such as "testimony of Christ", "testimony of Jesus Christ", "testimony of God", "testimony of the Spirit" and nearly endless permutations. It can be readily seen there are two terms repeatedly used that deserve more specific attention: "prophecy" (e.g. in the phrase "spirit of prophecy") and "testimony" (e.g. in "testimony of Jesus").

1897 Definitions of Prophecy and Testimony

Webster's dictionary shows three definitions for the noun "prophecy" at the turn of the century: (1) "A foretelling; prediction; a declaration of something to come." (God and his prophets are referred to as the only certain source of such); (2) Reference to a book of prophecy, as used in the Scripture (e.g. "the prophecy of Ahijah"); (3) "Preaching; public interpretation of Scripture; exhortation or instruction" (A Bible text is cited).¹ Although the second definition is extremely limited and can be ignored in this study, the first and third are essentially the same as in usage today. Thus for the purposes of this study "prophecy" will be taken as referring to a discourse delivered by a person informed by God through the revelation-inspiration process. (It may or may not include prediction. Prophecy is the verb, with essentially the same meaning.)

¹Webster, 878.

Webster, who was a contemporary of Ellen White, enumerates thirteen usages for the noun "testimony." The first four and the last three basically refer to the current usage: a declaration, an affirmation or a witness. The first of these seven definitions is the only one that refers to the giving of testimony in a judicial proceeding while references are made to Scripture in three of the others. The remaining six are exclusively Biblical references to the pronouncements of God communicated through His servants, such as those preserved in Holy Scripture.¹

In 1897 the general meaning of the term "testimony" carried through into the first definition, that of the legal setting, as well as into the very common and often detailed religious definitions. Yet today, the term is almost exclusively used in a legal setting.² This fact means that the more general meaning and usage of "testimony" in a religious context is usually somewhat obscure. The definition of the word, as often used in a religious setting at the time of Ellen White, was not quite what one might expect today. It quite specifically referred to

¹The two tables of ten commandments given to Moses: Ex 25:16, 21; the book of the law: 2 Kgs 11:12; the Scriptures, laws or precepts of God as often referred to in the Psalms; the gospel (the sayings of God through His servant): 1 Cor 2:1, 1 Tim 1:8. Ibid., 1140-1141.

²A modern definition usually deals with cases brought before a court of law, with some general usage of the term and no scriptural reference at all. For example Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 699.

declarations or pronouncements transmitted to us by chosen servants of God through the revelation-inspiration process.

Analysis of Ellen White Statements Involving
the Phrase "Spirit of Prophecy"

A computer search over the CD-ROM base of Ellen White's published works uncovered 394 paragraphs which included the phrase "spirit of prophecy."¹ After elimination of repetitious and irrelevant usage, only sixteen different instances are significant in understanding the author's meaning of the term. Surprisingly, two thirds (ten) of these significant places include the word "testimony" in the same paragraph.² As mentioned above, four different passages specifically equate "spirit of prophecy" to the phrase "testimony of Jesus" according to the Biblical formula. (For example, "We have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, which is the spirit of prophecy."³)

Sister White at times used the phrase "spirit of prophecy" in a general sense as though all who wrote or

¹Noise words such as "a," "and," or in this case "of," are ignored so that the search string was simply "spirit adj prophecy."

²A total of seventy-eight passages were listed from the search command "spirit adj prophecy and testimon*" of which ten different quotations were considered significant; only six more were found in the 394 listed under the larger search for all "spirit adj prophecy." These sixteen passages are reproduced in the appendix for reference.

³EGW, Testimonies to Ministers, 114. See the appendix for the others.

spoke by revelation-inspiration manifested it.¹ Yet in several places she clearly refers to her own statements or writings ("testimonies") when she uses the term.² Speaking about the "messages" of "the last sixty years" which have been "communicated" to the Lord's people,³ she in two statements even makes a distinction between "the Scriptures" and the "spirit of prophecy" as two different communications from the Lord.⁴

She also equates the "prophetic gift" with the "spirit of prophecy," suggesting what she wrote and spoke was by the divine gift of prophecy.⁵ Her usage of the term, "gift of prophecy" was also researched via the CD-ROM disk. Although she rarely uses the term except when she is

¹For example, Jacob's "dying testimony" was "by the spirit of prophecy," as he was "under the influence of inspiration." EGW, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870; Washington, DC: RH, 1969 facsimile), 156. See appendix.

²For example, EGW, 4T, 330 and below. See appendix.

³EGW, The Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters (Payson, AZ: Leaves-Of-Autumn-Books, 1985), 224; idem, "Notes of Travel--No. 1: Journey to Southern California," R&H, 14 June 1906; idem, The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1987), 808. See the appendix.

⁴EGW, 3SM, 30; idem, My Life Today (Washington, DC: RH, 1952), 40. See the appendix.

⁵EGW, Loma Linda Messages, 33. See the appendix.

quoting 1 Cor 13,¹ Ellen White uses the phrase to designate that divine gift by which a person informed by God is able to prophesy.² Since she referred to "the testimonies" as an evidence of "the gift of prophecy among us,"³ she therefore considered herself as being blessed with this gift.

If it has now been sufficiently ascertained what Ellen White meant by using the term "prophecy," the following can now be raised: "Why is it connected with 'spirit'," and "What is the relation suggested in her use of the phrase 'spirit of prophecy'?" In three different passages (repeated often) it is clear that she refers to the Holy Spirit, by whom God informs His servant and enables him or her to prophesy via revelation-inspiration.⁴

In one instance, the spirit of prophecy is equated to "testimonies of His spirit," which means what is communicated is by declaration of the Holy Spirit. Stating the issue this way demonstrates the spirit of prophecy is more than just a Spirit-enlightened communication. It is the

¹The search string was "gift adj prophecy." The inclusion of statements by people other than Ellen White in the database is misleading--forty-eight out of seventy-four hits were not hers. Thirteen were quotes of 1 Cor 13. Not counting repeats, there were only six different passages.

²EGW, Acts of the Apostles, 263; 1T, 190; Sketches, 110.

³EGW, Manuscript Releases, vol. 9, 278. See also 3SM, 83.

⁴EGW, 3SM, 30; 1SM, 27, 41. See the appendix.

same as saying the spirit of prophecy is the words of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is abundantly clear why the equation of Rev 19:10 is used in the Bible and often referred to by Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists: According to Ellen White, the spirit of prophecy is the same as Jesus Himself speaking.¹

It was Christ that spoke to His people through the prophets. The apostle Peter, writing to the Christian church, says that the prophets "prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the 'Spirit of Christ' which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." 1 Peter 1:10, 11. It is the voice of Christ that speaks to us through the Old Testament. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Revelation 19:10.²

Summary of Understanding of the Phrase "Spirit of Prophecy"

The contemporary Adventist usage of the phrase "spirit of prophecy" is more limited than the understanding which Ellen White held. Although her usage of the phrase includes reference to her own writings, she also uses it when alluding to the work of prophets of old.³ In using the term "prophecy" she is speaking of the communication of a prophet operating through revelation-inspiration, and the

¹EGW, Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, 213. See appendix.

²EGW, Patriarchs and Prophets, 366-367. See also 1SM, 21.

³EGW, Testimonies to Ministers, 114; Patriarchs and Prophets, 366-367. See also mention of Jacob's prophecy, Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, 156. These are in the appendix.

word "testimony" is used in a synonymous sense.¹ The word "spirit" in the phrase "spirit of prophecy" is an explicit reference to the involvement of the Holy Spirit.

Related terms used in conjunction with spirit of prophecy such as "gift of prophecy" and "testimony of Jesus," reveal by analysis that Ellen White is referring to the revelation-inspiration process, under the direct influence of God in the fullest sense. Whenever she refers to the spirit of prophecy, it means the pronouncement or declaration of a servant of God operating through revelation-inspiration. She applies this meaning to the Scriptures, to her own writings or to any other prophetic communication.

Thus by applying the phrase "spirit of prophecy" to her own work, she means that her writings were produced under the same process of revelation-inspiration as the Bible and she traces the source of her writings directly to God as did any other product of revelation-inspiration. By her use of the term "spirit of prophecy" we see implicit claim that her books and articles were likewise to be taken as the testimony of Jesus, meaning they are the word of God.

¹Refer to the section entitled "1897 Definitions of Prophecy and Testimony," p. 59. Also that ten of the sixteen "spirit of prophecy" passages included the term "testimony" is significant.

CHAPTER IV

ELLEN WHITE'S CLAIMS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF HER WRITINGS

Before considering the authority of the spirit of prophecy, investigation must be made into the variety and extent of Ellen White's sources. If they are human sources, one may be able to measure the authority of her writings by human standards. If everything she wrote came by divine special revelation, it would be beyond human analysis. Consequently, the only recourse would be to accept or totally deny such claims. But the previous study into White's concept of the revelation-inspiration process shows that the genuine manifestation is a combination of divine and human activity. Thus an inquiry into the origin of the spirit of prophecy becomes a major challenge.

This fact necessitates close investigation into the process of how Ellen White actually received information and prepared it for publication. To separate the processes involved, and to analyze them more carefully, the narrow working definitions of the terms "revelation" and

"inspiration" are employed in this chapter.¹ Beginning with a short study of her experiences of revelation, investigation continues into the inspiration phase. Then a proper study can be made into the origin of her works.

Ellen White's Experience
of Special Revelation

In her writings, Ellen White reveals a wide variety of types of revelation in her experience. From the time of her first visions and dreams, she writes of receiving verbal communication from Jesus and angels.² She claims to have visions of scenes or "panoramic views" presenting "past, present and future."³ For example, her first vision is said to picture the Advent people from the time of the disappointment (1844) through to the second advent and the new earth.⁴ Often a great deal of symbolic representation is involved. For example, in this first scenario people are seen traveling on an upward path with a bright light behind. An angel apparently explained that the light represented the midnight cry.⁵ Yet in the same account there are several specific references that Seventh-day Adventists understand to be taken literally, such as

¹See introduction to this document, p. 6.

²EGW, Early Writings, 13-20; also cf. 78-81.

³EGW, GC, xi; 5T, 64-65.

⁴EGW, Early Writings, 12-20.

⁵Ibid., 15-16.

the mighty earthquake at Jesus' coming, and the graves opening for the sleeping saints to rise.¹

In addition to Ellen White's claims about this variety of supernaturally given revelations, she also states she received special direction in presenting commonly known historical events. These brought out "facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events" which enabled "a proper understanding of their application."² She often wrote that her personal experiences as well as events of the world were providentially engineered by God.³ She purports to "have been instructed in accordance with the Word."⁴ Thus the kinds and types of special revelation claimed by Ellen White cover all the range of those represented in the Bible, including even theophany. For example, she relates she was taken in vision into the very presence of God:

As inquiries are frequently made as to my state in vision, and after I come out, I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give a vision, I am taken into the presence of Jesus and angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things. I can see no farther than the angel directs me. My attention is often directed to scenes transpiring upon earth. At times I am carried far

¹Ibid., 16.

