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ABSTRACT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
UNDERSTANDING OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S
PROPHETIC GIFT, 1844-1889

by

Theodore N. Levterov

Adviser: George R. Knight

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
UNDERSTANDING OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S PROPHETIC GIFT,
1844-1889

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Name and degree of faculty adviser: George R. Knight, Ed.D.

Date completed: October 2011

Topic

This study is a historical investigation examining the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift between 1844 and 1889.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and analyze the stages of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen G. White's prophetic gift from 1844 through 1889 from a historical perspective only. This research is not a theological study and therefore it is beyond its scope to judge, to prove, or to disprove the prophetic gift of Ellen White. It starts with 1844 when Ellen White claimed to have received her first vision and finishes with 1889 when the major essential arguments for and against her prophetic gift were in place.

Sources

This research examined published and unpublished primary sources and documents related to Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1844 to 1889. Secondary sources were only used for background or historical context. The primary documents included periodicals, books, tracts, letters, and manuscripts written against or in defense of Ellen White. The majority of the sources were found in the General Conference Archives, the Ellen White Estate Office in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University.

Conclusions

The study identified four general stages in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift. Stage one covered the period from 1844 to 1850 during which the Sabbatarian group established some initial arguments for its acceptance of Ellen White's claim of having the gift of prophecy. Stage two examined the years from 1851 to 1862 during which the movement developed a more systematic biblical reasoning for the validity of the modern display of the gift of prophecy and saw it as one of the identifying marks of God's true people. In stage three, from 1863 to 1881, Ellen White's prophetic gift became a part of the Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs. The denomination also clarified questions related to the relationship between Ellen White's writings and the Bible. Stage four, from 1882 to 1889, refined Adventism's understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift in relation to the doctrine of inspiration and questions of suppression and plagiarism. By the end of 1889 Seventh-day Adventists had developed their major arguments for their belief in Ellen White and were convinced that she possessed the genuine gift of prophecy.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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UNDERSTANDING OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S
PROPHETIC GIFT, 1844-1889

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Theodore N. Levterov

October 2011

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AH</i>	<i>Advent Herald</i>
AU	Andrews University
CAR	Center for Adventist Research
<i>GC</i>	<i>General Conference</i>
<i>HE</i>	<i>Healdsburg Enterprise</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Midnight Cry</i>
MS	Manuscript
<i>PT</i>	<i>Present Truth</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Review and Herald</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Signs of the Times and Expositor of Prophecy</i>

PREFACE

Background of the Problem

Seventh-day Adventists, like many Protestant Christians, believe in the doctrine of spiritual gifts. The Adventists, however, differ from mainstream Protestantism in their claim to have the gift of prophecy manifested in their midst through one of their early founders—Ellen Gould White. Number 18 in the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reads:

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. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.¹

As Alfred S. Jorgensen puts it, this “is a bold claim of immense significance” and “cannot be lightly dismissed.”² Many Christians, on the other hand, have taken the New Testament statement “the Law and the Prophets were until John” in Luke 16:16 to mean

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 15.

² Alfred S. Jorgensen, *The Gift of Prophecy: The Anchor Ropes Still Hold*, Spirit of Prophecy Day Sermon (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), 4.

that there should be no more new prophets after the Apostolic Age. Thus they have denied any modern prophetic manifestations as coming from God.³

Seventh-day Adventists, however, have affirmed that the Bible teaches the continuity of spiritual gifts from their beginning in the 1840s and have accepted Ellen G. White as a legitimate prophet of God.⁴ Moreover, her prophetic gift became one of their distinctive doctrines and was soon integrated into their theological system of beliefs.⁵ While the majority of other former Millerites did not have confidence in any new visions or supernatural revelations and saw them as one of the fanatical extremes of that time,⁶ the Sabbatarians were certain that Ellen G. White possessed the biblical gift of prophecy.

³ Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 90-114; Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary With the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, 12 vols., gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 8:989; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 12 vols., gen. ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9:312-313.

⁴ [James White, Ellen White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to the "Little Flock"* ([Gorham, ME, James White], 1847), 13-14, 21; *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872), 11; *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book of Statistics for 1889* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889), 150; *1931 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1931), 379; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 216-229; *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed., 15.

⁵ George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 84-85.

⁶ N. Southard, "Boston Advent Conference," *ST*, June 7, 1843, 107; "Address to the Public," *MC*, Nov. 21, 1844, 166; "Conference of Adventists at New York," *Morning Watch*, May 15, 1845, 157-160; Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983), 86-90.

Statement of the Problem

Although there are many Seventh-day Adventist works written about Ellen White and her prophetic ministry, there was no comprehensive historical investigation examining the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift prior to this study. Beyond that, the Adventist understanding of Ellen White's gift of prophecy has been one of the most controversial subjects within and without Seventh-day Adventism from the beginning of the movement until the present time.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine and analyze the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1844 through 1889. In order to achieve this goal I have examined the writings of Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Adventists⁷ who argued for the validity of Ellen White's gift of prophecy, those outside and inside the movement who argued against her prophetic gift, and those Ellen White's writings that described her self-understanding of her prophetic role.

Scope and Delimitations

This study traces the developmental stages of the concept of the gift of prophecy in relation to Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her prophetic role from a historical perspective. It is beyond the scope of this study to judge, to prove, or to disprove the prophetic gift of Ellen White. This research is not a theological study of the doctrine of spiritual gifts, although that doctrine is discussed whenever it has

⁷ The Sabbatarian Adventists adopted the name "Seventh-day Adventists" in 1860.

relevance to the main purpose of the study. Nor is the purpose of this research to be a historical treatment of the development of the gifts of the spirit in general. Its main focus is on one of those gifts only. In addition, the “gift of prophecy” concept is discussed in reference to the prophetic gift of Ellen White and not to the prophetic gift in general unless otherwise stated. It is important to realize that when early Adventists referred to the “gifts of the spirit,” they were concerned in most cases with the gift of prophecy.

A brief overview of Millerite and Sabbatarian Adventist attitudes concerning charismatic and visionary experiences among Adventists in the 1840s is provided as historical background. That introductory overview is not exhaustive but provides understanding of the general attitudes held by pre- and post-disappointment Adventists towards visions and other contemporary charismatic experiences.

The main body of the study confines itself to the period of time during which Seventh-day Adventists gradually accepted Ellen White’s prophetic gift. The year 1844 is important, since it was the year she had her first vision, while 1889 is significant as the year D. M. Canright published the second extended edition of his book *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*,⁸ which summarizes and categorizes all the previously raised objections against Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Despite being modified somewhat, all later objections would be based upon Canright’s systematized arguments.⁹ Thus by 1889

⁸ D[udley] M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith*, 2d ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1889), 129-165. The second edition became the standard form of Canright’s book. The first edition had been published in 1888 with the same title.

⁹ An example of Canright’s influence on non-Adventist critics is Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 96-108.

the essential arguments for and against Ellen White's prophetic gift were in place. After 1889, discussions for and against her prophetic gift rested largely on arguments developed prior to that year. I assume that the reader is generally familiar with the history and the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the prophetic role of Ellen White in that church.

Justification of the Study

This study is justified for three major reasons. First, the belief in the prophetic gift became one of the five doctrines that eventually distinguished the Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Adventists from the rest of the adventist groups after the Great Disappointment in 1844.¹⁰ This study shows how this belief was gradually understood and accepted within Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Adventism. Second, the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to officially believe in Ellen White as a genuine prophet of God,¹¹ even though Christianity in general, including some people within the Adventist church, has rejected the validity of a modern prophetic gift and disclaims belief in modern prophetic guidance.¹² In fact, the first offshoots from the Sabbatarian Adventist

¹⁰ The other four doctrines were: the Second Coming, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and the state of the dead.

¹¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed., 15; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 216-229.

¹² Examples include: Guy Herbert Winslow, "Ellen Gould White and Seventh-day Adventism" (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1932); Laura Lee Vance, "Adventism in Crisis: A Sociological Analysis of Seventh-day Adventism with Emphasis on the Relationship between Gender and Sectarian Change" (Ph.D. diss., Simon Fraser University, 1994); Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform*, rev. and enl. ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M&R Publications, 1982).

movement arose because of controversy over Ellen White's gift of prophecy.¹³ Hence, knowing the historical development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of this controversial issue may provide light in resolving contemporary difficulties related to the role of Ellen White and her prophetic ministry. Third, despite the fact that Ellen White's gift of prophecy has been one of the most distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history, there has not been any specific research on the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy of Ellen White. Hence the goal of this study was to fill this gap.

Review of Related Research

There was no in-depth study examination of the historical development of the Adventist understanding of Ellen White's gift of prophecy prior to this research. Several Seventh-day Adventist historical works have discussed the issue briefly, but the discussions have been invariably part of larger studies with different objectives in mind.

Roy E. Graham partially treats the development of the Sabbatarian understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift in several chapters of his dissertation.¹⁴ He looks at the emergence of Ellen White as a prophet in the 1840s and the early Adventist reactions to her prophetic gift. The author also treats briefly some of Ellen White's major objectors such as D. M. Canright and L. R. Conradi. Thus Graham's dissertation provides valuable background helpful to this research but has not treated in detail the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

¹³ C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), 134-136.

¹⁴ Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985). See chapters 2 to 6 in particular.

In his dissertation, Alberto Timm gives a short overview of the development of Sabbatarian understanding of the gift of prophecy until 1863. His primary purpose, however, is to treat the sanctuary and the three angels' messages of Rev 14 as the two integrating factors of the early Sabbatarian movement.¹⁵

Merlin Burt's doctoral research examines the historical background and interconnected developments of three major Sabbatarian doctrines between 1844 and 1849: the sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen White's prophetic gift. Although Burt's purpose is different from that of the present research, his dissertation is useful in terms of providing the context, the historical background, and the initial development of an understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.¹⁶

In his extensive book, the *Messenger of the Lord*, Herbert Douglass has two sections treating the question of Adventist reactions to Ellen White's gift, including her own self-understanding as a prophet.¹⁷ George Knight also discusses the issue briefly as part of a larger overview of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.¹⁸ Jud Lake also gives an overview of critics of Ellen White and her prophetic claims in his

¹⁵ Alberto R. Timm, "The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages, 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines" (Ph.D. diss., AU, 1995).

¹⁶ Merlin D. Burt, "The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849" (Ph.D. diss., AU, 2002).

¹⁷ Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 134-179, 372-465.

¹⁸ Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 84-86.

Ellen White Under Fire.¹⁹ Arthur L. White's biography of Ellen White is the most comprehensive work on Ellen White's life experience.²⁰ The first three volumes cover the period of this study and give useful background information. A number of other unpublished documents also touch on the Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.²¹ These works provide helpful clues for the purpose of this research, but none of them treat explicitly the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's gift of prophecy.

Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant consists of five brochures that consider different phases of Ellen White's life and work. Brochure two, "Prophetic Guidance in Early Days," discusses the attitudes of the early Sabbatarians towards the gift of prophecy.²² *Notes and Papers Concerning Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy* and *The Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest* are collections of materials used as

¹⁹ Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire: Identifying the Mistakes of Her Critics* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010).

²⁰ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Vol. 1, The Early Years, 1827-1862; Vol. 2, The Progressive Years, 1862-1876; Vol. 3, The Lonely Years, 1876-1891; Vol. 4, The Australian Years, 1891-1900; Vol. 5, The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905; Vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981-1986).

²¹ Some examples are: Dalton De Vere Baldwin, "The Testimony of E. G. White as a Basis of Authority in Doctrine and Polity" (Unpublished paper, CAR, AU, 1954); Tim Poirier, "Contemporary Prophecy and Scripture: The Relationship of Ellen G. White's Writings to the Bible in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1845-1915" (Unpublished paper, Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986); Alberto R. Timm, "Issues on Ellen G. White and Her Role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (Lecture presented at the General Conference Field Conference in Theology, Greece and Turkey, CAR, AU, 2002); Arthur L. White, "Prophetic Guidance in the Advent Movement" (Syllabus prepared for Andrews University Theological Seminary Course, CAR, AU, 1966).

²² Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1969), 27-53.

study guides on the gift of prophesy doctrine published by the Ellen G. White Estate.²³ None of the above works, however, deal with the specific purpose of the present study.

Methodology and Sources

The present research is a documentary study based on published and unpublished primary sources and documents. Examining these documents, the study traces the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the concept of the gift of prophecy of Ellen White between 1844 and 1889. The primary documents utilized include periodicals, articles, books, tracts, letters, and unpublished manuscripts. The use of secondary sources has been primarily for providing historical context and perspective.

Sources such as the *Midnight Cry*, the *Advent Herald*, and the *Day Star* provide historical data regarding non-Sabbatarian attitudes towards the gift of prophecy and other spiritual gifts during the 1840s.

The documents of Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Adventists arguing for the legitimacy of Ellen White's gift of prophecy are found primarily in the *Review and Herald*, the General Conference session minutes, private letters, booklets, and books written by major Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Adventist leaders. The major authors

²³ Ellen G. White Estate, *Notes and Papers Concerning Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy: An Assemblage of Materials Referred to in Connection with the Presentation of the Seminary Course on "Prophetic Guidance,"* rev. and rearranged ed. (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1974); idem, *The Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest: An Advent Source Collection of Materials Relating to the Gift of Prophecy in the Remnant Church and the Life and Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1960).

included Joseph Bates, James White, Uriah Smith, M. E. Cornell, J. N. Andrews, G. I. Butler, and J. N. Loughborough.²⁴

The study also examines primary documents written against Ellen White's prophetic gift. Major documents in this category include works such as *The Visions of Ellen G. White, Not of God*²⁵ (the first book written against Ellen White's prophetic gift), H. E. Carver's *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined*,²⁶ D. M. Canright's *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*,²⁷ and articles in the *Messenger of Truth* (1854),²⁸ the *Voice of the West*, and the *World Crisis*.

Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic gift is found in parts of her letters, manuscripts, correspondence, and several books.²⁹ These materials are examined

²⁴ Examples are: James White, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 69-70; Uriah Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868); G. I. Butler, "The Visions: How They Are Held among S. D. Adventists," *RH*, Aug. 14, 1883, 11-12.

²⁵ B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God* (Cedar Rapids, OH: Cedar Valley Times Book and Job Print, 1866).

²⁶ H. E. Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (Marion, IA: "Hope of Israel" Office, 1870).

²⁷ D[udley] M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith* (Kalamazoo, MI: Kalamazoo Publishing Co., 1888); idem, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith*, 2d ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1889).

²⁸ Three volumes of this paper have recently been discovered in the State Library of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, PA).

²⁹ Some examples are: Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU; idem, "Doubting the Testimonies," MS 1, 1883, CAR, AU; idem, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851); idem, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888); idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 5: 62-84, 654-683.

in the light of the primary purpose of this research.

The major portion of the primary materials were found in the General Conference Archives and the Ellen G. White Estate Office in Silver Springs, Maryland, and the Center for Adventist Research in the James White Library at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. This dissertation examines and analyzes the gathered information chronologically and shows the stages of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

Design of the Study

The study is divided into five major chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background for the study. It briefly examines Millerite and early Sabbatarian Adventist attitudes towards charismatic and visionary experiences up to the year 1850.

Chapter 2 shows the initial Sabbatarian acceptance of Ellen White as a modern prophet of God in the period from 1851 to 1862. It also looks at the first internal controversies among the Sabbatarian believers, which were over the understanding of Ellen White's gift of prophecy.

Chapter 3 examines the period from 1863 to 1881, during which the Seventh-day Adventists made Ellen White's gift of prophecy a part of their doctrinal statement of beliefs. It also continues to treat the controversies within and without the movement over its understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

Chapter 4 examines some major revisions of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic role between 1882 and 1889. The major issues of discussion during that period were related to suppression and plagiarism charges that ultimately questioned Ellen White's inspiration and authority. The chapter also looks at

the major crisis related to the understanding of the gift of prophecy caused by D. M. Canright.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, concluding observations, and recommendations for further research.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND EARLY ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHARISMATIC AND VISIONARY EXPERIENCES AMONG MILLERITES AND SABBATARIAN ADVENTISTS UP TO 1850

American Christianity in the mid-1800s was open to both charismatic and visionary manifestations. Four major factors provided the way for that openness: the revival of the Second Great Awakening, the camp meeting gatherings, the Methodist quest for holiness, and the appearance of more radical religious groups established by a charismatic or visionary leader (or prophet). Sabbatarian Adventism arose in this context of nineteenth-century America, and its understanding of the doctrine of spiritual gifts was influenced to one degree or another by the general religious milieu of the times. The group emerged from the Millerite movement after the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844, and grew up around a set of doctrines which included the belief in prophetic revelations and visions.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it provides a brief background of charismatic and visionary experiences in American Christian life during the first half of the nineteenth century. Second, the chapter gives an overview of Millerite attitudes toward such spiritual phenomena before and after the Great Disappointment. Third, after a brief introduction to Ellen G. White, the visionary Sabbatarian leader, it examines the early Sabbatarian responses toward charismatic and visionary experiences. The initial Sabbatarian reaction toward Ellen White's visions and claim of having the biblical gift of

prophecy is also given in the last part of the chapter. It is not the objective of this chapter to be comprehensive in character but rather to provide an introductory background helpful to the primary focus of this research: the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the prophetic gift of Ellen G. White.

Religious Background of Charismatic and Visionary Experiences in the Mid-nineteenth Century

The religious background of charismatic and visionary manifestations in the beginning of nineteenth-century America was influenced by four major movements: (1) The Second Great Awakening; (2) the camp meetings; (3) the Methodist and holiness movement; (4) and the appearance of radical religious groups. This section examines the main characteristics of each movement and shows their contribution to the establishment of a religious environment hospitable to experiential and charismatic practices such as shouts, weeping, fainting, dreams, visions, extreme bodily contortions, and others.

The Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening and its emphasis on religious revivalism was one of the major factors contributing to the establishment of experiential and charismatic religion in the 1800s. Revivalism became a major feature in American Christianity in the 1730s with the preaching of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and others in a movement known as the Great Awakening. The movement became known for its spontaneous preaching, emphasis on the importance of personal inner experience with God, and dramatic (emotional) conversion experiences.¹ The First Great Awakening,

¹ William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1944).

however, set the stage for another American revival where charismatic and emotional religion developed even further.

The Second Great Awakening lasted roughly from the 1790s to the early 1840s and became “the most influential revival in the history of the United States.”² More than anything else, it created a religious climate which accepted weeping, shouting, groans, visions, prophetic revelations, and other charismatic forms of religious expressions as an important part of true and genuine Christianity. Moderate religious leaders began gradually to be open to a “variety of signs and wonders” and acceptance of supernatural events in everyday life. Nathan Hatch notes that “scores of preachers’ journals, from Methodists and Baptists, from north and south, from white and black, indicated a ready acceptance to consider dreams and visions as inspired by God, normal manifestations of divine guidance and instruction.” He then quoted Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist stalwart, who wrote: “I know the word of God is our infallible guide, and by it we are to try all our dreams and feelings,” but “I also know, that both sleeping and waking, things of divine nature have been revealed to me.”³ One outcome of the Second Great Awakening was openness to charismatic and visionary experiences.

Experiential and charismatic forms of religion in American Christianity in the first half of the nineteenth century were further established through new techniques employed by revivalist preachers of the Second Great Awakening. Charles G. Finney, a Presbyterian minister, became one of the main leaders of the new revival techniques in

² Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 166.

³ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 10.

the 1820s and 1830s and his methods became widely popular among other religious leaders and groups. Finney's prominence began first in upstate New York but eventually spread to the big cities of the East, such as Hartford, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and others. Finney believed, first, that the aim of preaching was not only to instruct and comfort people but to bring them to spiritual and moral change.⁴ Since he held that faith was a personal matter his new methods aimed to arouse the emotions of people and bring them to a decision for Christ. In fact, he argued provocatively that a spiritual revival is an "essentially human activity"⁵ and believed that it was "purely a philosophical result of the right use of constituted means." What he meant was that if a preacher gave the right biblical message using the right methods, a revival would happen.⁶ Thus Finney "made revivalism into a science."⁷ Although Finney focused on preaching and prayer, the responses of the listeners were often accompanied by intense religious experience and emotionalism.

Second, Finney contributed to the emotional and charismatic religious atmosphere of the time by introducing the so-called "protracted meetings"—town-wide revivalist meetings of several days' length. In many ways the protracted meetings were the urban counterpart of the camp meetings that played a prominent role in American religious life

⁴ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 35, 158.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶ William Gerald McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 125.

⁷ George R. Knight, *Ellen White's World: A Fascinating Look at the Times in Which She Lived* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 21.

in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Finney used tents or large churches and auditoriums for his mass evangelism. His meetings were interdenominational and were usually sponsored by all the major churches in the town. The meetings were held during mornings, afternoons, and evenings and were full of prayers, praises, and preaching. The meetings often ended up with many conversions and different kinds of spiritual manifestations.⁸

Third, Finney helped in the acceptance of experiential and charismatic religion of the time by introducing several “new measures” as part of his revivalistic techniques. He believed that new times and circumstances required a new system of measures to be employed in order for true revival to happen. Those new measures included the practice of praying for the conversion of people by name in public. Finney held that this would prompt people to respond to Christ and receive salvation. Another new measure was to allow women to pray and give religious testimonies in gender-mixed groups in public. Although many saw this practice as scandalous, Finney believed that both men and women had the right to express their faith publicly. He considered such testimonies as important means for other conversion experiences since public testimonies were usually dramatic and emotional in character.⁹

A fourth measure established by Finney was the introduction of the so-called “anxious seat”—a specially designated bench that was placed in front of the church where people who desired salvation and sought forgiveness of their sins would come to

⁸ McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 12, 127.

⁹ Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1977), 32.

experience a special encounter with God. At the anxious seat, people manifested publicly their determination to be followers of Christ. This, however, was most often accompanied by deep emotionalism and ecstatic display that affected emotionally not just the anxious ones but the rest of the people present as they struggled in their Christian experience as well.

In addition to the anxious seat, there were “anxious meetings” which sometimes lasted all night. The meetings were held in a room in a church or in a private home. “Here the revivalist, the local ministers, and laymen spoke personally to the anxious, trying to bring them to conversion.”¹⁰ These meetings also often ended in some kind of charismatic display and deep emotionalism.

Although Finney apparently never intended to arouse the emotions of his hearers, his “new measures” undoubtedly contributed to the greater acceptance and popularity of charismatic religious expressions and demonstrative religion. These included shouting, weeping, fainting, dreams, visions, and others. As noted above, Finney’s methods were embraced by other revivalists and impacted many popular churches of that time, such as Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Christians. Some Adventist preachers, including William Miller, used some of Finney’s methods in their meetings. Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White) herself came to an “anxious seat” seeking a special prayer during William Miller’s meeting in the spring of 1840 at the Casco Street Christian Church, in Portland, Maine.¹¹ Clearly the Second Great Awakening contributed to the establishment and acceptance of charismatic, visionary, and other outward physical manifestations by many

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Burt, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development,” 8, 19.

Christians in the first half of nineteenth-century America. That emotional and charismatic religion was aided further by the introduction of the religious camp meetings.

The Camp Meeting

The second factor contributing to the acceptance of charismatic and visionary manifestations in American Christianity in the early 1800s was the establishment of camp meetings. These were annual gatherings at which people camped out for several days to listen to powerful preaching, to pray, to sing, and to experience or witness conversion. The earliest meetings were interdenominational and were conducted by Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and others. Eventually, however, they became mainly a Methodist institution and played an important part in the growth of that denomination.¹²

The camp meeting contributed to the development of experiential religion in several ways. First, one of its main hallmarks was highly charismatic worship that was full of emotional excitement. Many participants, in fact, measured the success of a camp meeting by the display of God's power through the people present.¹³ Peter Cartwright, who preached at many camp meetings, describes one of his meetings in the following way:

My voice was strong and clear, and my preaching was more of an exhortation and encouragement than anything else. My text was, "The gates of hell shall not prevail." In about thirty minutes the power of God fell on the congregation in such a manner as is seldom seen; the people fell in every direction, right and left, front and rear. It was

¹² Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 22-30.

¹³ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 74, 54.

supposed that not less than three hundred fell like dead men in mighty battle. . . . Our meeting lasted all night, and Monday and Monday night; and when we closed on Tuesday, there were two hundred who had professed religion, and about that number joined the Church.¹⁴

On another occasion Cartwright witnessed people who fell into trances and saw visions. “They would fall at meetings,” he wrote, “and lay apparently powerless and motionless for days, sometimes for a week at a time, without food or drink; and when they came to, they professed to have seen heaven and hell, to have seen God, angels, the devil and the damned; they would prophesy, and, under the pretense of Divine inspiration, predict the time of the end of the world, and the ushering in of the great millennium.”¹⁵

Second, camp meetings contributed to experiential religion through their emphasis on the importance of a conversion experience. Conversion experiences were usually accompanied by dramatic physical manifestations, including prophetic visions and trances, falling, shouting, jerking, running, barking, and others. Although there were some who did not favor all of the above experiences, most preachers accepted them to be legitimate manifestations of the power of God. But conversion was the main focus of all camp meeting activities and an effective means of reaching thousands of people with the Christian faith.¹⁶ As Giuseppe Dardano puts it, “the camp meeting became religion’s ‘harvest time.’”¹⁷

¹⁴ Peter Cartwright and W. P. Strickland, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 92-93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶ Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 84.

¹⁷ Giuseppe E. Dardano, “The Frontier Camp Meeting and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century North America” (M.A. diss., Queen's University, 1991), 3.

In addition, the camp meetings gave opportunity to the converted believers to give public testimonies of their conversion experiences. The main purpose of this practice was to encourage other people to experience God's power for themselves. Public testimonies were often accompanied by intense emotionalism and prompted other conversions. Women as well as children were also given the opportunity to publicly exhort, testify, and preach before the people on such occasions. Dickson Bruce gives an example of a twelve-year-old boy who during the time of worship raised his voice and with tears in his eyes cried aloud to the wicked, "warning them of their danger, denouncing their certain doom if they persisted in their sins."¹⁸ Rebecca Chaney Miller felt the call to preach at the age of only sixteen. She struggled, however, with "deep anxiety" and feared to follow her calling. While attending her first camp meeting, however, she overcame her "diffidence in public speaking" and began a fourteen-year preaching career that led to "thousands" of new converts.¹⁹

Perhaps the best example of activities taking place at camp meetings is that of Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. Cane Ridge became the most famous camp meeting and a model for other early-nineteenth-century camp meetings.²⁰ It was full of emotional excitement, dramatic conversion experiences, and powerful testimonies. As Paul Conkin observes, "Cane Ridge gained its greatest fame for the extent of these exercises."²¹ He

¹⁸ Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 76.

¹⁹ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 142.

²⁰ Knight, *Ellen White's World*, 24.

²¹ Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 102.

cites the reflections of a minister (probably James Campbell) on some of the scenes at Cane Ridge. Sinners, the minister penned, were

dropping down on every hand, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convoluted; professors [of religion] praying, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress, for sinners, or in raptures of joy! Some singing, some shouting, clapping their hands, hugging and even kissing, laughing; others talking to the distressed, to one another, or to opposers of the work, and all this at once—no spectacle can excite a stronger sensation. And with what is doing [*sic*], the darkness of the night, the solemnity of the place, and of the occasion, and conscious guilt, all conspire to make terror thrill through every power of the soul, and rouse it to awful attention.²²

Peter Cartwright in his autobiography gives a similar description of the emotionalism displayed at Cane Ridge:

The mighty power of God was displayed in a very extraordinary manner; many were moved to tears, and bitter and loud crying for mercy. . . . Hundreds fell prostrated under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle. Stands were erected in the woods from which preachers of different Churches proclaimed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was supposed, by eye and ear witnesses, that between one and two thousand souls were happily and powerfully converted to God during the meeting. It was not unusual for one, three, and four to seven preacher to be addressing the listening thousands at the same time from the different stands erected for the purpose. The heavenly fire spread in almost every direction. It was said, by truthful witnesses, that at times more than one thousand persons broke out into loud shouting all at once, and that the shouts could be heard for miles around.²³

Charismatic forms of worship, dramatic conversions, and emotional testimonies became the norm for future camp meetings and influenced American religious practices during the first half of the nineteenth century. Falling, crying, prophecy, trances, and visions became accepted forms of religious expression and were seen as the display of the power of the Holy Spirit. As time went on, however, and camp meetings matured, many

²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 93-94.

²³ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, 30-31.

of the more radical physical manifestations died out. The meetings also became much more organized and orderly. By the 1830s most denominations, except for the Methodists, had abandoned the camp meetings.²⁴ Methodism, nevertheless, contributed further to the acceptance of experiential religion in its own ways.

Methodism and the Holiness Revival

Methodism and its emphasis on holiness was the third contributing element to the atmosphere of experiential and charismatic religion in America in the first half of the nineteenth century. Methodism began as a revival movement in England in the 1730s and 1740s and was similar in character to the revival in America at the time of Jonathan Edwards and others. Through the leadership of Francis Asbury and a network of itinerant preachers (circuit riders) Methodism spread quickly in America and experienced phenomenal growth during the early nineteenth century. By 1820 it had become the largest denomination in the new land.²⁵

Methodism became particularly influential in the acceptance of charismatic and experiential religion for several reasons. First, Methodist worship was characterized by enthusiasm and emotionalism. This was particularly true of American Methodism. Lester Ruth notes that the difference between American Methodism in relationship to British Methodism “was in the pervasiveness and intensity of the ecstasy” among believers.²⁶

²⁴ Knight, *Ellen White's World*, 26. Growing up as a Methodist, Ellen Harmon attended this kind of camp meeting.

²⁵ Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 124.

²⁶ Lester Ruth, [ed.], *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), 164.

Although most of the Methodist ministers were poorly educated, they were known for powerful preaching that led to emotional responses in the listeners. Methodists believed that “the most important parts of religion—faith, salvation, God’s grace, a sense of God’s presence—were to be experienced inwardly” and preachers aimed to achieve that goal.²⁷ Moreover, Methodist preachers did not feel that their preaching was good enough unless some kind of visible and audible expressions were present during the worship service. Such were viewed as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and represented the power of their preaching.²⁸ It became a common practice to interrupt the preaching with shouts of “Hallelujah,” “Amen,” or “glory, glory, glory,” and eventually the Methodists became known as the “Shouting Methodists.”²⁹

Benjamin Abbott, for example, who claimed to be given many of his sermon texts in dreams, reported that most of his meetings were full of ecstasy and enthusiasm.

Describing one such meeting, Abbott reported,

the next meeting-day in time of preaching, we had a powerful time, and a number fell to the floor; one man attempted to run off, but God laid him down at the door. A woman made the same attempt, but the Spirit of the eternal God arrested her, and she fell back into the house just as she was going out of the door. After preaching, we had a blessed time in class: while claiming the promises, several were soon down, both on the right and left; some found peace, and others professed sanctification.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ George Claude Baker, Jr., *An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodism, 1789-1839* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1941), 32.

²⁹ Winthrop S. Hudson, “Shouting Methodists,” *Encounter*, Winter 1968, 73-84.

³⁰ Benjamin Abbott, *Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott: To Which Is Annexed, a Narrative of His Life and Death*, ed. John Ffirth (New York: Ezekiel Cooper and John Wilson for the Methodist connection in the United States, 1805), 73.

The impact of such preaching upon the listeners was a visible, tangible emotional response and was often reflected in some kind of bodily affectations.³¹

Expressions of ecstasy were not confined to corporate worship settings but were seen in smaller Methodist class meetings as well. For example, the evening before his conversion on August 18, 1806, John Emory and several member of his family were gathered together and spent some time in singing, praying, and “conversing about experiential religion.” After the family prayer John went to the garden and “there gave vent to the feelings of his burdened spirit.” The next morning he attended a “love-feast.” The meeting was filled with “exercises” and “the mighty power of God was displayed.” John fell upon his knees and speaking in a “solemn manner, called upon God and angels, heaven and earth, and the assembly then present, to witness that he that day determined to seek the salvation of his soul.” Immediately people formed a circle around him and many offered prayers for his salvation. Suddenly John rose from his knees and declared that “he felt peace and comfort” in his heart.³²

A second contributing aspect of Methodism to charismatic and visionary acceptance in American religion was its view of the conversion experience. Methodism associated true conversion with some kind of outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit. In fact, a direct experience of God’s power was a necessary means for membership in the denomination.³³ Even Wesley, who was at times skeptical of dreams, visions, and other

³¹ Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1999), 107.

³² John M'Clintock, ed., *Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), 106-108.

³³ Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 61.

spiritual phenomena, demanded believers to provide a written account of their conversion experience.³⁴ Methodist conversions usually exhibited physical and emotional intensity. New converts often burst forth with emotional and physical demonstrations such as weeping, jumping, shouting, loud praying, clapping of hands, trances, visions, or other bodily motions. Some of the more dramatic conversions were recorded and later given as public testimonies. This was true for ministers as well as for lay adults, and even children.

A third important contribution of Methodism to the charismatic and visionary background of American religion was its acceptance of supernatural encounters in everyday life. Methodist believers not only “expected” but also “desired” supernatural encounters with God through visions, dreams, supernatural impressions, healings, miracles, signs, and other wonders.³⁵ John Wigger notes that “this quest for the supernatural in everyday life was the most distinctive characteristic of early American Methodism.”³⁶ Early American Methodists strongly believed in the “efficacy of prophetic dreams, visions, and supernatural impressions and were not afraid to base day-to-day decisions on such phenomena. Examples of this kind of supernaturalism abound in the journals and autobiographies of Methodist preachers and lay men and women.”³⁷

³⁴ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 73-75.

³⁵ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, 161.

³⁶ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist itinerant, even before his conversion prayed for his brother who was “dangerously ill” and he was healed from his disease. Later in his ministry he received numerous dreams and visions which were often graphic and detailed. One night in his sleep, for example, he was taken to eternity through a “narrow gate.” There he was met by his guide who led him on a tour of hell. “It appeared as large as the sea,” wrote Garrettson, “and I saw myriads of damned souls, in every posture that miserable beings could get into. This sight exceeded any thing of the kind that ever had entered into my mind. . . . I cried to my guide, it is enough.” Garrettson then was asked by his guide to return to the earth and be more faithful in warning sinners of the consequences of their sinful behavior. Interestingly, his wife Catherine Livingston Garrettson also had visionary experiences. During their courtship they often read their journals to each other and “even had dreams in common.”³⁸ Ann Taves rightly notes that “both the revival and the related dreams, visions, and involuntary bodily movements endured for decades under Methodist auspices.”³⁹

A fourth element of Methodist contribution to acceptance of charismatic and visionary experiences in American Christianity was the power that the denomination gave to the laity, and women in particular. Lay men, women, and even children were given the opportunity to participate in worship services to an extent unseen up to that time. Since the circuit ministers could visit local Methodist societies only periodically, local congregations were operated primarily by lay leadership. Lay ministry involved

³⁸ Ibid., 106-107.

³⁹ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 74.