²EGW, GC, xi-xii. W. C. White called them "flashlight pictures" in his 1911 presentation before the General Conference, which Ellen White fully endorsed (3SM, 43). See also Appendix B in 3SM, 446.

³EGW, Life Sketches (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1943), 65.

⁴EGW, 1SM, 29.

ahead into the future and shown what is to take place.¹

The supernatural sources of Ellen White do not usually present a problem for Adventists. People either accept her as a prophet and had special revelation from God or they do not believe in her prophetic claims at all. The problems about the origin of the spirit of prophecy come with Ellen White's use of natural sources of information which are included in the inspiration phase of the revelation-inspiration process.² Consequently, questions involving interpretation of experience and the Bible fall back onto her supernatural sources. Thus, the area that really requires investigation centers around Ellen White's process of communicating what has been revealed to her.

Production of the Spirit of Prophecy
by the Process of Inspiration

Ellen White claims that God especially directed her to communicate to others the content of her supernatural revelations. She believed that the Lord gave her "instruction in symbols," and "explained their meaning." Furthermore, she dared not "refuse to give it to the people," because the "love of Christ, and . . . the love of souls"

¹Ibid., 36.

²These consist of uninspired material such as culturally obtained knowledge and history.

constrained her not to "hold her peace."¹ She also stated in this connection:

The words have been spoken in a charge to me, "Write in a book the things which thou hast seen and heard, and let it go to all the people." . . . I have been aroused at one, two or three o'clock in the morning with some point forcibly impressed upon my mind, as if spoken by the voice of God.²

Ellen White Describes Her Experience of Inspiration

Ellen White indicated several times that God had raised her up, and made her a "means through which to communicate His light to the people."³ She declared she was "taught of God how to bring the truth in its simplicity before the people." She was told that God sustained her and gave her wisdom and "keeping power," that He would be her "instructor."⁴ Often she was preserved for her work only by divine intervention. In one case she claimed it was the Lord who "steadied [her] right hand, and made it possible for [her] to use a pen."⁵ In fact, she claims she could not even "take up a work and launch out into it"

¹EGW, Manuscript 22, 1890, quoted in Arthur L. White, E. G. White, Messenger to the Remnant (Washington, DC: RH, 1969), 14.

²EGW, Colporteur Ministry (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1953), 128. See also GC, xi; 5T, 655, 657; 1SM 35.

³EGW, 5T, 667.

⁴EGW, 1SM, 54, 55.

⁵EGW, 3SM, 38.

without being "impressed by the Spirit of God"; she could not write "unless the Holy Spirit" helped her.¹

Contrary to what one might suppose, Ellen White did not usually communicate immediately what was revealed to her. Usually the message came later, according to the circumstance.² Until she began to write about a vision, she often did not remember all of what she saw in it until afterwards. In fact, sometimes the things were "hid" from her and she could not "call them to mind" until brought into circumstances where the vision would apply.³ At other times she was "bidden to let no one know" about what was shown until the situation developed. In such cases, she dared not "go beyond what the Spirit of the Lord [had] permitted."⁴

Many times Ellen White's memory was stirred while she was speaking and "the remembrance [came] sharp and clear, like a flash of lightning" even though the scenes were presented to her years before.⁵ While standing before the people, much of what she preached was not premeditated.

¹EGW to J. E. White, 5 January 1903. Letter 11, 1903. Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²EGW, 1SM, 51.

³EGW, 1SM, 36. See also p. 27, 37.

⁴EGW, Testimony for the Battle Creek Church, 49-50, quoted by Arthur L. White, Messenger to the Remnant, 14.

⁵EGW, 1SM, 37.

She was "carried out and away from" herself and "spoke what the Spirit of the Lord brought before her."¹

"Many times the scenes" about which Ellen White was writing were necessarily repeated in a new vision "so that they were fresh and vivid" in her mind.² She often bemoaned her inefficiency, her incapability of adequate expression to present what had been shown her, pleading with God for special aid of the Holy Spirit. For example, when writing on the life of Christ, she wrote in a letter, "I have hardly dared to enter upon the work. . . . I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words." Thus throughout this process involving time, memory, circumstances and human limitations it can be seen that the human element was very heavily involved. Generally speaking the choice of wording was her own:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.³

However, Ellen White mentioned that frequently she received specific help when writing out an important matter. For instance, when she was "puzzled for a fit word," the Lord would bring it "clearly and distinctly to

¹EGW, 5T, 678.

²EGW, Colporteur Ministry, 128.

³EGW, 1SM, 37.

[her] mind."¹ She claims that whether it was by pen or voice, "It is not I who controls my words and actions at such times."² She claimed that all of what she communicated was just as heavily dependent upon the Lord as the original reception of the information.

I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that He is pleased to have me relate or write them.³

Although the human element is also quite evidently present, thus far it can be seen that God was not only the purported origin of Ellen White's information, but she also claimed to be under strict control of the Holy Spirit when she was communicating it. The implication is that the Lord Himself is communicating to His people through the spirit of prophecy, and this "knowledge of His will [is] not presented as having originated with human minds."⁴

Influence by Others

Accepting this understanding of Ellen White's inspiration process leaves little ground for complaints about her

¹EGW, Letter 127, 1902; also see Letter 123, 1904 both quoted by Arthur L. White, The Ellen G. White Writings (Washington, DC: RH, 1973), 22.

²EGW, 1SM, 39.

³EGW, 1SM, 36-37.

⁴EGW, 1888 Materials, vol. 2, 808. (One of the "Spirit of Prophecy" quotations in the appendix.)

supposed influence by human sources.¹ When people turned against her messages the cry was frequently raised, "Who told Sister White about these things?" When questioned in this way, she answered simply, "The angel of God has spoken to me." If individuals had prejudiced her mind, it was her belief that she would not be "fitted to be entrusted with the work of God."²

Ellen White often took special pains to not be influenced by people or other written works. After hearing her first account of the "great controversy theme," J. N. Andrews brought a copy of Paradise Lost to her house. She was determined that if it was similar in any way, she would not read it until after writing out what the Lord revealed to her in vision.³ Similarly, until she had fully written out her revelations from God, she refused to read publications by Doctors Trall, Jackson and others who supposedly taught principles of health reform similar to hers.⁴ She once wrote that she was "not in the habit of reading any doctrinal articles in the paper" (Review and Herald) so she

¹She was often accused of being influenced or "conveniently" having a vision. See EGW, 5T, 683; 3SM, 62-66; 1888 Materials, vol. 2, 828-829.

²EGW, 3SM, 62-63. See also 4T, 330, one of the "Spirit of Prophecy" quotations, the appendix.

³She put it on a high shelf in the kitchen, out of reach and out of sight. Arthur L. White, Messenger to the Remnant, 16.

⁴EGW, R&H, 8 October 1867, quoted by Arthur L. White, "Toward A Factual," 15.

would not be connected with "a mold of any man's theories."¹

Questions about Ellen White being influenced by her son, W. C. White, began to circulate from Battle Creek and eventually they were abetted by her other son, Edson. In 1906 she had to take action, directly accusing Edson:

"What kind of a move was it . . . saying to those there, that W. C. White . . . manipulated my writings? This is just what they needed to use in their counsels to confirm them in their position that the testimonies the Lord gives your mother are no longer reliable."

At the close she declared, "It is falsehood—but what a charge is this! Not one soul manipulates my writings."²

Finally, however, she did acquiesce to the challenge:

There are those who say, "Someone manipulates her writings." I acknowledge the charge. It is One who is mighty in counsel, One who presents before me the condition of things.³

Use of Secretaries

In her work of writing letters, manuscripts, articles, and books, Ellen White brought every power to bear, using every available means to clearly communicate what had been shown her. This included employing the aid of helpers and utilization of uninspired sources. The most famous of her

¹EGW, 3SM, 63.

²Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol 6, 100-101. Many also accused her of being influenced by her husband (EGW, 1SM, 26).

³EGW, 3SM, 64.

secretaries is probably Marian Davis, who she called "my bookmaker."¹ But this help from other people engendered accusations that the spirit of prophecy was the work of someone else.

After the death of James White, Ellen White sometimes mourned that she had nobody to read her works back to her before sending them out.² He apparently was a great help to her.³ The literary helpers of Ellen White generally only corrected grammatical errors and eliminated needless repetition.⁴ In addition, Marian Davis gathered pertinent portions for a new production from Ellen White's own writings, helping to arrange them.⁵ Because everything in this process was initiated by the prophet, received minimal input from others during the production, and passed under careful scrutiny before being sent out, Ellen White is well justified in saying, "The books are not Marian's productions, but my own."⁶

With respect to her claims regarding the revelation-inspiration process, what difference does it make if she

¹Ibid., 91.

²EGW, Letter 76, 1897. Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

³EGW, 1SM, 50.

⁴Ibid. This was all she attributed to her own husband!

⁵EGW, 3SM, 91.

⁶Ibid.

did have literary assistance? The claim for the spirit of prophecy was not verbal inspiration, and every word is not considered to be grammatically perfect or inerrant! Ellen White invariably maintained that the subject matter was unchanged by her helpers:

The reports that are circulated, that any of my helpers are permitted to add matter or change the meaning of the messages I write out, are not true.¹

Inclusion of Uninspired Sources

When communicating what had been shown to her, Ellen White often utilized uninspired works by other authors. This seems unacceptable to many because of their presuppositions about the process of revelation-inspiration. In this investigation of Ellen White's claims about her inspiration process, it is worth noting her characterization of Christ's method of utilizing the ideas of others:

Christ did not disdain the repetition of old and familiar truths in prophecies if they would serve His purpose to inculcate ideas. He was the originator of all the ancient gems of truth. Through the work of the enemy these truths had been displaced. They had been disconnected from their true position, and placed in the framework of error. Christ's work was to readjust and establish the precious gems in the framework of truth. . . . Christ rescued them from the rubbish of error, gave them a new, vital force, and commanded them to shine as precious jewels, and stand fast forever.

Christ himself could use any of these old truths without borrowing in the smallest particle, for He had originated them all. . . . As Christ presented these truths to minds, he broke up their accustomed train of thought as little as possible. Nevertheless a new and transforming economy of truth must be woven into their

¹EGW, 1SM, 50.

experience. He, therefore, aroused their minds by presenting truth through the agency of their familiar associations.¹

With this understanding, it would be entirely consistent for Ellen White to use a similar process, involving "the repetition of old and familiar truths," having "rescued them from the rubbish of error." Selecting from common source materials in this way, she would not feel she was "borrowing in the smallest particle" in a way that was reproachable. Ultimately, Christ was "the originator of all the ancient gems of truth."² This method certainly "would serve [her] purpose to inculcate ideas" into the minds of others if it "broke up their accustomed train of thought as little as possible." If this held true for Christ, it was also the best way for her to "arouse their minds by presenting truth through the agency of their familiar associations."

In her introduction to her classic work The Great Controversy, Ellen White describes to the reader the process she follows in selecting from common sources. This method is consistent with the above understanding:

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed. . . . In pursuance

¹EGW, Manuscript 25, 1890, quoted by Robertson, The White Truth, 38, 39.

²See also EGW, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1943), 360; idem, "Books in Our School," R&H 10 November 1891.

of this purpose, I have endeavored to select and group together events in the history of the church. . . .

The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. . . . In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.¹

Note how Ellen White asserts "the scenes of the past and the future" were "opened to [her] mind" first; the revelation came before the selection of sources. Thus as mentioned before, there is no possibility of influence by other authors during the identification of appropriate language to portray what was shown. Notice that the revelations seem to have been in the form of "panoramic views." They may not have included all the dates and details of history necessary for the book presentation.

What she included was a brief history of great events "well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world." When she quoted convenient summaries or brief, comprehensive portrayals of the subject, it is sometimes said that she borrowed from historians.² However, Ellen White probably would have responded that she was not

¹EGW, GC, xi-xii.

²She also made a similar use of published works from her contemporaries, "those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time" (EGW, GC, xii).

"borrowing in the smallest particle" in an unseemly manner. She only included commonly available information.

Her intention in The Great Controversy was not to introduce new details of history in a publication for universal distribution. Such new information would be subject to suspicion, so she presented only "facts which none can gainsay." On the same page she says, "It is not so much the object of this book to present new truths concerning the struggles of former times, as to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events."¹ Thus, she was not so much a descriptive historian as she was an interpretive historian. She primarily included historical information for the purpose of constructing a background to explain the conflict between good and evil and to help prepare us for future events.

An important question can be raised on this point, "Why didn't Ellen White give credit by proper citation, according to the standards of today?" The answer is simply that there was no such legal or literary expectation in her day.² Her reason was that the quotations were not given

¹EGW, GC, xii.

²Coon, "There Simply Is No Case," 4-6. This is an interview with Attorney Vincent L. Ramik, senior partner of Diller, Ramik and Wight, specialists in patent, trademark and copyright cases, Washington, DC. They discuss the legal and moral implications of Ellen White's use of sources.

"for the purpose of citing that writer as authority."¹ In other words, she did not use the words of others to magnify the authority of the presentation. She used the passages because they were well composed, and factual accounts of what was presented to her in vision.² In philosophical terms she used these sources not in a material causal sense but in an efficient causal perspective.³

As described earlier, Ellen White's concept of the revelation-inspiration process was not limited to the transmission of original information received by supernatural experiences and unnatural sources. Accepting this concept of the revelation-inspiration experience, the use of natural sources for general knowledge is certainly commendable, rather than reproachable. Revelation-inspiration utilizes the full mind of a prophet; therefore all knowledge would be involved, including secular history.⁴ Thus what she wrote by inspiration should not be

¹Ibid.

²Usually they were refined to fit her use: edited and rearranged or paraphrased.

³Aristotle's four causes in physics are: (1) the formal cause (like a blueprint); (2) the final cause (the purpose); (3) the material cause (the object which is affected by the action); (4) the efficient or instrumental cause (the action by means of which the desired result is produced).

⁴Also such knowledge as natural science (EGW, Education, 134). About the Biblical use of uninspired ancient literature see Coon, Inspiration/Revelation, part 1.

restricted to that received "through direct vision."¹ Consequently when she used the words of another author to clearly describe what was shown to her, that does not violate her consistent position. This type of research is expected of any competent scholar and author. She explains that God prepared her for her work, He sustained her and He always guided the mind of a prophet in the selection of what to speak and write:

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God.²

Ellen White's Claims About the Origin of the Spirit of Prophecy

Divine Origin of Ellen White's Inspiration

In the last quotation, we learn that whatever the limitations of the human instrument, however the heavenly message was transmitted, whether secretaries or uninspired

¹EGW, 5T, 690. Note that again, George Rice's "Lucan model" of inspiration, which he distinguishes from prophetic revelation, does not harmonize with this perception (Rice, Luke, a Plagiarist?). All of the spirit of prophecy is considered equally as inspired. Even when separated from the revelation process, the inspiration process is a result of supernatural operation. The information originates in God just as does that which comes from a dream or a vision.

²EGW, GC, vi-vii.

sources were consulted, the message is still said to be "the testimony of God." Through the process of revelation-inspiration, the spirit of prophecy comes to us from God.

In His providence the Lord has seen fit to teach and warn His people in various ways. By direct command, by the sacred writings, and by the spirit of prophecy has He made known unto them His will.¹

Ellen White constantly began her statements with words such as "I saw" or "I was shown"² She wrote, "The Lord has manifested himself through the Spirit of prophecy."³ She claimed, "The Lord has again visited His people by giving me a testimony. In this view I was shown. . . ."⁴ Her testimonies, articles, books, and her letters, manuscripts and diaries are said to originate in God (even much of what is not published).

Several statements clearly underscore this position. For example, Ellen White wrote, "Those who carefully read

¹EGW, My Life Today, 40. See also 4T, 330; 1888 Materials, 802, 808. All these include the phrase "spirit of prophecy" and are reproduced in the appendix.

²See, for example, her first published vision in James White, "A Word to the 'Little Flock'," 14-18. Note that such frequent use of these phrases could not honestly be employed if they reflect a common type of illumination, involving influence by natural circumstances to a great degree (implied by Ron Graybill in "The 'I Saw' Parallels in Ellen White's Writings," AR, 29 July 1982, 4-6). In fact as shown below, Ellen White maintains that she took special efforts not to be unduly affected by any outside influence.

³EGW, 5T, 671.

⁴EGW, Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce (Silver Spring, MD: EGW Estate, 1989), 166-167.

the testimonies . . . need not be perplexed as to their origin. The many books, written by the help of the Spirit of God, bear a living witness to the character of the testimonies."¹ Again she asserts, "I do not write one article in the paper, expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision."² Moreover, she declares, "I take no credit of ability in myself to write the articles in the paper or to write the books which I publish. Certainly I could not originate them."³

Ellen White definitively states that she was "not the originator" of her books, that they contained light God had "given His servant to be given to the world,"⁴ and that they bore the spirit of prophecy:

These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the spirit of prophecy. . . . This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven.⁵

About her books Patriarchs and Prophets, The Great

¹EGW, 1SM, 49-50. See also 5T, 673, 678. They were "given of God." Incidentally, EGW refers to "general" as well as "personal" testimonies, by which she meant to divide her writings into "published for general distribution" as opposed to "private communication." The inference is: "general testimonies" refers to anything that is published (5T, 664).

²EGW, 1SM, 27.

³EGW, Letter 60, 1890, quoted by Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 3, 458.

⁴EGW, Colporteur Ministry, 125.

⁵EGW, R&H, 14 June 1906. See the appendix.

Controversy and The Desire of Ages, she writes, "The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone."¹ About her letters we read these words:

You might say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your minds things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me.²

At all times Ellen White kept with her what she called a diary, in which she wrote the first drafts of testimonies and other manuscripts. These were in addition to her daily diaries of her experience, from which little is published. Clearly referring to the former, she states, "I have much written in the diary . . . I want that which is deemed worthy to appear . . . for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for His people."³

When she had "no light on the subject," she disdained to communicate anything about it, writing, "I can set before them only that which has been presented to me." "I am not at liberty to write . . . I have received no instruction . . . I cannot take upon myself responsibilities that the Lord does not give me to bear."⁴

¹EGW, Colporteur Ministry, 126. See 123-130.

²EGW, 1SM, 27.

³EGW, 3SM, 32.

⁴Ibid., 51.

Full Inspiration or Her Opinion

Ellen White avowed that she did not write out her own opinions. However, some who "acknowledged that the testimonies were from God" deigned to separate out some portions of what they thought was "Sister White's opinion and judgment."¹ Her reply to such an attitude is, "You have in this way virtually rejected the whole of the messages, which God . . . has sent you to save you."² Again she counters, "This is not my opinion" when one person "calls it a human work and casts it aside."³ "In no case have I given my own judgment or opinion. I have enough to write of what has been shown me, without falling back on my own opinions."⁴ Once more, she answers those who say, "It is only Sister White's individual opinion," by asserting, "They show that they despise the counsel of God."⁵ Not one portion of the spirit of prophecy is admitted to originate from Ellen White:

¹EGW, 3SM, 68. See also 5T, 691.

²Ibid.

³EGW, 3SM, 69.

⁴EGW, 3SM, 70. If some of it was her opinion, what difference would it make to us who can't claim prophetic inspiration? She was "trained and disciplined for a special work" by Christ (p. 46). "Is anyone else's opinion "more reliable than Sister White's?" "Is a judgment that has been under the training of God for more than fifty years of no preference to those who have not had this discipline and education?" (p. 60).

⁵EGW, 5T, 687-688.

Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord has manifested Himself through the Spirit of prophecy.¹

Her claim for all her writing ministry is clearly not that of ordinary illumination, but of divine inspiration. Like the Bible writers, the direct source is said to be God Himself. By her understanding of the revelation-inspiration process and from the evidence above, it is clear that her writings are maintained to be as fully rooted in divinity as a supernaturally given revelation. Ellen White claimed that she was influenced by nobody but God in her writing. Whether she employs the help of secretaries or copies from uninspired writers, in all her published testimonies, articles, books, letters and manuscripts, she maintains she never expressed her opinion: The origin in every case is said to be the God of the Bible.

According to the conclusion of chapter 3, Ellen White constantly implies that her writings are revelation-inspiration of divine origin by applying the phrase "spirit of prophecy" to her writings.² She even entitles one series of four books Spirit of Prophecy and another set of

¹EGW, 1SM, 27.

²See her use of the phrase "spirit of prophecy," p. 64 of this document.

nine books Testimonies for the Church.¹

This woman whom Seventh-day Adventists claim was bestowed with the divine gift of prophecy, often wrote in terms that make it unmistakable: She believed the spirit of prophecy consisted of messages transmitted directly from God. She writes, "The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy"²

Misconceptions About the Origin of
the Spirit of Prophecy

Dissection into Inspired and Uninspired

It is now evident that Ellen White claims all of what she published for public distribution is to be considered inspired. Yet today, as in her day, many "feel at perfect liberty to accept or reject any part of the whole."³ Her answer is predictable, "Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven, and what is the expression of mere human wisdom."⁴

The situation is analogous to the attempt by some to dissect the Scriptures, separating out a "canon within the canon." Ellen White writes that those who, "in measuring

¹EGW, 5T, 681.

²EGW, 3SM, 30. See the appendix.

³EGW, 5T, 674.

⁴EGW, 5T, 691. See also Letter 8, 1860.

by their finite rule that which is inspired and that which is not inspired . . . have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us."¹ She declares, "The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this."²

Some sit in judgment on the Scriptures, declaring that this or that passage is not inspired . . . Others for different reasons question portions of the Word of God. Thus many walk blindly where the enemy prepares the way. Now, it is not the province of any man to pronounce sentence upon the Scriptures, to judge or condemn any portion of God's Word. . . . When a man feels so very wise that he dares to dissect God's Word, his wisdom is, with God, counted foolishness.³

However, some individuals equivocate about the compilations of quotations assembled since Ellen White's death. Although there inevitably must be some bias involved in chapter headings or arrangement, Ellen White provides for compilations and authorizes such work in her will.⁴ To minimize distortion and provide greater accessibility, the EGW Estate recently instituted a policy to release entire documents into the public domain rather than bits and pieces.⁵

¹EGW, 1SM, 17.