“preaching in the vernacular, accepting popular idioms into worship,” and giving worshipers a sense of belonging and opportunity to lead.⁴⁰

Women were actively included in the life of the church and contributed greatly to the success of Methodism. As Wigger puts it, “Methodism was created as much by women as it was by men.”⁴¹ Although they were not officially ordained, women were welcomed into the pulpits. Like most Methodist preachers, women lay leaders were generally uneducated, but they at times claimed that their messages were given to them through visions and dreams.⁴² As a result, they were given the opportunity to stand before the congregation and publicly testify concerning their religious experience, which in many cases was accompanied by intense emotionalism. At times, women were asked to repeat a dramatic testimony in different gatherings.

Probably the best known example of the role of a Methodist woman is that of Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874). Palmer had the devastating experience of losing three of her children, and she “longed for a deeper experience of her faith.” After July 26, 1837, when she received a special sense of the power of the Holy Spirit, Palmer began to share her experience with others. Together with her sister, Sarah Lankford, she organized the so-called “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness” gatherings where people assembled to pray, to share publicly personal experiences, and to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Palmer believed that public testimony was an essential element if one

⁴⁰ Hudson, *Religion in America*, 123.

⁴¹ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 151.

⁴² Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 145; Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

was to retain God's grace in his or her life. As she saw it, the lack of personal testimony was "one of the most certain signs of a lack of religious life which would finally culminate in complete apostasy."⁴³ The meetings associated with Palmer were usually accompanied by strong emotionalism. They contributed also to the acceptance of charismatic manifestations in Methodism during that time.

Palmer published several books and believed that God's gift was given equally to men and women. Based on Galatians 3:28 ("there is neither . . . male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus") and Joel 2:28 ("your sons and daughters will prophesy"), Palmer argued that women should have the right to speak and share their Christian experiences in the church and other religious meetings. Although Palmer was concerned primarily with the promotion of holiness, she greatly contributed to the "public role of women in the religious life of America."⁴⁴

Methodism made a major contribution to the acceptance of charismatic religion in America in the first half of the nineteenth century through its emotional services, dramatic conversions, acceptance of supernatural guidance in everyday life, and allowing lay men and women to participate in the public worship. The acceptance of charismatic and visionary manifestations in American Christianity was also related to the establishment of new religious groups by leaders who had received some kind of visionary experience.

⁴³ Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 25, 31.

⁴⁴ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 183.

New Religious Groups

The fourth element contributing to the charismatic and visionary background of American Christianity in the first half of the nineteenth century was the emergence of new religious groups led by a charismatic leader. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the appearance of prophets (or visionaries) of all genders and conditions. Based on a scholarly survey of published sources only (pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, literary journals, and evangelical memoirs) Susan Juster has identified about 315 men and women who were recognized as prophets in England and North America in the period between 1750 and 1820.⁴⁵ Juster notes, however, that the real number is probably much higher since many were illiterate or did not keep a journal. “We can probably multiply our figure of 315 by a significant factor,” concludes Juster, “and still be reasonably confident that we have underestimated the total number of prophets and prophetesses in Anglo-America during the revolutionary era.”⁴⁶ While some made only brief appearances, others left enduring legacies and many followers, “sometimes numbering in the thousands.”⁴⁷ We will examine a few examples of new religious groups established by a prophet or visionary leader.

Jemina Wilkinson and Ann Lee were “the forerunners of new revelation in upstate New York.” In the late 1770s Wilkinson received a vision which revealed to her that her body was possessed by a new spirit and that she had been reborn as the “Public Universal

⁴⁵ Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 64.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

Friend.” Wilkinson believed that God had called her to invite people to repentance and she began to view herself as the female John the Baptist. In spite of her limited education she became a highly successful evangelist. Some of her main beliefs included the promotion of a modified form of community living, celibacy, equality of sexes, and the importance of visionary revelations.⁴⁸ Wilkinson’s religious views were based primarily on the faith that “God speaks directly to the human spirit.” She and her followers believed that God’s messages could come “through intuition, dreams, visions, or through some appointed messenger such as the prophets of old, or the Public Universal Friend.”⁴⁹ After her death in 1819 her followers continued to promote her teaching until about 1863.⁵⁰

A much more familiar example is that of Ann Lee and the Shakers. After her conversion in England and her joining a small group of “Shaking Quakers,” Ann Lee claimed to receive a series of visions. It was revealed to her that the root of all evil was sexual activity within and without the marriage. For Lee this was the “original sin” of Adam and Eve. After Ann Lee migrated with a small group of followers to upstate New York in 1774 the Shakers grew rather quickly. The Shakers became known for promoting celibacy and the validity of new revelations. Their worship was full of excitement and included singing, groaning, jumping, dancing, laughing, shouting, and leaping for joy. In

⁴⁸ Winthrop S. Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," in *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 9.

⁴⁹ Herbert A. Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Public Universal Friend* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 34, 185-186.

⁵⁰ Hudson, "A Time of Religious Ferment," 9.

these things they saw the manifestation of the Holy Spirit inspiring “love for the sacred things” and giving “confidence in those gifts.”⁵¹ The Shakers formally organized in 1787 as the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearance, three years after the death of Ann Lee.

A further manifestation of visionary manifestations in nineteenth-century America was the appearance of Joseph Smith and Mormonism. Mormonism became known mostly for its promotion of plural marriages and its belief in continuing revelation. When Smith and his family moved to the State of New York in 1816 he was exposed to the religious excitement of what came to be known as “the burned-over district.” Seeing some of the religious controversies of that time, Smith became disturbed and troubled by the question of which was the right denomination. He decided to pray and seek God for guidance. According to his account, one day as he prayed in the woods, he received a vision. The Father and the Son appeared and revealed to him not to join any of the existing denominations since all of them were wrong and “their creeds were an abomination.”⁵² He was to establish a new movement. After further revelations he was given a special task. Guided by the angel Moroni, Smith claimed to have discovered two golden plates which revealed the story of a lost tribe of Israel that had inhabited the American continent centuries ago. Because the stones were written in an ancient lost Egyptian language, Smith claimed that he was given the tools for translation. In 1830 he

⁵¹ Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society*, new enlarged ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 28, 157.

⁵² Joseph Smith and Heman Conoman Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: 1805-1835*, vol. 1 (Lamoni, IA: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1908), 6-23.

published the *Book of Mormon*⁵³ in Palmyra, New York. Smith and his followers considered the *Book of Mormon* to be equal in authority to the Bible since it was a direct revelation from God. Joseph Smith became a contemporary prophet for his followers. The Mormon belief in modern prophetic manifestation was so strong that they considered anyone who denied the new revelations to be of God and argued against the modern prophetic gift to be denying Christ and his gospel.⁵⁴

Smith claimed to have received an additional revelation in which John the Baptist appeared to him and ordained him together with Oliver Cowdery to the “Priesthood of Aaron.” The two men became the first and the second elder of the new Church of the Latter Day Saints.⁵⁵ Other revelations established Smith’s authority even further. In cases of doctrinal controversy over issues such as baptism, ordination, Trinity, marriage, and church government, to mention a few, Smith used his prophetic authority to decide every controversial question.⁵⁶ Although Smith was murdered at a prison in Carthage, Illinois, by an angry mob in 1844, Mormonism continued its growth under the leadership of

⁵³ Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, 3d European ed. (Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830).

⁵⁴ Hudson, “A Time of Religious Ferment,” 13.

⁵⁵ Hudson, *Religion in America*, 190.

⁵⁶ Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), 13.

Brigham Young who became the next prophet of the movement. Thus the prophetic gift was institutionalized in the presidency of the new denomination.⁵⁷

Another movement related to charismatic and visionary manifestations in the first half of nineteenth-century America was the Christian Connection. The goal of this movement was to reform existing churches from unbiblical traditions and to return to the purity of New Testament Christianity. The Christian Connectionists had no formal creed but the Bible and referred to themselves simply as Christians. William Kinkade (b. 1783), one of the main founders and the theologian of the movement, wrote in 1829 that he “refused” to call himself by any other name “but that of *Christian*,” and declared that he “would take no other book” for his standard “but the *Bible*.”⁵⁸ Kinkade noted that all of his religious beliefs were formed by simple reading of the Bible “without note, comment, or marginal reference,” “without the assistance of commentators” or any concordance.⁵⁹

According to Kinkade, at the center of the New Testament order was the doctrine of spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy. Based on verses such as 1 Cor 12:8-12 and Eph 4:11-16 he argued for the perpetuity of spiritual gifts until the end of time.⁶⁰ “This is the *ancient order of things*,” he wrote, and “every one opposed to this, is opposed to primitive Christianity. To say God caused these gifts to cease, is the same as

⁵⁷ Ralph A. Britsch and Todd A. Britsch, “Prophet,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Pub. Company, 1992), 3:1165.

⁵⁸ William Kinkade, *The Bible Doctrine of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Atonement, Faith, and Election: To Which Is Prefixed Some Thoughts on Natural Theology, and the Truth of Revelation* (New York: H. R. Piercy, 1829), iv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

to say, God has abolished the order of the New Testament church. . . . To divest the church of all these spiritual gifts, would be to take from the body of Christ the senses of hearing, smelling, seeing, &c.”⁶¹ Kinkade noted that the gifts not only composed the “gospel ministry,” but that there was “not a text in the Bible” speaking of God’s intention to remove the spiritual gifts from the church after the apostolic time.⁶² Moreover, he noted that according to 1 Cor 12:31 and 1 Cor 14:1, 39, the Christians were to ““desire spiritual gifts”” including the gift of prophecy. Thus the Christian Connectionists were opened towards supernatural revelations and visionary experiences and saw them as biblically founded, even though they held the Bible to be their only authority.

The movement grew simultaneously in four different locations: New England, Virginia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania.⁶³ Elias Smith and Abner Jones were the two major leaders of the Christian Connection movement in the New England area. Both were firm believers in visionary manifestations. Smith’s conversion, for example, was accompanied by a vision. Shocked by the “untimely death of two young women in Woodstock,” Smith went to the woods and started thinking about his own sin, depravity, and guilt. “The day appeared dark, and every thing seemed to mourn around me,” wrote Smith. Not long after that he was gathering wood when “a light appeared to shine from heaven, not only into my head, but into my heart. This was something very strange to me, and what I had never experienced before. My mind seemed to rise in that light to the throne of God and the Lamb. . . . The Lamb once slain appeared to my understanding, and while viewing him, I

⁶¹ Ibid., 332.

⁶² Ibid., 333, 338.

⁶³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 69.

felt such love to him as I never felt to any thing earthly. The view of the Lamb on mount Sion [*sic*] gave me joy unspeakable and full of glory.”⁶⁴

Abner Jones was Smith’s “closest colleague” in the early days of the Christian movement. He was baptized into the Baptist church but later left the church and established the first Christian congregations in New England.⁶⁵ Jones as well as Smith believed in visions and direct manifestations of God’s Spirit in the life of true believers.

With its appeal to pure Christian practices the Christians attracted many followers. By 1840 there were around forty congregations of the Christian Connection in Vermont alone.⁶⁶ While Ellen G. White came from a Methodist background, James White and Joseph Bates, the other two founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, came from the Christian Connection. Their views on the primacy of the Bible as the only source of theological authority and the perpetuity of spiritual gifts were influenced by the Christian Connectionist theology.

Noticeably, the religious environment of early-nineteenth-century America was hospitable to ecstatic expressions of faith, including prophetic manifestations, visions, and trances. The Sabbatarian understanding of the prophetic gift was influenced by the milieu of that time. But before we examine the Sabbatarians’ initial reaction toward the

⁶⁴ Elias Smith, quoted in Michael G. Kenny, *The Perfect Law of Liberty: Elias Smith and the Providential History of America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47, 84-85.

⁶⁶ Donal Ward, “Religious Enthusiasm in Vermont: 1761-1847” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1980), 72.

prophetic gift of Ellen White, we will look at the Millerite attitude toward supernatural revelation and visionary experiences.

Millerite Attitudes towards Charismatic and Visionary Experiences

The Millerite movement appeared in the first part of the nineteenth century and became a part of the Second Great Awakening. It started with the preaching of a Baptist layman, William Miller (1782-1849), but when Josiah Litch, Charles Fitch, Joshua Himes, and other prominent ministers accepted Miller's view of the soon return of Christ, Millerism grew into a mass movement and became a "household word across the nation."⁶⁷ Although Millerite meetings appealed primarily to the intellect, emotionalism was not absent from their religious gatherings. As such, Millerism had to take a position concerning charismatic and visionary manifestations. In this section we will examine the Millerite attitude toward charismatic and visionary experiences before and after the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844.

Millerite Attitudes towards Charismatic and Visionary Experiences before the Great Disappointment

Millerite leaders in general had a negative attitude toward charismatic and visionary manifestations and considered them fanatical. On the other hand, emotionalism, prophetic visions, and other such experiences were present among Millerite believers before the Great Disappointment. Their existence can be understood because of three major reasons.

⁶⁷ David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 30.

The first is the nature of the movement. Millerism was an interdenominational movement in character and as such its religious practices varied among its followers. The believers who accepted Millerism came from different churches and brought into the movement their past religious experiences and worship styles. Everett Dick's study of 174 Millerite lecturers found that 44.3 percent were Methodist, 27 percent Baptists, 9 percent Congregationalists, 8 percent Christians, and 7 percent Presbyterians.⁶⁸

Second, Millerite leaders did not exercise strong external control over the movement. Miller himself never wanted to establish a new denomination but only to alert believers of the soon coming of Christ. Millerism encouraged people to think for themselves on doctrinal issues and did not force doctrinal unanimity. Consequently, it was difficult to prevent practices of charismatic, visionary, or other forms of emotional manifestations among its adherents.

Third, charismatic and visionary experiences were present among Millerites because the movement was influenced to one extent or another by Methodism. A large portion of believers who accepted Millerism came from the Methodist denomination. Since Methodist worship included emotional, charismatic, and visionary experiences, it is not surprising to find instances of ecstatic and visionary activities within the Millerite movement. Below are examples of such activities as seen in corporate meetings and individuals who claimed a visionary and prophetic gift.

Charismatic forms of emotionalism were present at Millerite camp meetings and gatherings. One example is the Advent camp meeting in Taunton, Massachusetts, during

⁶⁸ Everett N. Dick, "The Adventist Crisis of 1843-1844" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1930), 232-233.

the month of September 1842. The meeting was attended by “crowds” of people and a “large number” of ministers. Josiah Litch took a leading role in the week-long gathering. At one morning prayer meeting there was an invitation for people to come forward to be prayed for. According to Joseph Bates’s account, “among the mourners” who came forward “there were about thirty ministers that prostrated themselves, some of them on their faces beseeching God for mercy, and a preparation to meet their coming Lord!” “The Holy Spirit,” concluded Bates, was displayed with so “much power . . . that it seemed like sin to doubt.” On the following Sunday it was estimated that there were ten thousand people in the camp. “The clear, weighty and solemn preaching of the second coming of Christ,” Bates noted, “and the fervent prayers and animated singing of the new Second advent hymns, accompanied by the Spirit of the living God, set such thrills through the camp, that many were shouting aloud for joy.”⁶⁹

Four weeks later Bates attended another camp meeting in Salem City, Massachusetts. Joshua V. Himes, who was in charge of the camp meeting, pitched the “big tent,” which held about “seven thousand people.” The meetings were attended by major Millerite ministers such as Josiah Litch, Charles Fitch, Apollos Hale, Henry Plummer, Timothy Cole, and others. The large crowds of people listened with interest to explanations on the subject of the Second Coming. Those who could not find a place in the tent congregated under trees outside and listened to selected ministers on the same

⁶⁹ Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates: Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard, with Sketches of Voyages on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas; Also Impressment and Service on Board British War Ships, Long Confinement in Dartmoor Prison, Early Experience in Reformatory Movements; Travels in Various Parts of the World and a Brief Account of the Great Advent Movement of 1840-44* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 264-265.

subject. When the preaching meetings closed, there were prayer meetings for the unconverted which often led to some form of charismatic expressions and emotional responses. “Sometimes after listening to the united, earnest prayers,” Bates wrote, “the shout of victory would follow, and then the rush to the tents to learn who was converted, and to hear them tell what Jesus had done for them, and how they loved his appearing.” As a result, there were many baptisms.⁷⁰

Some forms of charismatic exercises and fanaticism were also present at the Exeter, New Hampshire, camp meeting in August 1844. It was reported that there was a tent from Watertown, Massachusetts, “filled with fanatical persons” that attracted much attention because of the way they conducted their worship. Their meetings frequently continued “nearly all night” and were filled with “great excitement,” “noise of shouting,” “clapping of hands,” and other such exercises. James White reported that “some shouted so loud and incessantly as to become hoarse, and silent, simply because they could no longer shout, while others literally blistered their hands striking them together.”⁷¹ Elder Plummer, who was in charge of the meeting, stated that “he had no objections to shouts of praise to God, over victories won in his name. But when persons had shouted ‘Glory to God’ nine hundred and ninety-nine times, with no evidence of one victory gained, and had blistered their hands in striking them together with violence, he thought it was time for them to stop.”⁷² The *Advent Herald* also reported that the Exeter camp meeting was

⁷⁰ Ibid., 265-267.

⁷¹ James White, *Life Incidents: In Connection with the Great Advent Movement as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 157.

⁷² Ibid., 158-159.