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid., 42.

⁴Her whole will is in Nichol, Ellen G. White and Her Critics, 674-678. Provision for "printing of compilations" is specifically stated in article 5, paragraph 2.

⁵Ellen G. White Estate, "Policy Changes for Manuscript Releases," Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University (Berrien Springs, MI), Minutes of the Meeting of the

The Question of Infallibility

At one time Ellen White seemingly gives impetus to this type of dissection by writing, "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible."¹ About the Holy Scriptures, she asserts they are an "infallible revelation of His will."² Yet she also admits, "God and heaven alone are infallible."³ These apparently contradictory statements require investigation.

What does this word "infallible" mean, and how did she generally use it? Webster defines it as follows: (1) "incapable of error: unerring"; (2) "not liable to mislead, deceive, or disappoint: certain"; (3) "incapable of error in defining doctrines touching faith or morals."⁴ From the first definition, "infallible" seems to mean the same as inerrant,⁵ which was rejected as not properly representing Ellen White's concept of revelation-inspiration.⁶ But the

Board of Trustees of the EGW Estate, 9 May 1991, 4337-4340.

¹EGW, 1SM, 37.

²EGW, GC, vii.

³EGW, 1SM, 37.

⁴Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1976), 590. The 1897 definition is similar.

⁵Note that Webster conversely defines "inerrant" as "free from error: infallible" (Ibid., 589).

⁶"The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language . . . [but] in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect" (EGW, 1SM, 20).

second and third definitions are acceptable as a reference to Scripture. Conversely, however, only God could properly be labeled as inerrant under any of the three definitions. Thus, a prophet's writings can be referred to as infallible even though the writer cannot be.

A CD-ROM search reveals this pattern is continued in all of Ellen White's published works: fifty times she uses the word "infallible" in conjunction with "Scripture", forty-six times while mentioning the Bible, but never in a positive way referring to any person but God.¹ Men are said to be "erring and fallible . . . for no man is infallible."² "Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible."³

The question of Ellen White's personal fallibility has been confused with the infallibility of her writings.⁴ In the aforementioned quotations, she could with all consistency refer to her own works as infallible although she and other prophets certainly were not. Despite the fact that the spirit of prophecy is not considered "inerrant," Ellen

¹There were hundreds of negative references to men, their opinions, ministers, the Roman church and a few to Ellen White herself as not infallible.

²EGW, Testimonies to Ministers, 376.

³EGW, LSM, 416.

⁴Roger Coon, for one, didn't confuse the two, but he didn't quite draw his reasoning to conclusion (Coon, "Inspiration/Revelation," conclusion of part 2).

White considers it all as "infallible" according to the second and third of Webster's definitions.¹

The real problem at this point is discernment between the common and the sacred. The inconsequential details which render Scripture or the spirit of prophecy to be "errant" is a human aspect, indivisibly combined with the divine. Or to put it positively, the infallible divine messages overshadow the human aspects of details and cannot be accurately separated by the uninspired.

Yet there is admonition in the spirit of prophecy about the separation of the common and the sacred.

There are many dreams arising from the common things of life, with which the Spirit of God has nothing to do. . . . But dreams from the Lord are classed in the word of God with visions, and are as truly the fruits of the Spirit of prophecy as visions.²

Both Ellen White's personal diaries and her letters show a clear distinction between the common and the sacred: To her son Edson and his wife Emma, she pens, "I wrote you a letter on common, everyday topics. . . . I have written a long letter on the subject spoken of in your letter and have given it out to be copied."³ Here she clearly

¹This is discussed in the next chapter under the section on doctrinal guidance. As Webster defines "infallible," the spirit of prophecy is "not liable to mislead, deceive, or disappoint" and includes no "error in defining doctrines touching faith or morals."

²EGW, 5T, 658.

³EGW, 3SM, 59-60. See also Arthur L. White, "Common or Uninspired Writings."

distinguishes between two different kinds of letters, one to family members about her household matters, the other about a spiritual subject, to be copied before being sent out.

Ellen White's distinction between the sacred and common accounts for her statement about thirty-eight rooms instead of the correct number of forty rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium. This number was written in a letter to a co-worker in southern California and picked up by someone else as a reason for rejecting the spirit of prophecy.

There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know. In my words, when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord. . . . For one to mix the sacred and common is a great mistake. . . . There are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God.¹

We should be able to discern what is obviously common or sacred in unpublished family letters and personal biographical diaries. Fortunately, the workers at the Ellen G. White Estate are generally able both to distinguish the difference and to accurately portray such elements in Ellen White's published works. However, about

¹EGW, 1SM, 38-39.

the fine distinction between the divine and human in Ellen White's writings, it would be better to defer such judgment to a prophet. When concerned with inspired writings such as the spirit of prophecy, we cannot equivocate but must accept or reject the whole.

CHAPTER V

ELLEN WHITE'S CLAIMS ABOUT THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Most questions about the spirit of prophecy ultimately impinge on the matter of its relative authority. The previous investigation serves as preparation for a study of this topic. The question is asked, "How does Sister White know in regard to the matters of which she speaks so decidedly, as if she had authority to say these things?"¹ One can expect people to try to measure the character of Ellen White's work. But problems occur when "their own mind and judgment is the standard by which they would weigh the testimonies." She writes that by doing this, they are "sure to err in their conclusions."²

For Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White's ministry is declared to be a manifestation of the prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit, a "continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance,

¹EGW, 1SM, 37.

²Ibid., 49.

instruction, and correction."¹ It is accepted that her commission "embraces the work of a prophet" although her work is also said to be more than that of a prophet.² By her definition, a prophet is "one who spoke by direct inspiration, communicating to the people the messages he had received from God."³

As an avowed messenger of God, Ellen White claimed that her writings, the spirit of prophecy, speak for Him. Investigation into her understanding of the phrase "spirit of prophecy" reveals that just by applying this title to her writings, she believes them to be the voice of Christ or the "testimony of Jesus."⁴

The Authority Derives From Its Origin

As shown in the previous chapter, Ellen White believes that what she speaks and writes originates in God. She claimed that her work was influenced by nobody but God and that her secretaries made no instrumental changes in her messages. According to her understanding of the revelation-inspiration process, she is at liberty to make use of uninspired sources to describe what she was shown by

¹"Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 7.

²EGW, 1SM, 34-36.

³EGW, Education, 46.

⁴Cf. pp. 64-65 of this document. See also the first four EGW quotations in the appendix, especially Patriarchs and Prophets, 366-367.

God. Therefore she claims that her writings are not her own opinion but messages that God gave to her. Any suggestion to the contrary is an insult to the Lord Himself!

Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord has manifested Himself through the Spirit of Prophecy.¹

Ellen White consistently maintains there was One behind her, "which is the Lord," and He prompted the messages.² "The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy."³

Kenneth Kantzer shows that the authority of Scripture is based on its inspiration originating in God.⁴ Because God is likewise the originator of the spirit of prophecy, Ellen White comes to the same decisive conclusion: "God has been speaking to His people in the Testimonies of His spirit, in the Spirit of Prophecy."⁵ It is precisely here where she claims the authority of the spirit of prophecy rests.

¹EGW, 1SM, 27. See also in the appendix, Paulson Collection, 224; 1888 Materials, 808.

²EGW, 3SM, 69.

³Ibid., 30. See the appendix.

⁴Kenneth S. Kantzer, "The Authority of the Bible," in Readings in Christian Theology, vol. 1, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 168.

⁵EGW, Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, 213 in the appendix. Notice also the two quotations from 1888 Materials and the one from 8T.

"I speak the words of the Lord, with the authority that He gives me, and then I leave the matter in His hands, knowing that I have done my duty. This I must do, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. But I am not to speak words of my own, lest I weaken the testimony God gives me."¹

This has been the historic position of the SDA Church.² If one affirms that Ellen White was a prophet of God (or more than a prophet), then it is simply inconsistent to deny the authority she claimed for the spirit of prophecy. The authority is exactly the same as if God Himself was speaking.

The Spirit of Prophecy and the Bible

Statements About the Bible

Ellen White always maintains the supreme position of the Bible as our rule in matters of Christian faith and practice: "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. . . . The Bible [is] our rule of faith and discipline."³ "I recommend to you, dear reader,

¹EGW, Letter 145, 1902, quoted by Arthur L. White, The Ellen White Writings, 144.

²Since the early days the General Conference has periodically made resolutions such as, "The testimonies of Sister White [are] the teachings of the Holy Spirit" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "General Conference Proceedings," R&H, 25 November 1873; 14 February 1871).

³EGW, 1SM, 416. See also for more examples: 2SM, 85; Fundamentals of Christian Education, 126; idem, Counsels to Writers and Editors (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 145.

the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that word we are to be judged."¹

She presented the Scriptures as the supreme standard of all authority: "The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."² Although the spirit of prophecy carries the same authority as though God were speaking, somehow "we are to receive God's word as supreme authority."³ This apparent paradox is discussed in the next section.

The Relationship to the Bible

Similar in Authority

That the phrase "Word of God" refers to the Bible seems to be the natural assumption when reading the above statements. But Ellen White also refers to the spirit of prophecy as "the words of God."⁴ She also writes, "Permit me to express my mind, and yet not my mind, but the word of the Lord."⁵ This position is consistent with the earlier

¹EGW, Early Writings, 78. See also Counsels on Sabbath School Work, 84.

²EGW, GC, vii.

³EGW, 6T, 402.

⁴EGW, 1SM, 40.

⁵EGW, 3SM, 70.

conclusion that by using the phrases "testimony of Jesus" and "spirit of prophecy" in reference to her writings, Ellen White claims they are the "word of God."¹

Thus Ellen White uses the same elevated phrase to refer to her writings that is ordinarily only applied to the Bible. Notice again that she includes the communications of prophets of old under the broader usage of the term "spirit of prophecy."² Since her concept of the divine revelation-inspiration process does not allow differing degrees of inspiration, and since she claims the same operation of the Holy Spirit was involved in her work as with the Bible writers, did she believe her writings were equal to those of Scripture? Do they hold the same authority?

"Lesser Light" and "Greater Light"

Ellen White says that the Lord "has not given any additional light to take the place of His Word."³ The testimonies are to exalt the word of God, and to attract minds and direct men to it.⁴ Her work is "to open the

¹Cf. pp. 64-65 of this document.

²Cf. p. 62 of this document. For examples see the appendix, Testimonies to Ministers, 114; Patriarchs and Prophets, 366-367; 8T, 298; The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, 156.

³EGW, 3SM, 29. See also 5T, 663, 665.

⁴EGW, 5T, 665; 1SM, 46. See also 2T, 454-455, 606.

Scriptures to others as God [had] opened them to [her]."¹ Through the spirit of prophecy God speaks "to lead the minds of His people to the Bible teaching."² Mrs. S. M. I. Henry referred to the spirit of prophecy as "My Telescope," "a lens through which to look at the truth, . . . the Bible."³ Ellen White calls it "a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."⁴

If the spirit of prophecy is declared to bear the same origin and comes to us through the same process as Scripture, why is it a "lesser light," not equal to the Bible even though it is also the word of God? There is only one reason to be found stated in the spirit of prophecy: The Bible is the supreme standard, as concluded in section 1.⁵

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. . . . Never do we want any soul to bring in the testimonies ahead of the Bible.⁶

¹EGW, 8T, 236.

²EGW, Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, 213. See the appendix.

³S. M. I. Henry, "My Telescope," The Gospel of Health, January 1898, reprinted in Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy (Washington, DC: EGW Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1961), 68.

⁴EGW, Colporteur Ministry (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1953), 125.

⁵See p. 99 of this document.

⁶EGW, Evangelism (Washington, DC: RH, 1970), 256.

Although a standard may be made of the same material and be equal in every other respect to another genuine article, the latter holds a higher status just because it is the standard to which all others are compared. At the United States National Bureau of Standards, Gaithersburg, Maryland, lie the national reference standards of length and mass which are preserved in a temperature and humidity controlled environment. The National Bureau of Weights and Measures uses "working standards" for everyday comparison to other samples, but they are indistinguishable from the reference standards. The only difference is that the reference standard is accepted as the supreme article by which all others are compared.

In an analogous manner, the Christian community has agreed that the standard of faith and practice is the canon of Scripture. Over the centuries, its origin in God and the effect on people's lives have been tested and found to be true by the Christian community. Other prophetic works accurately measuring up to this supreme standard are accepted as genuine, yet by consensus the standard still remains on a higher level of authority.¹ Ellen White maintains that the testimonies "never contradict" the Word.² After comparison with the standard, Seventh-day Adventists

¹Credit must be given for this analogy to Roger Coon ("Inspiration/Revelation," part three) and John Robertson (The White Truth, 58-59).

²EGW, 3SM, 32.

have historically come to the same conclusion.¹ The consensus of agreement regarding what ought to be the standard is not arbitrary. The distinction between the supreme standard and the "lesser light" is not because there is any material difference between the spirit of prophecy and the Bible. They are both the genuine article, equal in every respect, except the Scriptures were written first. As the writings of the New Testament authors were tested by the Old Testament canon,² so Ellen White's writings must be tested by the whole of the Bible today. Furthermore, if a new prophet arises, such a person's work must then be tested not just by the Bible, but also by the spirit of prophecy.

"New Light" and "Old Light"

With genuine revelation-inspiration, "new light" never contradicts "old light," and often does not bear much new information. For instance, Jesus in His walk to Emmaus with His disciples, used only Moses and the Old Testament prophets to reveal "the things concerning Himself."³ "New

¹See for example, the first published statement in James White "A Word to the 'Little Flock'", 13. Also, Uriah Smith "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?" as mentioned in the literature review (p. 14 of this document).

²Peter, John and Paul would no doubt be shocked if they were to see how their writings are now considered part of the supreme standard. Their standard consisted of only the Old Testament canon.

³Luke 24:13-27.

light" may only build on what has been previously revealed but perhaps was incomprehensible, misunderstood or unappreciated. Ellen White believes this is the true method of what is sometimes called "progressive revelation":

In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are all essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new. . . . But it is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old.¹

The fact that the Bible is older explains why Ellen White lifted up the Scriptures, even though the spirit of prophecy is to her just as much the word of the Lord. Robert Olson's implication is counter to this position when he objects to using Ellen White's writings as "an inspired commentary on Scripture" because that would make her "the determinative final arbiter of what Scripture means."² If

¹EGW, Christ's Object Lessons (Washington, DC: RH, 1941), 127-128. "Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word. The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the work of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested" (GC, vii).

²See Olson, "Olson Discusses the Veltman Study," 17. Also see comments in the review of literature, pp. 13-14, 23 of this document.

Olson fully understood that both originated from God, then he would have to acknowledge there is no discrepancy between the standard and the other genuine article. Thus no arbiter is necessary. Scripture is still the standard, the supreme authority.

Canonical Prophets and Other Prophets

Some have called Ellen White a "non-canonical prophet" (or an "extra-biblical prophet") which implies that if her inspiration is not of a lesser degree, her writings might at least hold a lesser authority or might be limited in their application.¹ Roger Coon points out that the "canonical prophet" David bore a rebuke from the "non-canonical prophet" Nathan, so there is evidently no difference in authority. Whenever Jesus speaks through any person in human history, the message bears His ultimate authority. Perhaps it is more fitting to refer to Ellen White as a "post-biblical prophet."² Such a designation is less likely to diminish the prophet's authority. The spirit of prophecy may then be uplifted as a manifestation of the word of the Lord, not less useful in its application but in several ways more so: (1) it is contemporary, (2) it is written in modern English, and (3) there is such an abundance of material in the spirit of prophecy.

¹[Froom et al.], Questions on Doctrine, 90.

²This is the term used in [Damsteegt], Seventh-day Adventists Believe (222).

Areas of Authority

General Principles and Personal Counsel

Ellen White contends that the purposes of the spirit of prophecy are both far-reaching and personal. She explains that the messages which God gave "aided in laying the foundation of this work," and continually attended it with "reproofs, warnings, corrections, and encouragements."¹ She declares, "I was directed to bring out general principles, and at the same time to specify the dangers, errors, and sins of some individuals, that all might be warned, reproved, and counseled."² The general principles mentioned were the same as those in the Bible, dealing with "the formation of correct habits of living."³ These were "to instruct concerning God's will, and the course that He would have them pursue,"⁴ to clarify "man's duty to God and to his fellow men."⁵

Personal counsel is given for individuals, in private testimonial letters and interviews:

For the last forty-five years the Lord has been revealing to me . . . the cases of individuals in every phase of experience, showing where and how they have failed to perfect Christian character. The

¹EGW, 1SM, 43.

²EGW, 5T, 660.

³Ibid., 663-664.

⁴Ibid., 661.

⁵Ibid., 665.

history of hundreds of cases has been presented to me, . . . in order that I might see the dangers which threaten souls, and instruct and warn His people.¹

This work involved calling attention to the neglected "words of inspiration". Ellen White explains, "The Lord designs to warn . . . to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress . . . minds with the importance of the truth of His word."² Her special work was to urge all to search the Scriptures for themselves.³ The testimonies "point out defects of character, and rebuke . . . sins."⁴ A testimony letter was often "to set before the back-slider and the sinner his true condition and the immense loss he is sustaining by continuing a life of sin."⁵ However, positive encouragement was almost always held out for the faithful soul.

Painful though it has been to me, I have faithfully set before the offenders their faults and the means of remedying them. . . . Thus has the Spirit of God pronounced warnings and judgments, withholding not, however, the sweet promise of mercy.⁶

Thus the spirit of prophecy was to bear an uplifting effect, "for the comfort of [God's] people,"⁷ "to

¹Ibid., 585-586.

²Ibid., 655.

³Ibid., 686.

⁴Ibid., 674.

⁵EGW, 2T, 608. See also 4T, 13.

⁶EGW, 5T, 661.

⁷EGW, Early Writings, 78.

encourage the desponding and fainting soul,"¹ reproof in love and presenting "the righteousness of Christ."² Ellen White was to "go out among the people and present the truth"³ and "to prepare a people to stand in the day of the Lord."⁴ Therefore, the claims of Ellen White go well beyond her personal experience. The spirit of prophecy reaches out to specific individuals and bears relevance to others. The spirit of prophecy also contains general principles that should apply universally.

Organizational Guidance

According to Ellen White, the spirit of prophecy is not only a sure counsel for individuals, but it is also for the guidance of the church: "For the last forty-five years the Lord has been revealing to me the needs of His cause."⁵ She wrote extensively in the areas of health, education and publishing ministry.⁶ There are counsels about work in

¹EGW, R&H, 10 January 1856.

²EGW, 1SM, 53.

³EGW, 5T, 655.

⁴EGW, 1SM, 56.

⁵EGW, 5T, 685.

⁶Three books are compiled from her writings on education: Education, Fundamentals of Christian Education, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, & Students; three on publishing: Colporteur Ministry, Counsels to Writers and Editors, idem, Publishing Ministry (Hagerstown, MD: RH, 1983); five on health: idem, Counsels on Diet and Foods (Washington, DC: RH, 1976), idem, Counsels on Health (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1957), idem, Medical Ministry,

cities,¹ in city training centers,² in outpost centers and suburbs³ and in rural areas.⁴ There are special directions about unity⁵ and organization of the church,⁶ and establishment and operation of church institutions. For example,

Christ embraced the world in His missionary work, and the Lord has shown me by revelation that it is not His plan for large centers to be made, for large institutions to be established, and for the funds of our people in all parts of the world to be exhausted in the support of a few large institutions, when the necessities of the times call for something to be done, as Providence opens the way, in many places.⁷

Doctrinal Guidance

There is considerable doctrinal teaching in the spirit of prophecy, which is the point of focus for most of the questions and criticism. Some, such as Arthur Patrick, claim that Ellen White's use of Scripture is more homiletic than doctrinal, not always expressing "the meaning and

(Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1963), idem, The Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1942), idem, Temperance (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1949).

¹e.g. EGW, Evangelism, 36-42, 384-406.

²e.g. *ibid.*, 107-109.

³e.g. *ibid.*, 76-78.

⁴e.g. *ibid.*, 45-52.

⁵e.g. EGW, 3T, 361.

⁶e.g. EGW, Evangelism, 93-118.

⁷EGW, Counsels on Health, 214.

intent of the Bible."¹ This is true to a minor extent. For example, she once loosely quoted Eccl 7:29, saying "God made man upright" when encouraging the discipline of sitting and standing straight.² But the spirit of prophecy also expounds the same text in its proper Scripture sense,³ and the percentage of this type of usage is overwhelmingly higher than where homiletical license is taken.

Interpretation of Scripture

The early experiences of Ellen White illustrate how her experiences of revelation-inspiration helped bring understanding of the Bible to the pioneers. During a series of meetings where the doctrinal foundations of the SDA message were laid, the spirit of prophecy brought clarity as follows:

When they came to the point in their study where they said, "We can do nothing more," the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively. Thus the

¹Patrick, 9. This is similar to Ford's position (see this thesis, 22). The reference Patrick gives for this implication is misleading. He footnotes the entire article by Raymond Cottrell, "Ellen G. White's Evaluation and Use of the Bible," in A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 143-161. Cottrell lists twelve modes of her usage of Scripture, of which only one is "borrowing words . . . without implying an attempt to explicate Scripture" (154-161).

²EGW, Education, 198.