“somewhat disturbed and greatly annoyed by a company who came on the ground with a tent, having no sympathy with the object for which the meeting was called, and in whose exercises and extravagances the meeting had no sympathy.”⁷³

There were also individual Millerites who claimed to be prophets and were involved in visionary activities. William Ellis Foy (1818-1893) was a Free Will Baptist minister and a Millerite preacher who claimed to have received several visions during the early 1840s. Foy’s first vision occurred on January 18, 1842, and lasted for about two and half hours. “I met with the people of God in Southark St., Boston,” he wrote, “where the Christians were engaged in solemn prayer, and my soul was made happy in the love of God. I was immediately seized as in the agonies of death, and my breath left me; and it appeared to me that I was a spirit separate from this body.”⁷⁴ In this vision he saw the saved people in paradise and the wicked ones burning in flames of fire. Foy was so distressed that he felt it was his duty to declare the things that he had seen to his “fellow creatures, and warn them to flee from the wrath to come.”⁷⁵ He had his second vision two weeks later on February 4, 1842. While in a meeting with a large group of Christians who were “engaged in exhortation [*sic*] and prayer,” Foy recalled, “I began to reflect on my disobedience; and while thus engaged, suddenly I heard a voice, as it were, in the spirit, speaking unto me. I immediately fell to the floor, and knew nothing about this body, until twelve hours and a half had passed away, as I was afterwards informed.” In his second

⁷³ “The Exeter Campmeeting,” *AH*, Aug. 21, 1844, 20.

⁷⁴ William E. Foy, *The Christian Experience of William E. Foy Together with the Two Visions He Received in the Months of Jan. and Feb. 1842* (Portland, [ME]: J. and C. H. Pearson, 1845), 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

vision Foy was shown “innumerable multitudes coming from the four quarters of the earth” to be judged before the throne of God.⁷⁶ According to some of his contemporaries, Foy may have had additional visions, but we do not have a record from him about them.⁷⁷ Ellen White remembered seeing and talking to Foy. At one time as she related the scenes of one of her visions, Foy said that “it was just what he had seen” in his visions.⁷⁸

In Philadelphia, Dr. R. C. Gorgas also claimed to have visionary experiences. Gorgas, for example, claimed that he saw Christ who was to come at three o’clock in the morning of October 22, 1844. He wrote,

I was led to the Cross on the Clock striking 3, after which I was prostrated to the floor by the Holy Spirit, when the above was represented to me, but could not understand it until it was shown me. For six mornings the *Holy Ghost* took me about the same time, and I had to praise the Lord when the above was gradually represented to my mind, and on the 6th day, in Baltimore, at meeting, in the presence of perhaps 2000 persons, the Lord said unto me, it is *enough*. I arose and shouted, and spoke to the People. And on the 7th the Lord gave me a clear view of the vision of Daniel, the 70 weeks cut off, and it was finished.⁷⁹

Gorgas also published a broadside explaining his prediction through a graphic chart.⁸⁰ He managed to convince George Storrs, a major Millerite leader, of the validity

⁷⁶ Ibid., 16, 17.

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White and C. C. Crisler, “Interview with Mrs. E. G. White, Regarding Early Experiences,” MS 131, 1909, CAR, AU; J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1909), 146.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White and C. C. Crisler, “Interview with Mrs. E. G. White, Regarding Early Experiences,” MS 131, 1909, CAR, AU.

⁷⁹ C. R. Gorgas, “In Honor of the King of Kings,” *a Broadside*, [Oct. 16, 1844], CAR, AU.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

of his vision and Storrs helped him to publish his prophecy in a *Midnight Cry* Extra. The editor, N. Southard, trusting the judgment of Storrs, did not read the document, but he printed several hundred copies and sent them out. The next day, however, Southard stopped the distribution of the paper and burned the rest of the remaining copies. He wrote a note of regret to the readers of the *Midnight Cry* for his “great mistake” of not paying attention to the content of the material and publishing it. “We deeply regret that we in any way countenanced a pretence to inspiration, as if the word of God was not sufficient,” he wrote.⁸¹ Storrs also expressed his deep “regret” and “humbly ask[ed] the forgiveness of all who may have been in any way injured thereby.” As he put it, “the thought that I have contributed to its circulation is painful in the extreme to my mind. I never had any faith in the pretended *Inspiration* of any man since the close of the Scriptures of Truth: but, I was most unfortunately, at a time when I was looking for our blessed Lord with deep interest, drawn aside to give credit to the pretended inspiration of a mere man.”⁸²

Probably the most dramatic example of charismatic display and fanaticism before the Great Disappointment was that of John Starkweather. A graduate of Andover Theological Seminary, he accepted Millerism in the autumn of 1842. Soon Himes hired him to be his assistant pastor at the Chardon Street Chapel so that Himes could have more time for traveling and spreading the Advent cause. Being a powerful orator, Starkweather

⁸¹ [N. Southard], “Vision of C. R. Gorgas,” *MC*, Oct. 31, 1844, 143-144.

⁸² George Storrs, “Note from Brother Storrs,” *MC*, Oct. 31, 1844; Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Yarmouth, ME: I. C. Wellcome, 1874), 382-383; George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 211-212.

won the confidence of many believers. However, his peculiar views on perfection and personal sanctification brought about a conflict with Himes and other Millerite leaders. Starkweather taught that “conversion, however full and thorough, did not fit one for God’s favor without a second work; and that this second work was usually indicated by some bodily sensation.” The losing of strength and other bodily manifestations were seen to be “evidence of the great power of God in the sanctification of those who were already devoted Christians.”⁸³

While some believers accepted such charismatic manifestations with “wonder” and “awe,” others were suspicious but feared to say anything that would “offend” the Holy Spirit. The problem grew and divided the believers to such an extent that Himes had to publicly challenge Starkweather and his fanatical views in the spring of 1843. Starkweather was removed from his position as associate pastor. He left the Chardon Street Chapel with a group of followers who accepted his views and began meeting at different locations.⁸⁴

Starkweather’s charismatic influence among Millerites, however, continued. Thus in August 1843 he attended a camp meeting in Plainfield, Connecticut. It was reported that some charismatic manifestations were displayed “which were entirely new to those present, and for which they could not account.” Again in August there was another meeting held in Stepney, near Bridgeport. It was reported that “a few young men,

⁸³ *Defence of Elder Joshua V. Himes: Being a History of the Fanaticism, Puerilities and Secret Workings of Those Who, under the Garb of Friendship, Have Proved the Most Deadly Enemies of the Advent Cause* (Boston: n.p., 1851), 6-8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

professing to have the gift of discerning spirits, were hurried into great extravagances.”⁸⁵ The public press was quick to report the fanaticism displayed at the camp meeting and accused Millerism of being the “*hot-bed*” in which fanaticism was “nurtured and grown.”⁸⁶ Josiah Litch, who was present, disapproved of such manifestations. In the *Midnight Cry* of September 14, 1843, he stated that he had “rarely witnessed” a “more disgraceful scene, under the garb of piety.”

For the last ten years I have come in contact nearly every year, more or less, with the same spirit, and have marked its developments, its beginning and its result; and am now prepared to say that it is *evil, and only evil, and that continually*. I have uniformly opposed it, wherever it has made its appearance, and as uniformly have been denounced as being opposed to the power of God, and as resisting the operations of the Spirit. The origin of it, is, [*sic*] the idea that the individuals thus exercised are entirely under the influence of the Sprit of God, are his children, and that he will not deceive them and lead them astray; hence every impulse which comes upon them is yielded to as coming from God, and following it there is no length of fanaticism to which they will not go. That good men, yea, the best of men, have fallen into the error, and have been ruined for life, so far as their Christian influence is concerned, is a lamentable fact. They begin well, but are pushed beyond the mark, become captivated by the delusion of the devil that they are divinely inspired to perform certain acts, and are infallible, until they are beyond the reach of advice or admonition.⁸⁷

According to Himes, fanatical and extraordinary elements reached such a state that at times they amazed even Starkweather. Thus for example, a young man claimed to have the power to hold railroad cars from moving “by the mere effort of his will.” At a camp meeting in Windsor, Connecticut, in September 1843 a woman believed that by

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁶ “[Editorial],” *ST*, Sept. 27, 1843, 44.

⁸⁷ Josiah Litch, “Protest,” *MC*, Sept. 14, 1843, 29; *idem*, “Protest,” *ST*, Sept. 20, 1843, 38.

faith she might walk across the Connecticut River just as Peter did in the Bible but was restrained from attempting it.⁸⁸

Starkweather's influence gradually withered. In April 1844, he tried to unite the "disaffected" Advent believers by calling a special conference at the Marlboro Chapel in Boston. The conference, however, turned out to be disastrous. "No two were of one mind," and even Starkweather's leadership was questioned. Amidst arguments, women falling into "mesmeric ecstasies," and people all talking at the same time, confusion grew to such an extent that the owner of the building expelled all of them and the meeting was aborted.⁸⁹ Eventually Starkweather lost most of his Millerite followers. Subsequently, he accepted the doctrine of spiritual wifery and separated from his family.⁹⁰

In the light of the above charismatic manifestations, visions, and fanatical extremes, it is not surprising to find most of the Millerite leaders being against such occurrences. Interestingly, there had been ecstatic and emotional expressions during some of Miller's early meetings in spite of the fact that his preaching appealed primarily to the intellect.⁹¹ Miller, however, did not have a favorable attitude toward this type of enthusiastic display. Looking back at some meetings where he was present, he wrote in December of 1844: "Sometimes our meetings were distinguished by noise and confusion,

⁸⁸ *Defence of Elder Joshua V. Himes*, 12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹¹ Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry: A Defense of the Character and Conduct of William Miller and the Millerites, Who Mistakenly Believed That the Second Coming of Christ Would Take Place in the Year 1844* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1944), 84-85.

and—forgive me, brethren, if I express myself too strongly—it appeared to me more like Babel, than a solemn assembly of penitents bowing in humble reverence before a holy God. I have often obtained more evidence of inward piety from a *kindling eye*, a *wet cheek*, and a *choked utterance*, than from all the noise in Christendom.”⁹²

In his New Year address in 1843, Miller warned the Advent believers to “be careful that Satan get [*sic*] no advantage over you, by scattering coals of wild fire among you; for if he cannot drive you into unbelief and doubt, he will then try his wild fire of fanaticism, and speculation, to get us off from the word of God.”⁹³

In a letter to Sylvester Bliss in which he was probably reacting against some of the fanaticism associated with Starkweather, Miller wrote:

It does seem that something ought to be done, if possible, to save from distraction and fanaticism, our dear brethren who are ‘looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of the Great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. . . . My heart was deeply pained during my tour east, to see in some few of my former friends, a proneness to the wild and foolish extremes of some vain delusions, such as working miracles, discerning of spirits, vague and loose views on sanctification, &c. As it respects the working of miracles, I have no faith in those who pretend before hand that they can work miracles. . . . I see no reason for the working of miracles in this age.’⁹⁴

Miller was quick to characterize such miracles as the work of Satan.⁹⁵ Again he noted in the *Signs of the Times* that he “never pretended to preach anything but the Bible. I have used no sophistry. My preaching has not been with words of man’s wisdom. I have not

⁹² Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller: Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 282.

⁹³ William Miller, “A New Year’s Address to Second Advent Believers for 1843,” *ST*, Jan. 25, 1843, 150.

⁹⁴ William Miller, “Letter from Wm. Miller,” *ST*, Nov. 8, 1843, 97.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

countenanced fanaticism in any form. I use no dreams or visions except those in the word of God.”⁹⁶

Himes was also critical of some extreme views concerning the doctrine of holiness that some Millerites promoted in Boston, Connecticut, and several other places in the East. According to Himes, those Millerites had “gone into excesses, and various ridiculous airs and movements,” which violated both “the precept and spirit of Christianity.”⁹⁷ In the same way the majority of the believers in Watertown, Massachusetts, protested against some Advent believers who came among them and “made pretensions to the possession of superior light to that derived from the word of God, whose devotions were characterized by strange, disgusting, and indecent ‘exercises,’ which they ascribe to the ‘power of God.’” The believers made a resolution to have “no sympathy” with them and “their spirit or practices.”⁹⁸

In 1844 Sylvester Bliss, another prominent Millerite leader, wrote an article entitled “The Reformation of Luther—Its Similarity to the Present Times.” After showing the detrimental effect of the Zwickau “prophets,” who claimed direct revelations from God but whose teachings led to fanatical outbreaks in Luther’s days, Bliss made a comparison between the Reformation and the Advent movement. He noted the dangers of some “internal enemies, endeavoring to eat out its very vitals, and to wreck the ship of Zion on the rocks and quicksands of fanaticism, by leading those who favor it into

⁹⁶ William Miller, “Address to Second Advent Believers,” *ST*, Jan. 31, 1844, 196.

⁹⁷ Joshua V. Himes, “The Retrospect—State of Things,” *AH*, July 17, 1844, 188.

⁹⁸ “Statement and Protest of Advent Believers in Watertown, Ms,” *AH*, July 17, 1844, 189.

unseemly excesses, and the extravagancies of mysticism,” and warned “against the reveries of enthusiastical hallucinations.”⁹⁹

In addition to the attitudes of the Millerite leaders, the movement made several official declarations concerning charismatic and visionary exercises. In May 1843 at the dedication of the Boston Tabernacle, for example, the tabernacle committee made the following statement while addressing the general public and giving their fundamental principles of beliefs: “We place no reliance whatever upon any visions, or dreams, mere impressions or private revelations. . . . Neither have we any confidence in the stability of those whose hopes are based upon impressions, and not upon the word of God. . . . Impressions and visions, and dreams have thus far usually failed those who have put their trust in them; which proves they were not of God. . . . We have for our guide the sure word of God.”¹⁰⁰ At their official general conference in the same month, the Millerites declared again that they had “no confidence whatever in any visions, dreams, or private revelations.”¹⁰¹ A year later, in May 1844, at another general conference, the Millerite leadership issued a similar warning and cautioned the believers “upon the danger of placing any confidence in impressions, and dreams and private revelations, so called, as independent sources of information.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Sylvester Bliss, “The Reformation of Luther—Its Similarity to the Present Times,” *Advent Shield and Review*, Sept. 1844, 162.

¹⁰⁰ Tabernacle Committee, “To the Public,” *ST*, May 10, 1843, 74-75.

¹⁰¹ “Declaration of Principles,” *ST*, June 7, 1843, 107; “Declaration of Principles,” *MC*, June 15, 1843, 112.

¹⁰² “Address of the Conference,” *AH*, June 5, 1844, 141.

Thus we can conclude that the Millerite relationship to spiritual gifts was complex. While, on one hand, there were charismatic and visionary manifestations among them, on the other, the Millerite leadership condemned such activities as dangerous and unbiblical. S. C. Chandler expressed this dual attitude in his article “Special Revelations.” “While some may look upon the head of this article with terror,” Chandler wrote, “others will fear lest we may oppose their views. We confess that we have a strong desire to avoid a newspaper discussion on a point where sincere believers in the coming Christ at hand are divided. Instead of presenting an array of arguments, and quoting scriptures which all do not understand alike, we shall comply with the request of a brother, in publishing two striking facts.” Chandler then provided two accounts of “Deacon Fisher, a godly old man,” and of a “deaf and dumb woman” who accepted the doctrine of the second coming of Christ through visionary revelations which they claimed were given to them. Interestingly, at the end of the article, there is a “remark” from the editors reminding the believers to rely primarily on the Bible as their only “rule of faith and practice” and warning them that “special revelations cannot be of general authority. They cannot carry a divine sanction to those who are obliged to take them *second-hand*.”¹⁰³ The same duality continued after the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844.

Millerite Attitudes towards Charismatic and Visionary Experiences after the Great Disappointment

Charismatic and visionary manifestations continued to be present among Millerites after the Great Disappointment. The Millerite leadership, however, rejected

¹⁰³ S. C. Chandler, “Special Revelations,” *MC*, July 6, 1843, 147-148.

such exercises even more strongly than they did before the Disappointment. The main reason for such an attitude seems to be twofold. First, after the Great Disappointment there appeared a faction among the Millerite movements called the Spiritualizers. This group went to extreme positions on many biblical issues, including spiritual manifestations and visions.¹⁰⁴ Second, the 1840s witnessed prophetic activity among such religious groups as the Shakers and the Mormons. Both groups believed in the modern manifestation of the prophetic gift and visionary and charismatic exercises. The Millerite attitude can be seen, in part, as a reaction against what they viewed as extreme forms of religious experience.

As before the Great Disappointment, there continued to be reports of charismatic and visionary manifestations among the Millerites. From an account of the trial of Israel Dammon, a Millerite preacher, in February 1845, we understand that Maine was one of the areas where charismatic and visionary practices prevailed. There appeared to be at least five prophets in the area of Portland, Maine, and four of them, including Ellen Harmon,¹⁰⁵ were women.¹⁰⁶ The trial of Dammon depicted fanaticism among the Millerite Adventists in Maine that was producing a negative public attitude towards the movement.¹⁰⁷ Just before the significant Millerite conference in Albany in April 1845,

¹⁰⁴ Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 245-266.

¹⁰⁵ After her marriage to James White in August 1846, Ellen Harmon became Ellen G. White.

¹⁰⁶ Rennie Schoephlin, ed., "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial," *Spectrum*, Aug. 1987, 39. The other mentioned visionaries were: Emily Clemons, Dorinda Baker, Phoebe Knapp, and William Foy.

¹⁰⁷ For more on the trial see: Frederick Hoyt, "We Lifted up Our Voices Like a Trumpet: Millerites in Portland, Maine," *Spectrum*, Aug. 1987, 29-36; "Trial of Elder I. Dammon," *Piscataquis Farmer*, Mar. 7, 1845.