³EGW, Patriarch and Prophets, 49.

light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood.¹

The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error. As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me. I was given illustrations of heavenly things, and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays."²

Ellen White writes that her books contain expositions as to the proper interpretation of the Bible, that they "are a living witness to what saith the Scriptures."³ She believed what she wrote clearly separated truth from error: "It has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth. The Lord has revealed many things pointing out the truth, thus saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it.'"⁴ She writes that God chose to teach through the spirit of prophecy what is truth and error in interpretation of the Bible.⁵ She says, "The Lord has given special testimonies to His people . . . not as a new revelation," but to teach plainly the "lessons of His Word" and

¹EGW, 1SM, 206-207.

²EGW, 3SM, 32. See also 3SM, 38; Spiritual Gifts, vol. 2, 47-49, 97-99; 1T, 75-87; Testimonies to Ministers, 24-26.

³EGW, Publishing Ministry, 358.

⁴EGW, 3SM, 32.

⁵EGW, 1SM, 40. See also 5T, 663.

point out the right way.¹ Providentially, information was often revealed through the spirit of prophecy just in time to meet erroneous doctrine.²

The Dependability of Doctrinal Statements

Is it possible that the counsels of the spirit of prophecy are "flexible" or perhaps can be bent different ways according to circumstances?³ Would Ellen White accept this suggestion and risk undermining the authority of the teachings in the spirit of prophecy? In response to this kind of idea, she writes, "Through His Holy Spirit the voice of God has come to us continually in warning and instruction, to confirm the faith of the believers in the Spirit of prophecy . . . in the position they have taken."⁴ Perhaps it may sometimes appear that certain statements are contradictory, but she would not retract one word: "I

¹EGW, 3SM, 31. See also 3SM, 29; 5T, 665.

²For example, EGW, 1SM, 160-162, 193-208; 2SM, 101-118. See This Day with God, 317.

³George Knight raises this possibility in Myths in Adventism (Washington, DC: RH, 1985). In the first chapter, "The Myth of the Inflexible Prophet," he writes that there is a confusion between "prophetic authority" and "the divine gift of human reason" (17). Although he makes a good point that God expects us to be reasonable, he seems to hold human reason above the divine gift of prophecy. This leads him to search for situations where the advice of Ellen White appears to contradict statements she wrote under inspiration (20-22, 24). Thus she is "proven" to be "flexible." But does this mean that the spirit of prophecy can be superseded by reason?

⁴EGW, 1SM, 41.

shall write just as God bids me write. What I have written, I have written. Every word is truth."¹ It is better to say the spirit of prophecy is "well balanced," encouraging thorough study and careful compliance while at the same time not giving countenance to extremes.²

As to the reliability and accuracy of the doctrinal statements in the spirit of prophecy, late in life Ellen White asserted that all she had written was dependable and authoritative. In 1905 she wrote: "There is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence in that which I have written. This, I am instructed, is to be a living letter to all in regard to my faith."³ In addition, this is a statement of her own faith in all that ever flowed into her mind and out through her pen. The revelations from God contained in the spirit of prophecy are necessary today. It is asserted that one who accepts them would be protected against delusion:

All who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days.⁴

¹EGW, Letter 95, 1905, quoted by Arthur L. White, The Ellen G. White Writings, 143. In EGW to Dr. Burke, letter B35, 1891 she stated, "I will not retract one syllable."

²EGW often warns about extremes, and taking "the extreme meaning of what has been shown in vision." See 1T, 166 for this example.

³EGW, 3SM, 52.

⁴Ibid., 84. See also Colporteur Ministry, 129-130.

Authority for Different Audiences

Timeless Relevance

Recently some have been suggesting that Ellen White changed her views over the period of her lifetime. Fred Veltman sees some "correction" or "modification" in her position as she grew older.¹ Martin Weber devotes a whole chapter in his latest book to develop his contention: "Ellen White initially held a number of convictions that later changed as the Holy Spirit guided her understanding."² Yet in 1905 she preempted this challenge: "At

¹Veltman writes, "My study of her writings on the life of Christ has given me the impression that some of her views changed through time. The very fact that the DA [Desire of Ages] text represents a revision of her earlier work suggests that her writings form a textual tradition. . . . Her latest view might well be a correction or at least a modification of an earlier position" (Fred Veltman, "The Desire of Ages Project: the Conclusions," Ministry, December 1990, 13). However, if a person expands on a theme, it is not necessarily "changed," "revised" or "modified" in the sense Veltman implies. Olson in the same issue of Ministry perhaps unwittingly accedes to this position by stating, "I consider the later writings to be more precise—more accurate—than some of her earlier ones" (Olson, 17). His choice of the word "accurate" implies there may have been something "inaccurate" in previous publications, which involves a much broader concept than "errancy." Arthur Patrick has picked up the same idea: "While she often helped the church develop and express its theology, her doctrinal understandings underwent both growth and change during her lifetime of ministry" (Patrick, 9).

²Martin Weber, Adventist Hot Potatoes (Boise, ID: PPP, 1991), 106. Weber starts with the same idea that puzzled Olson ("Olson Discusses the Veltman Study"; see this thesis, 104). Weber says, "Anything that defines Scripture threatens to replace it as the final authority" (104). However, the Spirit of Prophecy does not replace the

this meeting I had opportunity to state decidedly that my views have not changed."¹ Again in 1907 she wrote that she would not change what she had earlier declared, "The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days."²

If what Ellen White presented is not her own judgment or opinion but the word of the Lord,³ how could it be essentially changed later on?⁴ She claims that what she wrote in the past was "without one heretical sentence."⁵ Writing about the early doctrinal conferences, she says, "Point after point was established by the Lord God of

authority of Scripture, but it replaces the authority of any other source which improperly interprets Scripture, namely, one which is inconsistent with the divine intent of Scripture itself.

¹EGW, 3SM, 73.

²EGW, 1SM, 41. See also 9T, 158 (from 1909).

³See 3SM, 70.

⁴Weber thinks that as new light was revealed to Ellen White, some of what was earlier revealed through her might have been erroneous (Adventist Hot Potatoes, 106-108). (On how new light does not contradict old light see this thesis, 103-104.) Weber introduces this theory by referring to the erroneous teachings of Martin Luther, the inaccuracy of the Millerites and a mistaken idea of the disciples of John the Baptist (105). Unfortunately he fails to realize that in contrast to Ellen White, Luther, Miller and John's disciples were not prophets.

⁵EGW, 3SM, 52. As noted before, this was also in 1905.

heaven. That which was truth then, is truth today."¹ To reiterate what was discovered above, her understanding of a progression in revelation does not mean that past revelations are altered. On the contrary, new truth can only build on the foundation laid before. Ellen White writes, "When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth."²

Another question is pertinent: Was the spirit of prophecy written only for the time of Ellen White, the 1800s and the turn of the century? This issue is engendered by referring to her as an "extra-canonical prophet" rather than a "post-canonical prophet," because the implication is that all prophets not included as writers of the canon were irrelevant to other times and situations. Thus, the idea of a "local prophet" is attached to Ellen White, one whose messages are marginally applicable to current issues.³

However, Ellen White declares, "Each of the ancient prophets spoke less for their own time than for ours, so that their prophesying is in force for us."⁴ Likewise, the spirit of prophecy was given especially for the future:

¹EGW, 2SM, 104.

²EGW, 1SM, 161.

³See what Colin Standish says about this issue: Osbourne, "The Spirit of Prophecy," tape 4, part 2.

⁴EGW, 3SM, 338. Ellen White quotes from 1 Cor 10:11, 1 Pet 1:12.

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.¹

Ellen White believed the spirit of prophecy would be even more valuable after her death: "When He may see fit to let me rest, His messages shall be of even more vital force than when the frail instrumentality through whom they were delivered, was living."² In reference to the early doctrinal conferences she wrote, "A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me."³ It is clear that according to Ellen White, the spirit of prophecy is not irrelevant today nor will it ever become so: "My writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last."⁴

Cross-Cultural Relevance

Still, is it not true that the culture was different in 1900 than it is today? Patrick's version of an affirmation for the spirit of prophecy reads, "Ellen White's

¹EGW, GC, xi.

²EGW, 3SM, 77.

³EGW, 1SM, 207.

⁴Ibid., 55.

writings make a striking appeal to timeless truth even though they are historically conditioned to a significant degree."¹ True, there are some differences, but compared to the Bible times of two thousand years ago the spirit of prophecy is definitely contemporary, presenting little significant divergence from our own situation. The medical understanding portrayed in the spirit of prophecy has proven to be far in advance of Ellen White's day,² and may contain information that is yet to be discovered.

Another question of culture may linger in the minds of some from foreign lands: Is the spirit of prophecy only for the North Americans? Ellen White responds, "Sister White is not the originator of these books. . . . They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servant to be given to the world. . . . The Lord has declared that these books are to be scattered throughout the world."³

Inter-Denominational Relevance

From the book Questions on Doctrine, a final question is raised: "We do not think of them [the spirit of

¹Patrick, 9.

²See, for example what Roger Coon documents in A Gift of Light, (Hagerstown, MD: RH, 1983), chapter 4 entitled "A Scientist Looks at Ellen G. White."

³EGW, Colporteur Ministry, 125. See also pp. 122, 124. The books she refers to are usually GC, Patriarchs and Prophets, Christ's Object Lessons, and idem, The Desire of Ages, (Mountain View, CA: PPP, 1940).

prophecy writings] as of universal application, as is the Bible, but particularly for the Seventh-day Adventist Church."¹ However, the above Ellen White quotation showed she believed her books were to be "scattered throughout the world." Even more pointedly she says, "I have a work of great responsibility to do—to impart by pen and voice the instruction given to me, not alone to Seventh-day Adventists, but to the world."²

A balancing statement was recently published that may seem to sustain a position against the use of the spirit of prophecy for people who are not Adventists: "In public labor, do not make prominent and quote that which Sister White had written as authority to sustain your positions. . . . Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God."³ But the explanation was given twice in the testimonies, the second time under the heading, "Wrong Use of the Testimonies."

Some who believe the Testimonies have erred by urging them unduly upon others. . . . I stated that some had taken an unwise course; when they had talked their faith to unbelievers, and the proof had been asked for, they had read from my writings, instead of going to the Bible for proof. It was shown me that this course was inconsistent, and would prejudice unbelievers against the truth. The Testimonies can have

¹Questions on Doctrine, 89.

²EGW, 8T, 236.

³EGW, Manuscript Releases, vol. 5, 140.

no weight with those who know nothing of their spirit. They should not be referred to in such cases.¹

The spirit of prophecy still bears a powerful message for people of all denominations, even though they may not accept it as the word of the Lord. The writings of Ellen White should not be quoted as doctrinal support for those who do not accept the authority of them. But for Seventh-day Adventists who accept Ellen White as a prophet, the only consistent course is to accept what the spirit of prophecy has to say.² On the basis of Ellen White's statements concerning the origin and resultant authority of the spirit of prophecy, this study concludes that Ellen White viewed her writings as presenting the messages of Jesus Himself, to all people everywhere and to the end of the age.

¹EGW, 5T, 668-669.