Himes warned Miller that “the Portland folks, are going on as you will see by the ‘Hope of Israel.’ They will lay all in ruins if they have time enough to do it. They are using your influence or you name and letters to sustain themselves in this new and visionary movements [*sic*].”¹⁰⁸ On April 22 Himes wrote to Miller again that “things in Maine are bad—very bad.”¹⁰⁹ He, however, looked towards the “Albany conference to help stabilize the advent cause.”¹¹⁰ Himes and Miller became so concerned with the situation in Portland that they visited the Advent believers there, preaching to them on Sunday, June 1, 1845. The *Portland Advertiser*, a local newspaper, “noted the sharp opposition of Miller and Himes to ‘fanaticism’ which had spread among Maine Millerites.”¹¹¹ Understandably, living in Portland at that time Ellen White was viewed as one of those fanatical prophets.

Samuel S. Snow, another major Millerite leader, also claimed the prophetic gift in 1845. He saw himself as Elijah the prophet who had to appear just before the second coming of Christ. Snow and his followers promoted his views in a periodical called *The True Day Star*. In its first issue they published a statement claiming that “Elijah,” the messenger of Jesus, “is here” in the person of Snow and that the “Spirit of God, guides him in the high and special work which is committed to him, of expounding the sacred

¹⁰⁸ Joshua V. Himes to William Miller, Mar. 12, 1845, CAR, AU.

¹⁰⁹ Joshua V. Himes to William Miller, Apr. 22, 1845, CAR, AU.

¹¹⁰ Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 256-257.

¹¹¹ Frederick Hoyt, “We Lifted up Our Voices Like a Trumpet: Millerites in Portland, Maine,” *Spectrum*, Aug. 1987, 21.

Scriptures, for the infallible guidance of the household of faith.”¹¹² Those who did not accept Snow as the new prophet were, according to him, assigned to hell in his *Book of Judgment Delivered to Israel by Elijah the Messenger of the Everlasting Covenant*.¹¹³ Since Miller, Himes, Litch, Storrs, and some other Millerite leaders rejected Snow’s prophetic claims, Snow saw them as “fallen,” “judged” and “cast out from the holy mountain of God, to receive the due reward of their deeds, and melt away under the burning curse of the Lord.”¹¹⁴ He apparently continued his prophetic claims until the end of his life.¹¹⁵

There were other reports of Millerite believers seeing visions. A. A. Sawin reported in the *Midnight Cry* of a Sister Matthewson who gave him a “hasty sketch of the scenes through which she had passed.” The sister “spoke in a clear and distinct tone,” wrote Sawin, “loud enough to be heard in any part of the room, and that without any apparent fatigue. The only sensible alteration in her, is, that her voice is not quite so strong as in the summer, and she eats a little food.”¹¹⁶ It is in this context that Himes, Miller, and other Millerite leaders continued to be against charismatic and visionary experiences. After the Disappointment they issued official resolutions condemning such manifestations.

¹¹² *Day-Star*, Dec. 29, 1845, 1-2; “True Day Star,” *Voice of Truth and Glad Tidings*, Jan. 14, 1846, 20-21.

¹¹³ [Samuel S. Snow], *The Book of Judgment Delivered to Israel by Elijah the Messenger of the Everlasting Covenant* (New York: G. Mitchell, 1848).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, iv-vi, 269.

¹¹⁵ Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 256.

¹¹⁶ A. A. Sawin, “Visit to Sister Matthewson,” *MC*, Nov. 21, 1844, 168.

One month after the Great Disappointment, the Millerite leadership addressed the public and gave reasons why the believers should continue to have faith in the Second Coming. Concerning visions and revelations they declared,

In support of our positions, we rest solely upon the testimony of the word of God, in its plain, obvious, and literal acceptance, and as understood by the apostles and their immediate successors. . . . *We place no reliance whatever upon any visions or dreams, mere impressions, or private revelations.* . . . “Search the Scriptures,” said our Saviour; and from them we profess to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, to every man that asketh us. Neither have we any confidence in any stability of those whose hopes are based upon impressions, and not upon the word of God; for when their impressions are gone, their hopes will disappear with them. But the word of God endureth forever, and those whose hopes are grounded upon it cannot be shaken, whatever may betide.¹¹⁷

In March 1845, Himes called for a general conference of the Advent believers to convene at Albany, New York, in April. In a sense, the Albany conference was a reaction against the fanaticism that was spreading among the Millerites. This, of course, included charismatic and visionary manifestations. The conference developed an official resolution against such experiences:

Whereas, in every great religious movement, there have been among the wise and sober-minded advocates of the truth, others who have risen up, striving about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers, making great pretensions to special illumination, indulging in many evil practices, creeping into houses and leading captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, men of corrupt minds and reprobate concerning the faith, who will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heap to themselves teachers having itching ears, turning their ears away from the truth, and turning unto fables, and who walk disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies, for the cause of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of. . . .

Resolved, that we have no sympathy or fellowship with those things which have only a show of wisdom in will-worship and neglecting of the body, after the commandments and doctrines of men. That we have no fellowship with any of the *new tests*, as conditions of salvation, in addition to repentance toward God, and faith

¹¹⁷ “Address to the Public,” *MC*, Nov. 21, 1844, 166.

in our Lord Jesus Christ, and a looking for and loving his appearing. That we have no fellowship for Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.¹¹⁸

Their position on the topic was clarified further at a conference held in New York in May 1845. One of the resolutions clearly stated that “we have no confidence in any new messages, visions, dreams, tongues, miracles, extraordinary gifts, revelations, impressions, discerning of spirits, or teachings &c. &c., not in accordance with the unadulterated word of God.”¹¹⁹ It is curious to note that the Albany Adventists, who affirmed their general position against any visions and prophetic manifestations, nevertheless opened a “little door” for such experiences at the New York conference. While before they expressed no confidence “whatever” in any kind of spiritual revelations, now they implied that if they were in accordance with the Bible they would accept them. The fact was, however, that the mainline Adventists did not believe that any of the spiritual manifestations and visions during that time were in accordance with the Bible. They rejected them all.

As before the Great Disappointment, there continued to be charismatic and visionary manifestations among the Millerites after October 22, 1844. Such experiences were claimed even by some prominent Millerite leaders. Many of the new visionaries, however, went to extremes and fanaticism in belief and practice. The mainline Millerites logically condemned such activities as dangerous and unbiblical. The Sabbatarian Adventists who would eventually come out of the Millerite group after the Great

¹¹⁸ “Mutual Conference of Adventists at Albany,” *AH*, May 14, 1845, 107; *Proceedings of the Mutual Conference of Adventists: Held in the City of Albany, the 29th and 30th of April, and 1st of May, 1845* (New York: Joshua V. Himes, 1845), 19-20.

¹¹⁹ “Conference of Adventists at New York,” *Morning Watch*, May 15, 1845, 158.

Disappointment would also have to take a position regarding charismatic and visionary manifestations. That was especially so since Ellen Harmon, one of the Sabbatarian Adventists, claimed to receive a vision a few months after the Disappointment. Before we look at the initial Sabbatarian understanding of the prophetic gift and visionary manifestations, however, I will briefly introduce Ellen G. Harmon (White).

Introduction to Ellen G. White

Ellen Gould Harmon, a seventeen-year-old girl from Gorham, Maine, received her first vision in December 1844. Her prophetic gift was gradually accepted among the Sabbatarian group and she played an important role in the development of that movement. She became one of the three main founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The following is a brief outline of her life leading to her call to prophetic ministry.

Ellen Gould Harmon and her twin sister, Elizabeth, were born on November 26, 1827, to Robert and Eunice Harmon near the small town of Gorham, Maine. A few years later, the family moved to Portland, Maine, where Ellen grew up. At the age of nine, Ellen suffered a severe injury that affected her childhood years and her life as a whole. While returning home from school, an angry schoolmate threw a stone that hit her in the face. For nearly three weeks she was unconscious but eventually she recovered. This experience, however, left her in such poor health that she struggled with school and learning. As she wrote later,

For two years I could not breathe through my nose, and was able to attend school but little. It seemed impossible for me to study and to retain what I learned. . . .

My nervous system was prostrated, and my hand trembled so that I made but little progress in writing, and could get no farther than the simple copies in coarse hand. As I endeavored to bend my mind to my studies, the letters in the page would run together, great drops of perspiration would stand upon my brow, and a faintness and

dizziness would seize me. I had a bad cough, and my whole system seemed debilitated.¹²⁰

Her teacher advised her to leave school until her health stabilized. That was the end of her formal education. “Her inability to attend school, however, did not stop her informal education. Her autobiographical sketches reflect a young woman with both a probing mind and a sensitive nature.”¹²¹

Ellen Harmon was brought up in a typical Methodist home. Her understanding of grace and assurance of salvation were in line with the Methodist faith. In 1840 William Miller came to Portland, Maine, for a series of lectures on the second coming of Christ. Harmon and her family attended the meetings held at the Casco Street Christian Church. Being touched by Miller’s messages, Harmon responded by going forward to the “anxious seat” for a special prayer. She and her family were convinced regarding Miller’s prophetic interpretations about the soon coming of Christ and became leading supporters of the Adventist cause in Portland, Maine. For some time, however, the twelve-year-old Harmon struggled with an inner sense of unworthiness and fear of eternal hell. She felt that she was not perfect enough for heaven. “I had often sought for the peace there is in Christ,” she wrote, “but I could not seem to find the freedom I desired.”¹²²

Her fears began to gradually dissipate a year later when she attended the Methodist camp meeting at Buxton, Maine, in 1841. After listening to a sermon, Ellen

¹²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 as Written by Herself; with a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and of Her Last Sickness* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 18-19.

¹²¹ George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 14.

¹²² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 21.

Harmon understood that “it is only by connecting with Jesus through faith that the sinner becomes a hopeful, believing child of God.” She noted that “these words comforted” her and gave her hope, although she continued to struggle for some time until she understood fully God’s grace.¹²³

At Buxton, Harmon also had a classical Methodist conversion experience. One day she came to the altar together with other people who were seeking God. She wrote,

As I knelt and prayed, suddenly my burden left me, and my heart was light. At first a feeling of alarm came over me, and I tried to resume my load of distress. It seemed to me that I had no right to feel joyous and happy. But Jesus seemed very near to me; I felt able to come to Him with my griefs, misfortunes, and trials, even as the needy ones came to Him for relief when He was upon earth. There was a surety in my heart that He understood my peculiar trials, and sympathized with me. I can never forget this precious assurance of the pitying tenderness of Jesus toward one so unworthy of His notice.¹²⁴

After returning from the camp meeting, she and several other believers were given probationary membership in the Chestnut Street Methodist Church.¹²⁵ In 1842 she was baptized into Methodism. At her baptism Ellen White claimed to have experienced some kind of ecstatic manifestation. “When I arose from the water,” she recalled, “my strength was nearly gone, for the power of the Lord rested upon me. I felt that henceforth I was not of this world, but had risen from the watery grave into a newness of life.”¹²⁶ This was the start of a Christian life that would be accompanied by many visionary experiences.

¹²³ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Burt, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development,” 20; Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 25.

¹²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 25.

After 1842 there was a growing opposition to Miller's prophetic teaching of the imminent second coming of Christ. The Harmon family, however, continued to hold the Advent doctrine. As a result, they were expelled from the Chestnut Street Methodist Church in 1843. Robert Harmon appealed the decision, but in vain. But the Harmons did not lose hope. They continued to attend Advent meetings and anticipated the Advent in 1844. Together with other Millerites they experienced the Great Disappointment on October 22, 1844, when Jesus did not appear. It was after that experience that the seventeen-year-old Ellen Harmon had her first vision, one that encouraged the disappointed Adventists. Up to that time Ellen Harmon's religious experience did not stand out in any dramatic way from that of other believers or Millerites. That changed with her first vision in December 1844. Since she would be a part of the small Sabbatarian group that evolved from the Millerites after the Great Disappointment, those who would become Sabbatarians had to take a stand on the issue of her visionary experiences. In the next section we will examine Harmon's own reaction to her visions and the Sabbatarians' initial reaction to and understanding of her claim to having the prophetic gift.

Ellen Harmon and Early Sabbatarian Adventist Attitudes toward Charismatic and Visionary Experiences

This section discusses Ellen Harmon's initial vision, her call to prophetic ministry, and her own early self-understanding and reaction to her gift. It also examines early Sabbatarian Adventist attitudes toward charismatic and visionary experiences in general and Ellen Harmon's gift in particular.

Most Millerite Adventists had absolute confidence that Jesus would come on October 22, 1844. When the expected date came and he did not appear, the Adventists

were not mentally prepared to answer questions related to Jesus' nonappearance. Thus this experience led them to confusion and frustration. While it is impossible to give definite figures, it is probable that the majority of the believers rejected the Advent message altogether in late 1844. Meanwhile, those who maintained their Advent hope began to differ in their opinion of what really happened on October 22, 1844. Three identifiable groups of Adventists eventually emerged out of the Disappointment.

The first group, called "spiritualizers," belonged to the "shut door" segment of Adventism.¹²⁷ They affirmed that the prophecy of Dan 8:14 was fulfilled and that Christ had come on October 22, 1844. His coming, however, was spiritual into the hearts of the believers. Furthermore, they concluded that the door of probation had closed for all people except for the Millerite believers on October 22. Several fanatical parties holding extreme views emerged as a result of their spiritual interpretation.

The second group was led by Joshua V. Himes and reacted against the fanaticism of the spiritualizers. They can be thought of as the "open door" or Albany Adventists.¹²⁸ They concluded that nothing had happened on October 22, that the date simply was wrong, but they still believed that Christ would physically come soon. They therefore continued to preach the Advent message.

The third group arose later out of the midst of the "shut door" Adventists. For them something did happen on the October date, but it was not the Second Coming. Through a series of extensive Bible studies they concluded that instead of coming to the

¹²⁷ For more on the "shut door" issue, see Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 236-242.

¹²⁸ The name "Albany Adventist" came as a result of a conference held in Albany in April, 1845. The group formed as Evangelical Adventists and later became the Advent Christian Church.

world, Christ had entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary to fulfill his last heavenly duty before returning in glory to the earth. This group would eventually become the Sabbatarian Adventists. Its members would gradually change their “shut door” view and accept the “open door” position.¹²⁹ They also would accept a modern prophet in their midst.

Ellen Harmon’s First Vision and Initial Self-Understanding of Her Prophetic Gift

As noted above, Ellen Harmon received her first vision in December 1844. In that vision, she saw the Advent believers on a straight and narrow path “traveling to the City,¹³⁰ which was at the farther end of the path. They had a bright light set up behind them at the first end of the path, which an angel told me was the Midnight Cry.¹³¹ This light shone all along the path and gave light for their feet so they might not stumble. And if they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the City, they were safe.”¹³² Clearly this was good news for the disappointed Millerite Adventists. It was not a time to be discouraged. God had not abandoned them. Instead, according to

¹²⁹ For fuller discussion of the above groups see: George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 55-61.

¹³⁰ The “City” represented the new Jerusalem in heaven.

¹³¹ The “Midnight Cry” represented the Millerite message of the second coming of Christ.

¹³² Ellen G. Harmon, “Letter from Sister Harmon,” *Day-Star*, Jan. 24, 1846, 31. This letter was published by Enoch Jacobs to whom it was addressed initially. However, it was not intended for publication. Thus she requested him to republish the vision in order to include more details so that people could see better what God had shown to her. The second publication appeared in the *Day-Star*, Mar. 14, 1846.

the vision, he had led them through the Midnight Cry experience culminating in the October 22, 1844 disappointment. To reject that past experience was to reject a prophetic movement led by God himself. “Others rashly denied the light behind them,” the vision reported, “and said that it was not God that had led them out so far. The light behind them went out which left their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and got their eyes off the mark and lost sight of Jesus, and fell off the path down in the dark and wicked world below.”¹³³

About a week later, Harmon received a second vision which compelled her to go and encourage the Millerite believers by sharing what God had revealed to her:

About one week after this the Lord gave me another view, and showed me the trials I must pass through; that I must go and relate to others what he had revealed to me; that I should meet with great opposition, and suffer anguish of spirit. Said the angel, “the grace of GOD is sufficient for you; he will sustain you.”

This vision troubled me exceedingly. My health was very poor, and I was only seventeen years old.¹³⁴

Ellen Harmon was reluctant to share her vision. She pleaded with God to remove “the burden” from her and use somebody else more capable for the job. “But all the light I could get,” she noted later, “was, ‘Make known to others what I have revealed to you.’ . . . I looked with desire into the grave. Death appeared to me preferable to the responsibilities I should have to bear.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts: My Christian Experience, Views and Labors in Connection with the Rise and Progress of the Third Angel's Message*, vol. 2 (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1860), 35-36.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 36.

Despite some of her personal reasons, such as poor health, being too “small” for the job, and fear of exaltation, it seems that there were two major reasons for her initial refusal to share her vision. First, the young prophet may have been fearful of accepting her calling because of the general Adventist attitude toward the prophetic gift. As noted earlier, the majority of Millerites were firmly against any form of spiritual manifestations, new prophets, or visions. That attitude had become even stronger by the spring of 1845 because of the appearance of many fanatical groups within the Spiritualizers’ segment of Millerism, some of whom claimed the gift of prophecy. In this context it is not surprising that Ellen Harmon was fearful of accepting or claiming a prophetic role.