²Still, it is not to be taken as a rule to measure all, (EGW, 1T, 382-383) and not to be made a test of fellowship (ibid., 327-329).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, questions about the authority and role of the spirit of prophecy have usually been answered only as they arise.¹ This investigation focused on Ellen White's understanding of the spirit of prophecy in order to delineate a consistent foundational position about her writings. Not only would such a position be expected to answer current questions in a more harmonious manner, but it should be helpful in resolving new questions in the future. Ellen White felt that these issues would become more and more important:

As the end draws near, and the work of giving the last warning to the world extends, it becomes more important for those who accept present truth to have a clear understanding of the nature and influence of the Testimonies.²

Adventists consider Ellen White a prophet while her written works are accepted as an "authoritative source of truth."³ To be consistent with this, her understanding of

¹For example, [Froom et al.], Questions on Doctrine and Olson, One Hundred and One Questions.

²EGW, 5T, 654.

³SDA Yearbook, 7.

the issues involved should bear a major role in the foundational positions about her work. Therefore, this investigation sought to determine what Ellen White herself understood about the root issues regarding her writings.

Research brought to light that although there was an abundance of literature about the spirit of prophecy, most was apologetic in nature and marginally related to the systematic method of investigation in this study. Although certain articles and a few books were helpful, most of the study was conducted directly from the published works of Ellen White. The CD-Rom in the Ellen G. White Research Center at Andrews University proved an invaluable aid in computer-assisted word search studies.

Summary of General Conclusions

Because concepts vary about what is called "revelation" and "inspiration," the first step in this systematic study was to define terms. Starting with the working definitions as listed in the introduction, it was discovered that Ellen White's understanding is somewhat different than expected: She usually employs the two terms interchangeably. When studying the writings of Ellen White, theologians would be on stronger ground to consider the operation as one single process of revelation-inspiration. Unless there is special care to prevent it, separation of the two terms can introduce subtle, unwarranted effects into subsequent considerations which

build on the concept of revelation-inspiration as a presupposition.

Ellen White's concept of revelation-inspiration involves a combination of divine and human activity which is based on the model of "thought inspiration" rather than "verbal inspiration." As traditionally taught by the SDA Church, this allows editing of her works and errors in detail marginally relevant to the subject matter. Even considering that Ellen White had help from secretaries and quoted uninspired sources, mainly for efficient causal purposes her consistent position is that all the information originated in God. She claims nobody else but God materially influenced the messages. Consequently all of what she published could be considered infallible even though she herself was not infallible.¹

The phrase "spirit of prophecy" is sometimes used in a broader sense by Ellen White, encompassing more than her writings. However, by employing this phrase in reference to her works, she implies that Jesus Himself was speaking through them. Since she claimed God was the originator of the spirit of prophecy, it is consistent that she maintained the authority manifested is that of God speaking.

The purported relationship between the spirit of prophecy and the Bible is that which would be expected

¹Infallible does not mean inerrant. See p. 51 in this document about inerrancy and p. 90 about infallibility.

according to Ellen White's concept of progressive revelation: New light never contradicts what was taught by the Spirit in the past, but instead is like an "unfolding of truth that glorifies the old [truth]." ¹ Thus she declares that the spirit of prophecy "never contradicts" the Bible. ² In the writings of Ellen White, the only stated difference between the spirit of prophecy and the Bible is that the latter is the supreme standard by which all other manifestations of the Spirit must be tested. This means there is no material difference between them, but since the canon of Scripture is older and accepted as the standard, it is still held in a higher position as the "final authority." When the spirit of prophecy proves to be consistent with the standard, it is also accepted as the genuine word of the Lord. Ellen White is considered a "post-biblical prophet" rather than a "non-canonical prophet" because all prophets of God speak with an equally authoritative, "Thus saith the Lord."

In the personal and general messages written by Ellen White there is an abundance of doctrinal teaching. The spirit of prophecy is said to explain the Scriptures, correct errors in interpreting the Bible and is purportedly "without one heretical sentence." ³ Ellen White claims that

¹EGW, GC, vii; Christ's Object Lessons, 127-128.

²EGW, 3SM, 32.

³Ibid., 52. See p. 113 of this document.

she did not change her views over the period of her lifetime.¹ The spirit of prophecy is asserted to be pertinent today, "as long as time shall last," and to be relevant to all people "throughout the world."² "When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth."³ These ideas represent the findings of this research project.

Recommendations

The results of this study should prove useful in subsequent development of a firm set of hermeneutical principles for the proper function of the spirit of prophecy in biblical study.⁴ Several statements of Ellen White indicate the same set of principles as those utilized in interpreting the Bible can also be employed in interpreting the spirit of prophecy. For example, "The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the

¹Ibid., 73; 1SM, 41; 9T, 158.

²See p. 117 of this document about timeless relevance and p. 118 about cross-cultural relevance.

³EGW, 1SM, 61.

⁴A useful statement for development of a hermeneutic for the spirit of prophecy was presented a few years ago by the Biblical Research Institute, "The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings" (Ministry, February 1983, 24). This is compatible with the findings of the present study. It could be used as a starting point, expanded and made more rigorous in light of the foundational position established in this document.

messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture."¹ This principle is reasonable, since one of the conclusions of this study is that the origin, production and the nature of the spirit of prophecy is identical to that of the Bible.

There is no higher authority on earth than one who speaks for God by the spirit of prophecy. Since Seventh-day Adventists generally agree that Ellen White was a prophet of God, the spirit of prophecy should be accepted as speaking with higher authority than any extra-biblical theories or ideas. As with the biblical prophets, that which Ellen White presents about a subject can never fully exhaust the truth of it.² In this sense the spirit of prophecy can never be the "end of all discussion" on any matter although it is still inexorable truth. Although in a certain sense the spirit of prophecy remains a "lesser light," it should be used in a manner similar to the Scriptures, by the truth of which all else may be tested. David Lin recently made a plausible suggestion, "We may

¹EGW, 1SM, 42. Note, however, that one such passage is often lifted out of context and misapplied, although the principle alluded to is probably correct: "Time and place must be considered" is taken to mean that the setting of a passage must be considered in interpretation (for example, Arthur L. White, Messenger to the Remnant, 88). But the context in this quotation is where Ellen White is speaking about the opportune timing and situation for information to be revealed. "Some matters must be withheld because some persons would make an improper use of the light given" (EGW, 1SM, 57).

²EGW, GC, vi.

liken this gift to a dispenser of the holy 'eye-salve' which the faithful and true Witness counsels us to buy."¹

That there may be some contradictions between the Bible and the spirit of prophecy (as some suggest), may seem to be a great problem in developing a hermeneutic. However, from its beginning, the SDA Church has always held that the spirit of prophecy is in perfect accord with Scripture.² Indeed, if there was any conflict observed between the two, the work of Ellen White would have been rejected at the outset.

Today the acceptance of the writings of Ellen White as a manifestation of the gift of prophecy has become one of the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church,³ but it is not made a test of fellowship. However, when a teacher or a minister employed by the church continues to seriously question this belief, after having carefully studied the subject of the spirit of prophecy, then he or she cannot properly portray the accepted SDA convictions. Perhaps such workers should be assisted in seeking

¹David Lin, sermon for the Wednesday chapel service at The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 14 May 1991.

²Perhaps the first published statement is by Uriah Smith who wrote, "These manifestations do in the strictest manner accord with the teachings of the word of God." (Uriah Smith, "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?").

³Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 7.

employment elsewhere.¹ We are all tested by the word of God to ascertain whether or not we will accept and comply with His will: "The spirit of prophecy has always distinguished the true people of God, and the test is usually given on present manifestations."²

Reflections

Having stated the conclusions and recommendations of this study, the writer offers several personal and documented observations concerning the issues of this study. Different presuppositions can lead to quite disparate conclusions. For example, consider what happens when the common theological distinction between revelation and inspiration is taken to the extreme: Alden Thompson draws from Rice's "Lucan model"³ and explains that much of Scripture as well as the spirit of prophecy is more the result of human research and compilation than divine supernatural operation.⁴ He does this by relegating his

¹Cf. 1T, 326.

²EGW, Loma Linda Messages, 33.

³This was observed to be antithetical to Ellen White's concept of the revelation-inspiration process. See p. 55 in this document.

⁴Originally presented in a series of Review articles (Alden Thompson, "Adventists and Inspiration," 4 parts, AR 5, 12, 19, 26 September 1985), the ideas were recently expanded in his book Inspiration. He refers to Rice's book for his basis (Inspiration, 48, 190-191; "Adventists and Inspiration," part four, "Letting the Bible Speak For Itself"). Note that in the third Review article Thompson also misapplies a quotation from the introduction to GC

technical definition of revelation only to that which is a supernaturally given manifestation, excluding all natural sources.¹ Then all other prophetic utterance is unrelated to revelation, an "inspiration" which is just "the Spirit's special urging of a messenger to speak or write."² Rice claims to stop short of putting this kind of writing on a lower level of inspiration or authority.³ However, the natural consequence of his idea is what Thompson does-- placing all "inspired" works on a level that is more like common illumination: Although he affirms "revelation and reason are not in conflict," in the same paragraph his uninspired reason leads him to judge that the "logic of the inspired readers is sometimes flawed."⁴

(xi): He says that the historical information Ellen White includes "came from common knowledge, not from revelation." He apparently missed where she writes on the same page, "As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed." Revelation is involved and it came before she wrote (see pp. 78-79 in this document).

¹Thompson, Inspiration, 57. His definitions of revelation, inspiration and inspiration are quite different than the working definitions for this thesis (p. 6). Note that Ellen White claims special direction in presenting what came to her through natural causes (see p. 68 in this document) and that what she writes is revealed before she consults other sources (pp. 74, 78-79).

²Thompson, Inspiration, 57. Compare with Ellen White's concept of revelation-inspiration (pp. 40-57 in this document).

³Rice, Luke, a Plagiarist?, 27.

⁴Thompson, Inspiration, 263.

The reader is drawn into a historical-critical perspective by presenting the apparent problems of Scripture. Thompson's liberal concept of inspiration allows a later prophet to misinterpret earlier prophets.¹ From this he concludes that a prophet's words are more humanly conditioned instead of divine communication.² Apparently, his objective is to eliminate the authority of the spirit of prophecy, as he bluntly states, "We should not expect Ellen White to be the definitive commentator on scripture."³ Thus his plea is for believers to be freed from all inspired guidance, "Inspired writers should not hinder ordinary believers . . . from . . . interpret[ing] the text of Scripture for themselves, *even if their interpretation may differ from that of a credentialed inspired writer.*"⁴ But while his reasoning seems to justify his conclusion, he has inadvertently succeeded in degrading the authority of all prophetic inspiration as it is no longer considered infallible.⁵

Finally, with no authoritative voice to guide him,

¹Ibid., 205-207. Thompson is widely diverging from Ellen White's position on progressive revelation; see pp. 103-105 in this document.

²See Thompson's statement about an "incarnational" view of inspiration, Inspiration, 87-97.

³Ibid., 211.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 261. Thompson directly contradicts Ellen White about infallibility (pp. 87-89, 96 in this document).