The second major reason for Ellen Harmon’s reluctance to accept her prophetic gift was the attitude of believers towards the disappointment in her own home church (or the “little band” as she called them). Arthur White notes that “by December most of the believers in the Portland area had abandoned their confidence in the integrity of the October 22 date.”¹³⁶ That was Harmon’s belief as well. In a letter to Joseph Bates, two years later she recalled: “At the time of the vision of the midnight cry [December 1844], I had given it up in the past and thought it future, as also most of the band had.”¹³⁷ Thus the December 1844 vision contained information contrary to what Advent believers in the Portland area believed. In her letter to Bates she described her reaction to God’s instructions to deliver the message seen in the vision. As she put it, “I shrank from it. I was young, and I thought they would not receive it from me. I disobeyed the Lord, and

¹³⁶ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years 1827-1862*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 60.

¹³⁷ Ellen G. White to Joseph Bates, Jul. 13, 1847, Letter B-3, CAR, AU.

instead of remaining at home, where the meeting was to be that night, I got in a sleigh in the morning and rode three or four miles and there I found J. T. [Joseph Turner].”¹³⁸ She even began to hide herself from the believers and did not attend meetings for a while. When finally she decided to relate what she had seen to the little group in Portland, to her absolute surprise, all of those present accepted her message as one coming from God. The paradox now was that her fellow believers acknowledged her prophetic gift while she was troubled by it.

After weeks of struggling, Harmon finally accepted her call. This happened in a meeting held at her home. The little company, noticing her depression and agony, decided to have a special prayer for her. The elder of the band, John Pearson, prayed for Ellen to surrender her will “to the will of the Lord.”¹³⁹ She later recalled how during the prayer the thick darkness that surrounded her disappeared and a “sudden light” came upon her. She felt she was in the presence of angels. “One of these holy beings again repeated the words, ‘Make known to others what I have revealed to you.’”¹⁴⁰

Ellen Harmon’s acceptance of her prophetic ministry, however, did not mean that she never doubted her divine calling again. As she acknowledged, she was “sometimes tempted to doubt” her own visionary experiences since some believers attributed her gift to fanaticism, mesmerism, or spiritual excitement.¹⁴¹ She reported that in 1845, while at family worship one morning, she was “struck dumb” for nearly twenty-four hours

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 70-71.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 89.

because she questioned her gift and thought of it as mesmerism. After realizing her sin “in doubting the power of God,” she saw a card with fifty texts¹⁴² of Scripture written in gold letters. The biblical passages encouraged her and affirmed her gift. The next morning she claimed that her “tongue was loosed” and her “soul was filled with joy.” “After that,” White wrote, “I dared not doubt, or for a moment resist the power of God, however others might think of me.”¹⁴³

It is interesting to note another fact related to the above experience. According to Ellen White’s later record, up to that time she could not write because she was unable to hold a pen “steadily” and her hand was “trembling.” During the vision, however, she was commanded to write out what she saw. “I obeyed, and wrote readily,” White recalled. “My nerves were strengthened, and from that day to this my hand has been steady.”¹⁴⁴

Ellen White’s self-understanding of her prophetic role during this early period (1844 to 1850) can be seen in two major areas. First, she felt obligated to deal with fanatical and extreme elements among some of the scattered Adventist groups. These extremes included issues such as perfection or “cannot-sin” theory, the “no-work” doctrine, false humility, time settings, bodily demonstrations, and others.¹⁴⁵ In a letter to John N. Loughborough in 1874 Ellen White remembered: “I was shown that God had a work for me to do amid dangers and perils, but I must not shrink. I must go to the very

¹⁴² For these texts see: Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2000), 24-31.

¹⁴³ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 89.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁴⁵ For examples of such controversies see: Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 49-52, 57-136; *idem*, “Notes of Travel,” *RH*, Nov. 20, 1883; *idem*, *Life Sketches*, 77-94.

places where fanaticism had done the most evil, and bear my messages of reproof to some of those who were influencing others; while I should give comfort and encouragement to those who were timid and conscientious, but deceived by those they thought were more righteous than they.”¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Ellen White felt inadequate for the task. As she put it, “I was young and timid, and felt great sadness in regard to visiting the field where fanaticism had reigned. I pleaded with God to spare me from this—to send . . . some other one.” God, however, assured her that “an angel of Heaven” would always be at her side.¹⁴⁷ “Had it not been for these special evidences of God’s love,” she wrote, “had he not thus, by the manifestation of his Spirit, set his seal to the truth, we might have become discouraged; but these proofs of Divine guidance, these living experiences in the things of God, strengthened us to fight manfully the battles of the Lord.”¹⁴⁸

Reproving fanaticism was not an easy task. It turned many against Ellen White as a person and her prophetic gift was often questioned. Thus she noted that “the very ones God has called me to reprove and warn have judged me and have been embittered against me because I have exposed their sins which were covered up. They have sought to make my testimony of no account by their misrepresentations and malicious falsehoods.”¹⁴⁹ In one occasion in 1845, for instance, fanatical teachings in Maine brought the Advent

¹⁴⁶ Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *RH*, Nov. 20, 1883, 721.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

believers to a state of “great confusion.”¹⁵⁰ Ellen White claimed receiving a vision about the situation and seeing the persons causing that fanaticism. As she put it, “it became my unpleasant duty to meet this, and we labored hard to suppress it.”¹⁵¹ Although some tried to destroy her influence, Ellen White reported that she faithfully related what was shown to her respecting the fanatical course of these people in Maine.¹⁵²

Second, Ellen White believed in the unifying role of her prophetic ministry. This was particularly true in relation to theological issues. Between 1848 and 1850 the small Sabbatarian group started to hold conferences to discuss and clarify important biblical concepts. Ellen White would sometimes claim to receive a vision in order to confirm a doctrinal position that had been already studied or discovered through Bible study. Her confirmatory visions brought unity and agreement among the Sabbatarians. Thus, for example, at the second Sabbatarian conference at Volney, New York, in August 1848, there were about thirty-five people assembled in the barn of Brother Arnold. But, unfortunately, they differed in their understanding of biblical doctrines so much so that White wrote: “There were hardly two agreed. Each was strenuous for his views, declaring that they were according to the Bible. All were anxious for an opportunity to advance their sentiments, or to preach to us. They were told that we had not come so great a distance to hear them, but had come to teach them the truth.”¹⁵³ At one point Ellen White

¹⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 49.

¹⁵¹ Ellen G. White, “Early Experiences in Meeting Fanaticism,” MS 10, 1859, CAR, AU; Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

¹⁵² Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 51; Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

¹⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 97-98.

felt so distressed that she fainted. After several prayers were offered for her, she revived and received a vision in which she saw “some of the errors of those present, and also the truth in contrast with their errors.” She also noted “that these discordant views, which they claimed to be according to the Bible, were only according to their opinion of the Bible, and that their errors must be yielded, and they unite upon the third angel’s message.”¹⁵⁴ As a result of her vision, Ellen White reported that unity was achieved and concluded that the “meeting ended victoriously” and “truth gained the victory.”¹⁵⁵

Ellen White also acknowledged the unifying role of her prophetic gift when she claimed that her visions were “the way God had chosen to teach, in some cases, those who erred from Bible truth.” “I saw that in striking against the visions,” she wrote, “they did not strike against the worm,—the feeble instrument that God spoke through, but against the Holy Ghost. I saw it was a small thing to speak against the instrument, but it was dangerous to slight the words of God.”¹⁵⁶ Her gift would eventually lead the early Sabbatarian Adventists to mount a biblical defense of the gift of prophecy as one of the genuine and legitimate gifts of the Spirit.

Initial Sabbatarian Perspectives on Charismatic and Visionary Experiences and Ellen Harmon’s Prophetic Gift

In the late 1840s the Sabbatarian Adventists had to take a position on charismatic and visionary manifestations and more specifically the visions of Ellen Harmon, since they had in their midst one who claimed to be a prophet. Early evidences reveal that there

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 99.

¹⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, MS 2, Jan. 17, 1849, CAR, AU.

were different forms of charismatic and visionary experiences among the Sabbatarian group in the late 1840s.

From the very beginning the Sabbatarians were inclined to charismatic and visionary manifestations and did not consider them as unbiblical. In 1848, for example, Ellen White and a group of Sabbatarians were engaged in prayer when, as reported, they experienced some kind of charismatic demonstration. “Brother and Sister Ralph were both laid prostrate and remained helpless for sometime,” Ellen White wrote. She also claimed to be “taken off in vision” and had a “sweet communion” with God.¹⁵⁷

Again, at a conference held at Topsham, Maine, “the power of God” came upon the people present “like a mighty rushing wind.” During the meeting believers “arose upon their feet” and “praised God with a loud voice.” As reported, “the voice of weeping could not be told from the voice of shouting. It was a triumphant time; all were strengthened and refreshed.”¹⁵⁸

In another meeting, “the Spirit of the Lord fell upon a young sister,” who then went to several of the believers, asking them if they would go with her to heaven. As she repeated the question several times some started falling upon their knees, others were crying for mercy, some desired to have a closer walk with God, while others desired salvation “full and free.” Ellen White reported that the meeting was accompanied with

¹⁵⁷ Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Hastings, May 29, 1848, Letter H-1, CAR, AU.

¹⁵⁸ Ellen G. White to the Church in Bro. Hastings House, Nov. [27], 1850, Letter H-28, CAR, AU.

lots of shouting and praises to God because of people's "victory" over sins and unbelief.¹⁵⁹

The Sabbatarians also reported instances when they exercised the gift of healing. In the spring of 1845, for example, a number of Sabbatarian believers were assembled in Topsham, Maine, at the house of Stockbridge Howland. His daughter Francis had rheumatic fever. When the group began praying for the sick girl a certain "Sister Curtis" entered the room where the girl was laying, took her hand, and said: "'Sister Francis, in the name of the Lord arise, and be whole.'" Ellen White reports that "new life shot through the veins of the sick girl, a holy faith took possession of her, and obeying its impulse, she rose from her feet, and walked the room, praising God for her recovery."¹⁶⁰ On another occasion in 1848, Ellen White recounted the healing of "Sister Penfield." After the doctors had given up on her condition, a group of Sabbatarian Adventists prayed for her. The prayers went on a whole night and continued in the next morning. The sick woman was healed and "she grew stronger in body and mind."¹⁶¹

There were also recorded experiences of tongue-speaking. In 1849 Hiram Edson reported on a conference he attended at Centreport, New York, with James and Ellen White. At the close of the conference there was an evening prayer meeting for a discouraged former Adventist, S. W. Rhodes. "Brother Ralph asked the Lord, in secret, to pour out his Spirit upon us if it was his will that we should go after Bro. Rhodes," Edson

¹⁵⁹ Ellen G. White to [Mary Nichols], Dec. 1850, Letter 31, CAR, AU. (Ellen White's letter is quoted in a letter of Mary Nichols to Sister Collins, Dec. 12, 1850.)

¹⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 74.

¹⁶¹ Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Hastings, May 29, 1848, Letter H-1, CAR, AU.

wrote. “The Spirit was poured out, and it settled upon us, so that the place was awful, and glorious. While I was inquiring of the Lord if he had sent his servant so far to go with me to hunt up Bro. Rhodes, that moment Bro. Ralph broke out in a new tongue, unknown to us all. Then came the interpretation—‘Yes to go with thee.’”¹⁶² When Edson and Ralph met Rhodes a few days later, trying to persuade him to come back into the faith, “God displayed his convincing power, and Bro. Ralph spoke in a new tongue, and gave the interpretation in power, and in the demonstration of the Holy Ghost.” Finally Rhodes joined the Sabbatarian Adventists.¹⁶³

In another occasion, F. M. Shimper reported of a tongue-speaking at a Sabbatarian meeting in Vermont, in the summer of 1851. In a letter to the *Review and Herald* she shared the success of the evangelistic work of Brother Holt in the Vermont area. Then she noted:

After baptizing six of our number, our dear Bro Morse was set apart by the laying on of hands, to the administration of the ordinances of God’s house. The Holy Ghost witnessed by the gift of tongues, and solemn manifestations of the presence and power of God. The place was awful, yet glorious. We truly felt that “we never saw it on this fashion.”

We now feel that our fellowship is with the Father, and the Son, and with one another, and that faith is indeed the evidence of things not seen.¹⁶⁴

Charismatic manifestations of this sort existed among Sabbatarians during this early

¹⁶² Hiram Edson, “[Beloved Brethren, Scattered Abroad],” *PT*, Dec. 1849, 35.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁶⁴ F. M. Shimper, “From Sister Shimper,” *RH*, Aug. 19, 1851, 15.

period and were considered as God's display of His Spirit among His faithful believers.¹⁶⁵

The Sabbatarians gradually accepted Ellen White's visions. By the late 1840s they began to develop some initial arguments for the validity of her gift of prophecy. As we will see, this trend continued in the later periods that this study examines. During the period between 1844 and 1850 the Sabbatarian understanding of the prophetic gift developed along several perspectives.

A first major perspective of the Sabbatarians concerning the gift of prophecy was their belief that it was a biblically based doctrine. Ellen White's visions were seen to be supported by the Scriptures. James White provides one of the earliest references regarding charismatic, visionary, and prophetic experiences of the Sabbatarian Adventists. He saw the gifts of the Spirit and the gift of prophecy, in particular, as a biblically sound doctrine. Thus he wrote as early as 1845 that

there is no safe place for a servant of Jesus Christ to plant his feet, but on the truths of the Bible. It is true we may expect glorious manifestations of God's Spirit; and I think the Bible warrants us in looking for visions, and those who may be discerners of spirits, even in the last days of time. But in such case we can judge alone by their fruits.

There is one Sister in Maine who has had a clear vision of the Advent people traveling to the City of God.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ For other recorded instances of tongue-speaking and healing experiences among the Sabbatarians in their early years see: George E. Rice, *Charismatic Experiences in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Present and Future* ([Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate], 1990); Arthur L. White, *Charismatic Experiences in Early Seventh-Day Adventist History* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, n.d.); James Michael Wilson, "Enthusiasm and Charismatic Manifestations in Sabbatarian Adventism with Applications for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of the Late Twentieth Century" (D.Min. diss., AU, 1995).

¹⁶⁶ James White, "Letter from Bro. White," *Day-Star*, Sept. 6, 1845, 17.

In that letter James White gave an account of the first vision of Ellen White. This appears to be the first published reference to her visions. He acknowledged the Bible as the only source of truth. Nevertheless, he implied that the Bible allowed for visions in the last days. This became the basis for his understanding and acceptance of the belief in the prophetic gift. Note that White's belief in the Bible as the only theological authority and at the same time his acceptance of modern prophetic manifestations was in line with the theology of Kinkade and the Christian Connection group to which he initially belonged.

Two years later, in 1847, in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* the first joined Sabbatarian publication, James White enlarged upon this idea. Among articles related to things that were soon to take place on this earth, he published Ellen White's first vision. Before its content, however, he wrote a short argumentative introduction as to why the readers should accept her visions as coming from God. His arguments were short but nevertheless they became the core of an understanding and justification of the prophetic gift among the Sabbatarians. In accordance with Kinkade, James White noted again that although "the bible is a perfect, and complete revelation," there was no reason why people should exclude charismatic and visionary experiences as a means through which God can lead his people. In fact, he was quite certain that "true visions are given to lead us to God, and His written word; but those that are given for a new rule of faith and practice, separate from the bible, cannot be from God, and should be rejected."¹⁶⁷ That is why he encouraged all who read the vision to "take the wise and safe course," pointed out by the Bible: "'Despise not prophesying. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.'

¹⁶⁷ [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to The "Little Flock"* ([Gorham, ME: James White], 1847), 13.

Paul. ‘To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.’ Isaiah 8:20.”¹⁶⁸

Accompanying the published vision, James White included more than eighty Bible references, including seven references to 2 Esdras and the Wisdom of Solomon from the Old Testament Apocrypha. It was as if he wanted to re-emphasize his point that the visions of Ellen White did not contradict but affirmed the Bible and its teachings.

In the December 1849 issue of the *Present Truth*, the first Sabbatarian Adventist periodical, James White noted again that “the Bible is our lamp” and “our guide.” “It is our rule of faith, and practice: still there is no reason why God may not give special revelations to lead the erring to God, and his living word,” he wrote.¹⁶⁹ Thus for White one could find a clear biblical basis for the belief in the gift of prophecy.

Similarly to James White, Otis Nichols explained the biblical foundation of Ellen Harmon’s gift in a letter to William Miller on April 20, 1846. He knew Ellen Harmon personally, since she lived at his home for about eight months (during the summer of 1845 and the winter of 1846). In his letter, he referred to her first vision published by James White and H. S. Gurney on April 6, 1846, in Portland, Maine.¹⁷⁰ He wrote:

Within is a part of the vision of E. G. H. of Portland. I fully believe them [*sic*] to be from heaven. The manner and circumstances attending is unlike any thing I have seen or read of since the days of the Apostles. I would ask you to lay aside prejudice and suspend judgment untill [*sic*] you have read and compared them with the scripture

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁶⁹ James White, “[Editorial Remarks],” *PT*, Dec. 1849, 40.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years 1827-1862*, 73-74.

and present truth. And if they speak not according to this word (and present truth) it is because there is no light in them Isa 8:20.¹⁷¹

We can note two things from the above quotation. First, according to Nichols, the circumstances and the manner of the visions were extraordinary, something that he had never seen before. Second, he did not ask Miller to believe the visions blindly. He encouraged him to compare them with the Bible and test them according to the Scriptures. Since the visions did not contradict the Bible, Nichols believed in them.

Joseph Bates also made a similar declaration in 1847. He published on April 7, 1847, in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* a letter that was written to him by Ellen White. The letter describes Ellen White's vision concerning the seventh-day Sabbath doctrine, a belief that became a major distinguishing mark of the Sabbatarian Adventists. In his remarks after the letter, Bates noted that although he did not initially believe in the visions of Ellen White, he could see "nothing in them that militated against the word [of God]." After further examination Bates was personally convinced that the visions were "the work of God."¹⁷²

Two years later, in 1849, Bates again confirmed the biblical foundation of Ellen White's prophetic gift. In his *Seal of the Living God* Bates noted that those who had "no faith in visions . . . may as well say they have no faith in the bible; for some, yea, many of the most wonderful scenes, and also promises made to the church of God have come to us

¹⁷¹ Otis Nichols to William Miller, Apr. 20, 1846, CAR, AU.

¹⁷² Joseph Bates, "Remarks," in [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to The "Little Flock,"* 21.

through visions.”¹⁷³ Bates then gave several biblical examples to prove that visionary experiences were supported by Scripture.¹⁷⁴ He, like most Sabbatarians, was certain that the visions of Ellen White were “in every instance . . . in accordance with God’s word.”¹⁷⁵ Therefore he appealed to those who still had questions about the truthfulness of Ellen White’s visions to “read them over again” and “see how clearly . . . they accord with God’s word and Second Advent History.”¹⁷⁶

The biblical foundation of the prophetic gift would become a major point for the Sabbatarians in their defense of Ellen White. This argument would be developed further as they tried to explain their understanding of her prophetic gift.

A second Sabbatarian perspective concerning the prophetic gift of Ellen White in the 1840s was related to the eschaton or the “last days.” It seems that the Sabbatarian Adventists saw it as one of their strongest arguments for defending the modern manifestations of the prophetic gift, because they used it extensively when they needed to defend their belief in the visions of Ellen White.

As early as 1847, James White made the “last days” argument a major point of defending the validity of Ellen White’s gift. In his introduction to her first vision published in *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* he built his main argument upon Acts 2:17-20 in connection with the last days’ prophecy in Joel 2 (see Joel 2:28-30):

¹⁷³ Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God: A Hundred Forty-Four Thousand, of the Servants of God Being Sealed, in 1849* (New Bedford [MA]: Benjamin Lindsey, 1849), 27-28.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28-32.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see Visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants, and on my hand-maidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.” Acts 2:17-20.¹⁷⁷

According to James White’s understanding, the prophecy of Joel was not fulfilled in its entirety at Pentecost. He argued that the signs in the sun and the moon were not seen on that day. Nor were there any dreams or visions. Thus only “a part of this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost,” White noted, “and ALL of it is to be fulfilled ‘IN THE LAST DAYS, SAITH GOD.’” He concluded that the “time has fully come, when the children of God may expect dreams and visions from the Lord.”¹⁷⁸ Then White gave his interpretation of the phrase the “last days.” He wrote:

I am well aware of the prejudice in many minds on this subject; but as it has been caused principally by the preaching of popular Adventists, and the lack of a correct view of this subject; I have humbly hoped to cut it away, with the “sword of the Spirit,” from some minds, at least. We will bear it in mind, that these dreams and visions, are to be in the “LAST DAYS.” As there cannot be any days later than the last, it is certain that we may expect just such revelations, until Christ appears in the clouds of heaven. I know that it is a very popular opinion among Adventists, that there was nothing more to be revealed by visions, after John closed up the revelation in A. D. 96. But if this opinion is correct, then the last days ended while John was on the isle of Patmos.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to The “Little Flock,”* 13.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

White aimed this argument at the general Adventist belief that the visions ended with apostle John. The last days did not end with John, he argued, therefore the readers could expect visions in these last days.

In May 1850, in order to affirm the belief that God could give prophetic guidance through dreams and visions “in the last days,” James White republished a dream that William Miller had had in November 1847.¹⁸⁰ Miller’s dream revealed the past advent experience through which the Millerite movement had passed. In the introduction before the content of the dream, White made an interesting point concerning dreams and visions. He not only believed that the gift of prophecy would be manifested in the last days, but he explicitly declared that it was a “sign” of the last days. “The gift of prophecy, by dreams and visions,” he wrote, “is here [referring to Acts 2:17] the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and in the last days is to be manifested sufficiently *to constitute a sign*. It is one of the gifts of the gospel church.”¹⁸¹ He went on to explain that “dreams and visions are the medium through which God has revealed himself to man. Through this medium he spake to the prophets; he has placed the gift of prophecy among the gifts of the gospel church, and has classed dreams and visions with the other signs of the ‘LAST DAYS.’”¹⁸² Based on 1 Cor 12, 1 Thess 5:20, Acts 13, and other biblical texts, White argued that “prophets”

¹⁸⁰ An account of the dream is found in Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, 361-363.

¹⁸¹ James White, “Brother Miller's Dream,” *PT*, May 1850, 73. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

and “prophesying” would only cease to exist at the Second Coming just as the rest of the gifts, such as apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.¹⁸³

Joseph Bates had a similar understanding concerning the gift of prophecy and the last days. Based on his earlier argument that God had always communicated to His people through dreams and visions he, as had James White, quoted Acts 2:17, 19 and asked rhetorical questions:

Will God’s word fail us here? Did not these prophets and apostles testify in vision by the inspiration of his spirit? yes. Will it not be manifest in the same way in the last days? yes. Is there any proof that the last days are past? no. Have any of the signs connected with the promised dreams and visions of the last days been seen yet? Why, to be sure they have; the daily and weekly papers have been teeming with them the last five years, besides the many books which have been published, and lectures given to prove that the earth is full of them. And the wonders of blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke, is repeated sometimes twice a week. Now why not believe the visions connected with these signs, unless you can absolutely prove that they are not of God.¹⁸⁴

Then Bates became even more specific. He went on to acknowledge that he also was once “slow to believe” that Ellen White’s visions were from God. However, “I did not oppose them,” he noted, “for the word of the Lord is positively clear that spiritual visions will be given to his people *in the last days*.”¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, Bates believed that in addition to Ellen White, God was “giving dreams and visions to his scattered children in many places, to prepare them for the coming scenes of this last coming conflict.”¹⁸⁶ Clearly in Bates’s understanding, these manifestations of the prophetic gift were

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, 30-31.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 31. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

confirmation that they were living in the last days of earth's history. Although he did not explicitly call the gift of prophecy a "sign" of the last days (as James White did), it is obvious that Bates applied that meaning in his writing. Later the Sabbatarian Adventists would develop "the last days" argument further and would gradually see Ellen White's gift as a mark (or a sign) of God's end-time people. By doing this they would try to validate the existence of their own movement.

A third Sabbatarian perspective of the prophetic gift during this early period was connected to the positive results and influence of Ellen White's visions among the believers. The Sabbatarians argued that because the visions brought many good "fruits" therefore Ellen White's gift was genuine. This argumentation was more pragmatic than theological (or biblical) and was based primarily on personal experiences and evidences that justified their belief in the gift of prophecy.

Otis Nichols used this argument in order to establish the truthfulness of Ellen White's prophetic gift in his letter to Miller in 1846. He noted that "her message was always attended with the Holy Ghost, and wherever it was received as from the Lord it broke down and melted their hearts like little children, fed, comforted, strengthened the weak, and encouraged them to hold on to the faith, and the 7th month movement." On the other hand, he noted that those who had rejected her message "very soon fell into the world and a nominal faith." Nichols compared such "prejudiced" and "unbelieving" persons, who called the visions of Ellen White mesmerism and ascribed them to the power of Satan, to the "unbelieving Pharisees" during Christ's time (Matt 10:25; 12:24). But for him "that power which is manifested in her, as far exceeds the power of

mesmerism as Moses did the magicians of Egypt.”¹⁸⁷ Thus he encouraged Miller to “try the spirits whether they are from God. . . . *To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them* Is 8:20.”¹⁸⁸ Evidently for Nichols, Ellen White’s gift was true and genuine. It had an encouraging effect upon the discouraged believers and always bore “good fruits.”

Bates, like Nichols, confirmed the positive function of Ellen White’s visions. He spoke from a personal experience since the visions affected him in a positive way and strengthened his own faith. It is worth noticing that Bates did not initially believe in the prophetic gift of Ellen White. Bates commented about his experience: “It is now about two years since I first saw the author, and heard her relate the substance of her visions as she has since published them in Portland (April 6, 1846). Although I could see nothing in them that militated against the word, yet I felt alarmed and tried exceedingly, and for a long time unwilling to believe that it was any thing more than what was produced by a protracted debilitated state of her body.”¹⁸⁹ Perplexed, he tried to investigate the matter for himself:

I therefore sought opportunities in presence of others, when her mind seemed freed from excitement, (out of meeting) to question, and cross question her, and her friends which accompanied her, especially her elder sister, to get if possible at the truth. During the number of visits she has made to New Bedford and Fairhaven since, while at our meetings, I have seen her in vision a number of times, and . . . I listened to every word, and watched every move to detect deception, or mesmeric influence. And

¹⁸⁷ Otis Nichols to William Miller, Apr. 20, 1846, CAR, AU.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Bates, “Remarks,” in [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to The “Little Flock,”* 21.

I thank God for the opportunity I have had with others to witness these things. I can now confidently speak for myself. I believe the work is of God.¹⁹⁰

Bates's personal conviction of the legitimacy of Ellen White's prophetic gift came in November 1846 in Topsham, Maine, "when Ellen White had a vision that included astronomical data."¹⁹¹ In 1857 Bates told of his experience to J. N. Loughborough who later related Bates' story to the readers of the *Review and Herald*. "The account of how he [Joseph Bates], an unbeliever in such things, became convinced of the truthfulness of Sr. White's visions, was of deep interest to me," Loughborough wrote.

One evening, in the presence of Bro. Bates, who as yet was an unbeliever in the visions, Sr. White had a vision, in which she soon began to talk about the stars. She gave a glowing description of the rosy-tinted belts which she saw across the surface of some planet, and then added, "I see four moons." "Oh," said Bro. Bates, "she is viewing Jupiter." Then, as though having traveled farther through space, she commenced a description of belts and rings in their ever-varying beauty, and said, "I see eight moons." Bro Bates exclaimed, "She is describing Saturn." Next came a description of Uranus, with his four moons; then a most wonderful description of the "opening heavens," with its glory, calling it an opening into a region more enlightened. Bro. Bates said that her description far eclipsed any account of the "opening heavens" he had ever read.¹⁹²

Being an ex-sea captain and having a personal interest on the topic, Bates was well familiar with the astronomical data of that time.¹⁹³ Since Ellen White did not have

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 97.

¹⁹² J. N. Loughborough, "Recollections of the Past—No. 16," *RH*, Nov. 30, 1886. The vision bore the astronomical data known up to that time. Seventh-day Adventists do not believe its factual data today.

¹⁹³ See Joseph Bates, *The Opening Heavens: Or a Connected View of the Testimony of the Prophets and Apostles, Concerning the Opening Heavens Compared with Astronomical Observations: And of the Present and Future Location of the New Jerusalem, the Paradise of God* (New Bedford, [MA]: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846), 6-12.

any previous knowledge concerning astronomy, Bates was convinced that her visions “were outside of her knowledge and control.”¹⁹⁴ By late 1846 and early 1847 Bates became a “firm believer” in Ellen White’s prophetic gift and was ready to defend it.¹⁹⁵ Thus most of his arguments came from his personal struggle to understand and accept Ellen White as a prophet of God.

In 1847 Bates made a couple of important comments regarding the good “fruits” of Ellen White’s gift in *A Word to the “Little Flock.”* His remarks were an attachment to a vision of Ellen White on the Sabbath doctrine through which he sought to strengthen his own arguments for the validity of the fourth commandment. First, he noted that the visions were given to comfort and strengthen the “scattered,” “torn,” and “pealed” believers. Bates acknowledged the divisions, confusion, and frustration of the Disappointed Adventists. He was certain, however, that God had sent the new prophet to help them see the truth. Thus he wrote:

The distracted state of lo, heres! And lo, theres! since that time has exceedingly perplexed God’s honest, willing people, and made it exceedingly difficult for such as were not able to expound the many conflicting texts that have been presented to their view. I confess that I have received light and instruction on many passages that I could not before clearly distinguish.¹⁹⁶

As did James White, Bates wanted to defend the authority of the visions and the prophetic gift of Ellen White. He, nevertheless, went quite beyond James White’s

¹⁹⁴ [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 22; J. N. Loughborough, “Recollections of the Past—No. 16,” *RH*, Nov. 30, 1886; Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 83.

¹⁹⁵ Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Joseph Bates, “Remarks,” in [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 21.

understanding on this point. He suggested that he got some “new light” through the visions, which he could not get otherwise.¹⁹⁷ The difficult question that faces us, however, is that if Bates had received new light, how did he know that this was not a prophet leading him away from the Bible? How could a person decide between his or her own interpretation and understanding of the Bible and the “new light” from the prophet?

Such questions may well be the reason for his second argument: “I believe her to be a self-sacrificing, honest, willing child of God, and saved, if at all, through her entire obedience to His will.”¹⁹⁸ Bates’s understanding was based upon his personal knowledge of “the instrument” of the visions and their positive influence. For him Ellen White was a real child of God. He, therefore, could accept her corrective views. As noted earlier, the positive impact of Ellen White’s visions was such a strong statement for Bates that it even changed his own understanding of her gift. Two years later in 1849 he wrote again: “I was once slow to believe that this sister’s visions were of God. . . . More than two years are now past since I proved them true. Therefore I profess myself a firm believer in her visions so far as I have witnessed, and I have seen her have many.”¹⁹⁹

James White backed Nichols and Bates and also acknowledged the positive “fruits” of Ellen White’s gift. When he republished her first vision in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* in 1847 he noted that he did that “for the benefit of the little flock.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Dalton DeVere Baldwin, “The Testimony of E. G. White as a Basis of Authority in Doctrine and Polity” (Unpublished paper, CAR, AU, 1954), 5.

¹⁹⁸ Joseph Bates, “Remarks,” in [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 21.

¹⁹⁹ Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, 31.

²⁰⁰ [James White, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Bates], *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* 13.

White also believed in the positive influence of true prophetic manifestations beyond Ellen White's gift. In May 1850, for example, when he republished a dream of William Miller in the *Present Truth*, he noted: "The following dream was published in the Advent Herald [*sic*], more than two years since. I then saw that it clearly marked out our past second advent [*sic*] experience, and that *God gave the dream for the benefit of the scattered flock.*"²⁰¹ Although we do not find White elaborating much on the practical aspect of Ellen White's visions, he was in line with the general Sabbatarian understanding regarding the positive "fruits" of her gift for the believers.

The fourth perspective concerning the gift of prophecy established by the Sabbatarians was related to the existence of counterfeit prophets. They argued that the existence of false prophets did not invalidate the true gift of prophecy, but to the contrary confirmed that there were "true ones."²⁰² For them, however, the identifying mark between true and false prophets was in their fruits and fulfillments. In his letter to Miller, Otis Nichols explained the issue regarding the Christian duty not to reject prophecy, but to test it and to hold fast that which is good. He quoted 1 Thess 5:20, 21, and wrote that "visions are either from heaven [Acts 10:9-16] or from satan [*sic*] [Deut 10:1-5]." The fact that there were "counterfeit" visions, he concluded, only proved that there was a "true coin."²⁰³ Utilizing Deut 18:22, Nichols argued that one could know if a vision was from God or not based on its fulfillment. If the vision did not "come to pass," he noted, then it was not from God and vice versa. Then he further explained:

²⁰¹ James White, "Brother Miller's Dream," *PT*, May 1850, 73. Emphasis supplied.

²⁰² Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, 31.

²⁰³ Otis Nichols to William Miller, Apr. 20, 1846, CAR, AU.

But many now say that every vision has failed. Well this is fulfilling Ezk [sic] 12:22-28. That proverb has been used to perfection for a few months past in the land of Israel *saying the days are prolonged and every vision faileth*. But God says “I will make this proverb to cease” with “*the effect of every vision.*” The first vision of E. G. H. was in the fall of 1844 which never was published to the world. It was a view of the travels of the advent company from the 7th mo, 44 and so far as fulfilled they have had as perfect a fulfillment as could possible [sic] be especially in most advent bands, and individuals wherever we are acquainted.²⁰⁴

According to Nichols’s understanding, the first vision of Ellen White was a description of what the Advent believers had gone through. Because of its fulfillment he was convinced that Ellen White had the true prophetic gift.

Bates wrote in the same manner concerning the Sabbatarian understanding on the issue of true and false prophets. He, like Nichols, argued against those who believed that all visions were to be considered as false manifestations. “We are commanded to *try* the spirits,” Bates wrote in 1849, “that we may understand which is right. So also to *try* visions by proving all things and holding fast that which is good.”²⁰⁵ He then continued discussing the existence and validation of true visions: “Well, says one, we have had them and it has caused nothing but confusion and fanaticism, therefore I believe all of them to be false.” In response to that attitude, Bates adds, “I ask if there ever could be a false, unless there was a true first? How can any thing be counterfeited unless from the genuine?”²⁰⁶

Bates became even more specific and referred to Ellen White’s visions and their truthfulness as he saw it. “If the visions this sister has published are false,” he wrote,

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, 27.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

“pray tell if you can, where we are to look for the true ones. Please read them over again, and see how clearly . . . they accord with God’s word and Second Advent History.”²⁰⁷

Based on their truthfulness, Bates implied that Ellen White was a true and genuine prophet of God.