Thompson presents a false dichotomy as the only two alternatives: Either one accedes to his "slippery slope" (inspired works are not really dependable) or one is manifesting the "Rehoboam principle" (unwillingness to reason).¹ This challenge means we must just learn to live with a faith built on sand unless, according to the author, we want to obstinately stand against all reason.

Fortunately, the contrasting firm position of Ellen White presents a "more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed."² The origin of a prophet's message is emphatically placed in God, and the authority is that of Him speaking. Extending far beyond Ellen White's own experience, Seventh-day Adventists believe that general principles of truth are revealed in the spirit of prophecy just as in the Bible. Ellen White asserts her writings are cross-cultural and relevant "as long as time shall last."³

Some may feel that it is inadvisable to retain the spirit of prophecy as a prominent factor of the SDA faith.

¹Ibid., 241 et seq. Thompson's "Rehoboam principle" is a reference to 1 Kgs 12:6-19, where Rehoboam obstinately "held to the status quo . . . failed to reason," and decided for no concessions at all.

²Loose application from 2 Pet 1:19 which originally referred to the canon of accepted Scripture, but surety is also vested in all divine prophecy. This passage of Scripture, it may be recalled, is a major point of differentiation between Rice's and Ellen White's concepts of the revelation-inspiration process (p. 55 in this document).

³EGW, 1SM, 55. See section on timeless relevance, p. 114 in this document.

Perhaps they think the principle beliefs of the church would be more acceptable if this concept was minimized.

Contrary to this idea, however, Ellen White wrote:

There are some occupying positions of responsibility who have had little experience in the working of the Holy Spirit. They do not appreciate the light in warnings, reproofs, and encouragement given to the church in these last days, because their hearts and minds have not been receiving the Spirit of divine grace. These persons are disposed to conceal the fact that in connection with the work of the third angel's message the Lord through the Spirit of prophecy has been communicating to His people a knowledge of His will. They think that the truth will be received more readily if this fact is not made prominent. But this is mere human reasoning. The very fact that this light coming to the people is not presented as having originated with human minds will make an impression upon a large class who believe that the gifts of the Spirit are to be manifested in the church in the last days. The attention of many will thus be arrested, and they will be convicted and converted. Many will thus be impressed who would not otherwise be reached.¹

To follow this advice and the conclusions and recommendations above may be seen as causing unnecessary division within the SDA Church. However, accepting and applying the consistent foundation established by this study will ultimately prove to be a more stabilizing factor for the denomination. Katherine Ching, in her study of liberal Protestant churches, recently concluded,

Churches that have allowed theological pluralism to dominate 'peripheral' doctrinal beliefs have discovered that it gradually sways all doctrinal interpretation, finally leading to theological indifference and intolerance of firm doctrinal standards.²

¹EGW, 1888 Materials, 808-809.

²Katherine Ching, "The Practice of Theological Pluralism," Adventist Perspectives 5 (1991): 11.

As mentioned at the outset, a discussion about the validity of Ellen White's claims for the spirit of prophecy lay beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the present writer clearly separates the following matter from the thesis itself.

The vital question which remains unanswered by this study is this: "Should one accept the writings of Ellen White as the voice of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy?" Every individual who prayerfully studies scripture on the subject of the spirit of prophecy and compares the writings of Ellen White with that supreme standard, can consistently entertain only one of two possible answers:

1. The writings of Ellen White are a lie and a delusion.
2. They are all true, precisely true and forever true.¹

Either the writings of Ellen White should be denounced as one of the last day deceptions, or they should be respected as God's last day gift of prophecy and accepted as an authority on matters of theology and interpretation of the Bible.

God is either teaching His church, reproofing their wrongs and strengthening their faith, or He is not. This is of God, or it is not. God does nothing in partnership with Satan. My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil.²

¹See pp. 91, 92, 117 in this document.

²EGW, 5T, 671. See also 65, 691.

APPENDIX

SIXTEEN "SPIRIT OF PROPHECY" QUOTATIONS

Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 114

We have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, which is the spirit of prophecy. Priceless gems are to be found in the word of God. Those who search this word should keep the mind clear. Never should they indulge perverted appetite in eating or drinking.

Loma Linda Messages, 33

Rev 12:17. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." This prophecy points out clearly that the remnant church will acknowledge God in His law and will have the prophetic gift. Obedience to the law of God, and the spirit of prophecy has always distinguished the true people of God, and the test is usually given on present manifestations.

Early Writings of Ellen G. White, 230-231

The angel from heaven came to John in majesty, his countenance beaming with the excellent glory of God. He revealed to John scenes of deep and thrilling interest in the history of the church of God and brought before him the perilous conflicts which Christ's followers were to endure. John saw them passing through fiery trials, made white and tried, and, finally, victorious overcomers, gloriously saved in the kingdom of God. The countenance of the angel grew radiant with joy and was exceeding glorious, as he showed John the final triumph of the church of God. As the apostle beheld the final deliverance of the church, he was carried away with the glory of the scene and with deep reverence and awe fell at the feet of the angel to worship him. The heavenly messenger instantly raised him up and gently reproved him, saying, "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The angel then showed John the heavenly city with all its splendor and dazzling glory, and he, enraptured and overwhelmed, and forgetful of the former reproof of the

angel, again fell to worship at his feet. Again the gentle reproof was given, "See thou do it not for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."

Patriarchs and Prophets, 366-367

It was Christ that spoke to His people through the prophets. The apostle Peter, writing to the Christian church, says that the prophets "prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the "Spirit of Christ" which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." 1 Pet 1:10, 11. It is the voice of Christ that speaks to us through the Old Testament. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Rev 19:10.

Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, 213

Emma should read her Bible more and storybooks less. In reading fascinating storybooks, she loses all relish for the Scriptures. God has been speaking to His people in the Testimonies of His spirit, in the Spirit of Prophecy, to lead the minds of His people to the Bible teaching, and these lie on the shelf, neglected, unread, and unheeded.
Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, 330

God has shown me much in regard to the work of Satan in Texas and the unchristian conduct of some who have moved there from Michigan. I was shown that the Brethren B have not in heart accepted the testimony which has been given them. They have more confidence in themselves than in the spirit of prophecy. They have felt that the light given was not of heaven, but that it originated from reports made to me in regard to them. This is not correct. But let me ask: Was there not foundation for reports? Does not their very life history condemn their course?

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, 298

Perilous times are before us. Everyone who has a knowledge of the truth should awake and place himself, body, soul, and spirit, under the discipline of God. The enemy is on our track. We must be wide awake, on our guard against him. We must put on the whole armor of God. We must follow the directions given through the spirit of prophecy. We must love and obey the truth for this time. This will save us from accepting strong delusions. God has spoken to us through His word. He has spoken to us through the testimonies to the church and through the books that have

helped to make plain our present duty and the position that we should now occupy. The warnings that have been given, line upon line, precept upon precept, should be heeded. If we disregard them, what excuse can we offer?

The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, 156

Jacob was an affectionate father. The words he uttered to his children were not his, spoken because he had retained an unforgiving spirit on account of their wrongs. He had forgiven them. He had loved them to the last. He mourned deeply at the loss of Joseph, and when Simeon was retained in Egypt, he manifested grief, and expressed his anxious wish that his children should return safely from Egypt with their brother Simeon. He had no resentful feeling toward his sorrowing children. But God, by the spirit of prophecy, elevated the mind of Jacob above his natural feelings. In his last hours, angels were all around him, and the power of the grace of God shone upon him. His paternal feelings would have led him to utter, in his dying testimony, only expressions of love and tenderness. But under the influence of inspiration he uttered truth, although painful.

Selected Messages, book 1, 27

"Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God. You know how the Lord has manifested Himself through the Spirit of prophecy. Past, present, and future have passed before me. I have been shown faces that I had never seen, and years afterward I knew them when I saw them. I have been aroused from my sleep with a vivid sense of subjects previously presented to my mind and I have written, at midnight, letters that have gone across the continent, and arriving at a crisis, have saved great disaster to the cause of God. This has been my work for many years. A power has impelled me to reprove and rebuke wrongs that I had not thought of. Is this work of the last thirty-six years from above or from beneath?"

Selected Messages, book 1, 41

A wealth of moral influence has been brought to us in the last half century. Through His Holy Spirit the voice of God has come to us continually in warning and instruction, to confirm the faith of the believers in the Spirit of prophecy. Repeatedly the word has come, write the things that I have given you to confirm the faith of My people in the position they have taken. Time and trial have not made void the instruction given, but through years of suffering and self-sacrifice have established the truth of the testimony

given. The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days. Those who are indifferent to this light and instruction must not expect to escape the snares which we have been plainly told will cause the rejecters of light to stumble, and fall, and be snared, and be taken. If we study carefully the second chapter of Hebrews, we shall learn how important it is that we hold steadfastly to every principle of truth that has been given.

Selected Messages, book 3, 30

The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy. These are not to be twisted and turned to mean what man may want them to mean, to carry out man's ideas and sentiments, to carry forward man's schemes at all hazards.

The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, vol. 2, 802-803

The Lord has revealed the perils that are around and before us. Through the agency of the Spirit of prophecy, He has unveiled the delusions that will take the world captive, and has spoken to His people, saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." Volume four of "The Great Controversy" unmasks the deceptions of Satan; and we may expect that the enemy of all righteousness will put forth every effort in his power to keep away from the people that which unveils his arts.

The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, vol. 2, 808-809

There are some occupying positions of responsibility who have had little experience in the working of the Holy Spirit. They do not appreciate the light in warnings, reproofs, and encouragement given to the church in these last days, because their hearts and minds have not been receiving the Spirit of divine grace. These persons are disposed to conceal the fact that in connection with the work of the third angel's message the Lord through the Spirit of prophecy has been communicating to His people a knowledge of His will. They think that the truth will be received more readily if this fact is not made prominent. But this is mere human reasoning. The very fact that this light coming to the people is not presented as having originated with human minds will make an impression upon a large class who believe that the gifts of the Spirit are to be manifested in the church in the last days. The attention of many will thus be arrested, and they will be convicted and converted. Many will thus be impressed who would not otherwise be reached.

My Life Today, 40

In His providence the Lord has seen fit to teach and warn His people in various ways. By direct command, by the sacred writings, and by the spirit of prophecy has He made known unto them His will.

The Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters, 224

Brother Burden, carry your work intelligently, even consulting the word of God; for this word is very precious to the worker in the cause. Study the messages that God has sent to His people for the last sixty years through the Spirit of Prophecy. Do not seek the counsel of men, but by earnest prayer seek the wisdom of God. A mistake has been made in the past by leaning upon the guidance of men. Seek to correct this mistake.

Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 14 June 1906

These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the spirit of prophecy. I thank God that he has preserved my voice, which in my early youth physicians and friends declared would be silent within three months. The God of heaven saw that I needed to pass through a trying experience in order to be prepared for the work he had for me to do. For the past half century my faith in the ultimate triumph of the third angel's message and everything connected with it, has been substantiated by the wonderful experiences through which I have passed. This is why I am anxious to have my books published and circulated in many languages. I know that the light contained in these books is the light of heaven.

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