James White, like Nichols and Bates, also argued for the validity of the Sabbatarian belief in the gift of prophecy based on the existence of the counterfeit. He logically noted that “those who reject such special revelations because the counterfeit exists, may with equal propriety go a little farther and deny that God ever revealed himself to man in a dream or a vision, for the counterfeit always existed.”²⁰⁸

Thus the Sabbatarian Adventists saw the counterfeit display of the prophetic gift as another proof that there was to be a genuine and true manifestation of this specific gift. They always, however, urged the believers to examine the truthfulness of such displays and accept only those that bore good fruits and did not contradict the Bible.

The biblical and pragmatic considerations were sufficient evidences for the Sabbatarian belief in the gift of prophecy during this early period (1844-1850). The small group gradually accepted Ellen White as having the true prophetic gift and saw her messages as coming from God.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the historical background and early attitude toward charismatic and visionary experiences among Millerites and Sabbatarian Adventists

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ James White, “Brother Miller's Dream,” *PT*, May 1850, 73.

through the year 1850. Several conclusions can be established. First, American Christianity was hospitable to charismatic and visionary manifestations in the first half of the nineteenth century. Such experiences were not seen as something strange or extraordinary but were viewed as a sign of God's acceptance of sinners. Ellen White's gift of prophecy, therefore, was not something unique or extraordinary by itself. Her claim to this gift was in line with the milieu of her time.

Second, the Millerite attitude towards charismatic and visionary manifestations was somewhat complex. While there were occurrences of charismatic and visionary manifestations among Millerites, the mainstream Millerite leadership rejected such activities as unbiblical and produced official resolutions condemning visions and prophetic revelations. This radical denial was prompted mostly by fanatical elements that arose from the Millerite movement after the Great Disappointment. For the Albany Adventists, Ellen White's claim of having the gift of prophecy fell into this category. They understood her visions as unbiblical and unacceptable.

Third, the Sabbatarian Adventists were forced to examine charismatic and visionary manifestations since one of their founders, Ellen G. White, claimed to have the gift of prophecy. Although not all Sabbatarians accepted her visions in the beginning, her prophetic influence gradually grew and her gift was progressively received as coming from God. The first defenders of Ellen White's prophetic gift were James White and Joseph Bates, two of the founders of the Sabbatarian group, and Otis Nichols, a friend of the Whites and one of the earliest Sabbatarian believers.

The purpose of the initial Sabbatarian arguments for the validity of Ellen White's prophetic gift was twofold. While they aimed to establish her authority among the Sabbatarian believers based on the Bible, they also wanted to distinguish her gift from the

rest of the so-called “prophets,” spiritualizers, and other fanatical elements that existed in abundance during the mid-nineteenth century. To achieve the above objectives the Sabbatharians developed two types of arguments: (1) theological (or biblical), and (2) practical (or experiential).

First, they argued that the gift of prophecy was supported by the Bible itself. biblical passages such as Joel 2, Acts 2, and Isa 8:20 were used profusely to prove that Ellen White’s prophetic gift was in full accordance with the Scriptures. They argued that God had always communicated to His people through the gift of prophecy. Closely connected with this idea was their second biblical argument, that the gift of prophecy was a part of the “last days” fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2 in connection with Acts 2. If they were living in the last days of human history, as they believed, then the gift of prophecy as seen through Ellen White was to be expected. James White even saw it as a “sign” of the last days.

The third and fourth lines of arguments developed by the Sabbatharians were more practical (experiential) than theological in nature. The prophetic gift was seen in the light of its positive influence and fruitfulness among the believers. The Sabbatharians argued that it helped people to unite in the faith and strengthened their confidence in biblical truths. The fact that the “fruit” was good, demonstrated that the gift of Ellen White was genuine. Closely related to the good “fruits” argument was the Sabbatharian understanding of the existence of counterfeit prophetic manifestations. They did not deny the fact that there were false prophets and visions. However, they argued, this was not a valid reason to suggest that all prophetic experiences, including that of Ellen White, came from Satan. They constantly urged believers to “try the spirits” and evaluate those who claimed to have the prophetic gift. Based on their observance, however, they were certain that Ellen

White's visions were genuine, and they were ready to accept her as having the true biblical gift of prophecy.

The practical implications of Ellen White's vision were also confirmed by Ellen White herself. During this early period (from 1844 to 1850) she saw her role in more practical (rather than theological) terms. First, her visions helped in the fight against fanaticism that was spreading among some former Millerites. That function was important since the Sabbatharians needed to distinguish themselves from the Spiritualizers and other fanatical elements among the former Millerites. Second, Ellen White's visions helped in the establishment of unity among the small Sabbatharian group that started to develop after the Great Disappointment.²⁰⁹ Thus the prophetic gift of Ellen White was initially understood to be more of a special help or a sign rather than an actual doctrine in itself.

In the 1850s the Sabbatharians would continue to develop their understanding upon these basic arguments. They would study the Bible more carefully on the subject of the prophetic gift and become more confident in their acceptance of it. At the same time they would be very careful to ascertain the difference between Ellen White's role and that of the Bible in relation to the formation of their basic beliefs, which by 1850 were already well established. The Sabbatharian desire to show that they were people of the Bible alone despite their belief in a modern prophetic manifestation became a central point of discussion in the period from 1851 to 1862. The Sabbatharians continued to build upon

²⁰⁹ By the 1850s the Sabbatharians had already established a unique theological platform that distinguished them from the rest of the Millerites. See: Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 55-89.

their initial arguments for the validity of Ellen White's prophetic gift. They became more cautious, however, of how they expressed and defended her prophetic experiences.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROPHETIC GIFT ACCEPTED BUT NOT PROMOTED, 1851-1862

During the 1850s and the beginning of the 1860s the Sabbatarian Adventists continued to develop their understanding concerning Ellen White and her prophetic gift. Although not yet viewed as a doctrine, spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy in particular would receive greater attention by the Sabbatarian leaders. James White's leadership role in this respect continued throughout the 1850s.

It should be noted that even though most Sabbatarians accepted Ellen White's gift as true and genuine, she was not promoted publicly between 1851 and 1856. This came partly because of an internal controversy that emerged among the Sabbatarians over the understanding of Ellen White and her prophetic role. The main issue of concern was the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's claimed gift of prophecy. The Sabbatarians' aim was to show that they were people of the Bible and that their distinctive doctrines came from the Bible and not from Ellen White's visions.

After the appearance of the first offshoots from the Sabbatarian group and two important conferences in 1855 and 1856, Sabbatarian publicity of Ellen White took a turn, and they started to speak and defend her prophetic gift in a much more open way. A number of important publications in defense of her visions were published for the first time.

This chapter will examine the opposing views and the first internal controversy among the Sabbatarians over Ellen White’s prophetic role from 1851 to 1862. It also will examine the Sabbatarian responses to the raised objections and show the further developments of their understanding of the gift of prophecy. The responses were mainly given through the pages of the *Review and Herald*. In addition, the first Sabbatarian booklets specifically dealing with Ellen White’s gift also appeared during this period of time. Another response of the Sabbatarians was through general conference resolutions. Of particular importance for our discussion were the general conference decisions in 1855 and 1856 which marked an important junction in the development of the Sabbatarian understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic role. In the last section we will examine Ellen White’s own understanding of her prophetic gift from 1851 to 1862.

Opposing Views of Ellen White’s Prophetic Gift

Despite the wide acceptance of Ellen White by Sabbath-keeping Adventists, the period from 1851 to 1862 witnessed the first offshoots that emerged from the Sabbatarian group, largely over controversies about the gift of prophecy. This section will give a short historical overview of the first dissident movements and their objections toward Ellen White and her prophetic gift. The negative attitudes of these groups would force the Sabbatarians to give answers to the raised objections and develop further their understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift.

Historical Overview of Opposition to Ellen White’s Prophetic Gift

The first organized opposition to Ellen White was from dissident Sabbatarian Adventists who became known as the “Messenger Party.” It originated in Jackson, Michigan, and was led by two Adventist ministers—H. S. Case and C. P. Russell. The

rebellion came as a result of a controversy over the validity of the prophetic gift of Ellen White.

In 1853 Case and Russell accused a lady from the Jackson church of losing her temper and using a “vile name” against an unfriendly neighbor. The accused sister denied using such a word. Meanwhile, the Whites were visiting the church in Jackson. While there, Ellen White had a vision concerning the disputed situation. It was revealed to her that the lady had not behaved as a true Christian and did lose her temper. Case and Russell seemed to be satisfied with the prophet’s conclusion at that point and urged church discipline. On the following day, Ellen White had a second vision in which she was shown that the woman did not use the particular word as accused and that God was displeased with the unkind and uncompassionate spirit shown by the two ministers towards her. While the woman confessed her wrongdoing and asked for forgiveness, Case and Russell turned against Ellen White and condemned her visions as totally false and unreliable. Consequently, in June 1853 the first Sabbatarian offshoot appeared. Case and Russell formed the so-called “Messenger Party” and started to publicize their ideas in a paper called the *Messenger of Truth*.¹ The paper seems to have existed until about 1857 when it ceased because of lack of financial support. The three extant issues reveal that the main purpose of the paper, at least initially, was to speak against Ellen White’s visions, to oppose James White’s work and leadership, and to accuse Sabbatarians of an un-Christian spirit against those who did not agree with them.

¹ Attempt was made to find this publication since there was no Adventist archive that possessed this material. It was discovered that there were three extant issues of the source in the State Library of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, PA)—those of Oct. 19, Nov. 2, and Nov. 30, 1854.

Another opposition to Ellen White's prophetic gift that arose in the early 1850s was the "Age to Come" group led by J. M. Stephenson and D. P. Hall in Wisconsin. The two men were first-day Adventist ministers who accepted the third angel's message and joined the Sabbatarians but continued to hold to the "Age to Come" theory. Their views were in general similar to those taught by several former Millerite preachers such as Joseph Marsh, O. R. L. Crosier, George Storrs, William Sheldon, and others who promoted the "Age to Come" theory through the *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*.² They believed that probation did not end with the Second Advent but continued during the "Age to Come" or the Millennium. When their views were refuted in the pages of the *Review and Herald*,³ Stephenson and Hall joined the Messenger Party and turned against the visions of Ellen White and the White family. Eventually Stephenson and Hall renounced their belief in the Sabbath and lost most of their followers among the Sabbatarians.⁴ The *Advent Harbinger* also published sporadic articles against Ellen White's gift and the Sabbatarians with similar arguments as those of the Messengers.⁵

² The periodical is usually referred to as the *Advent Harbinger*.

³ *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 1850-1889. This became the Sabbatarians' major periodical and was generally called the *Review and Herald*. Some examples of articles critical of the "Age to Come" theory are: J. B. Frisbie, "Age to Come," *RH*, Jan. 24, 1854, 6; Uriah Smith, "The Sanctuary," *RH*, Apr. 4, 1854, 84-86; James White, "The 'Age to Come,'" *RH*, Dec. 11, 1855, 84-85; R. F. Cottrell, "The Age to Come," *RH*, Sept. 3, 1861, 108.

⁴ J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-Day Adventists: With Tokens of God's Hand in the Movement and a Brief Sketch of the Advent Cause from 1831 to 1844* (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference Assn. of the Seventh-day Adventists, 1892), 204-209; Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1979), 92; James White, "A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Present Truth," *RH*, Jan. 14, 1858, 77-78.

⁵ More discussion about this is coming later in this chapter.

Specific Objections Raised against Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

The Messengers, as they started to be called, and the “Age to Come” movement made several specific accusations against the Sabbatarian Adventists and their belief in Ellen White’s prophetic gift. The first charge was that the Sabbatarians had another rule of faith and practice instead of the Bible alone. The Sabbatarians, they noted, were “under the influence of those [Ellen White’s] vain visions.”⁶ C. P. Russell summarizes the attitude of the opposition toward Ellen White’s prophetic gift in saying that “we have no *human creed*; no ground staked out by MODERN VISIONS. We believe that God’s Truth is progressive and self-evident, and will bare [*sic*] scrutiny.”⁷

John Bushman argued on the basis of Rev 22:18, 19 (“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book”), Prov 30:5 (“Every word of God is pure; he is a shield unto them that trust in Him, add thou not unto his words lest he reprove thee and thou be found a liar”), and Deut 4:2 (“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it”) that only the Bible was to be their “rule of faith and action.” He further noted that because “all scripture was given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16, 17), the Bible contained all that one needed to understand God’s will and receive salvation. Therefore, new visions and revelations were not needed.⁸ A. N. Seymour, from the “Age to Come” movement, also

⁶ [C. P. Russell], “Forgive One Another,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

⁷ C. P. Russell, “From Bro. Russell,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 2, 1854.

⁸ John Bushman, “From Bro. Bushman,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 30, 1854.

noted that Ellen White's visions were not acceptable based on Rev 22:18, 19. Those who did that were "adding to God's word" and made the visions another rule of faith.⁹

In a similar note, R. R. Chapin believed that if the revelations of "Sister White" were "to judge the remnant" this was adding to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he presumed that it was their mission to let people see Ellen White's false claims and to "have this yoke of bondage removed as soon as possible."¹⁰

In a letter to the *Messenger of Truth*, H. Barringer also noted that he had "learned to place no confidence in those who will not consent to be governed by the bible, as our highest light."¹¹ At a conference held at Franciscoville, some Sabbatarians who accepted the Messengers' ideas "expressed their determination to let go the visions, and for the future, take the word *alone* as their only rule of faith and duty."¹²

The Messengers and the "Age to Come" supporters were further determined to show that the visions did not agree with the Bible, as several documents published in the *Messenger of Truth* and the *Advent Harbinger* demonstrate. J. K. Bellows, for example, admitted that when he first embraced the Sabbath he "felt somewhat favorable toward the visions," but after he examined them he found that "they neither agreed with the Bible, nor with themselves." "Some things have been presented to us by Bro. Bates and others,"

⁹ A. N. Seymour, "Delusion—E. White's Visions," *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Mar. 26, 1853, 323.

¹⁰ R. R. Chapin, "Extracts from Letters," *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

¹¹ H. Barringer, "Letter From Bro. Barringer," *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 30, 1854.

¹² J. B. Bezzo, "The Conference at Franciscoville," *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

Bellows wrote, “which I could not reconcile with the Bible and when I insisted on their giving scripture evidence which they could not do, they would say, ‘Ellen saw it was so’ and they believed it. I told them they thought more of the visions, than they did of the word of God. So it is; they are, many of them, carried away with the delusion and we want something to break that snare; therefore, I rejoice to see a paper come out.”¹³

In his article, “Delusion—E. White’s Visions,” A. N. Seymour also criticized Ellen White’s visions as full of contradictions and therefore untrue. His critical remarks referred specifically to the visions published in her first book, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*.¹⁴

R. Hicks went even further and equated Ellen White to “Jezebel.” He noted that because of visible contradictions between the Bible and the visions, many believers were not willing to accept the “present truth.” Hicks, however, was convinced that the Sabbatarian support of Ellen White’s visions was as a house “built upon the sand” which would not stand for a long time and appealed to people to look to the Bible and to “‘hold fast that which is good’.” As for himself, he wished to be “distinguished as standing disconnected with all people who make vain visions their rule of faith and practice as soon as possible.”¹⁵ Apparently the opposition saw Ellen White’s visions as “another rule of faith.” They were also, the opposition held, contrary to the Bible and therefore had to be rejected.

¹³ J. K. Bellows, “[Bro. J. K. Bellows],” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

¹⁴ A. N. Seymour, “Delusion—E. White’s Visions,” *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Mar. 26, 1853, 323; Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851).

¹⁵ Ransom Hicks, “From Bro. Hicks,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

The second accusation of the critics of Ellen White's gift was related to the "last days" question. As noted in chapter 1, this was one of the initial arguments on which the Sabbatarians built their understanding and belief in Ellen White's gift of prophecy. Based on the prophecies of Joel 2 and Acts 2, the Sabbatarians argued for the modern manifestation of the gift of prophecy just before the second coming of Christ. Ellen White's gift was a proof for them that they were living in the last days. While the Messenger Party agreed with the Sabbatarians that they were living in the last days, they disagreed with them on the interpretation of Joel 2 and Acts 2. For them the fulfillment of these biblical prophecies happened at the day of Pentecost during the time of the disciples because there was a need for it. Interpreting Acts 2:16-21, R. R. Chapin remarked that God "promised to pour out his spirit upon all flesh." "How was this fulfilled?" he asked. He answered,

The apostles state that at the day of Pentecost, there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. And the natural conclusion is, that when these devout men returned to their own nations, the gospel was preached as Paul says, to every creature under heaven. Col. i, 23. . . . Here *the church needed the gift of prophecy*. . . . God had to work by the gifts of prophecy and visions to establish the gospel. Paul once had special revelation to go to Macedonia where he could get access to the people. And Peter was also shown in a vision that the time had come to preach to the Gentiles. Now, *we see the necessity of special revelations being given to the apostles*.¹⁶

Toward the end of the article Chapin concluded that the gift of prophecy ended with "the end of the apostles' day." "The visions of Daniel and John relative to the prophetic periods were given for us," he wrote, "and were sealed up until the time of the end; and were it not for these visions, we should perish. Jesus teaches us that prophecies ended

¹⁶ R. R. Chapin, "Who Are the Remnant?" *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854. Emphasis supplied.

with John's prophecy, and affirms that 'If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.' *So I dare not receive the visions or revelations of any one since John.*'¹⁷

H. C. Mason, a former Sabbatarian believer, also expressed his doubts concerning the Sabbatarian interpretation of Acts 2. "The text of scripture they took to prove that they were of God," Mason wrote, "had no bearing whatever on the point. . . . I could not find any scripture to prove that we are to have any visions except false ones in these last days." He then appealed to all believers to study the Bible and "not to be carried about by false doctrines."¹⁸

The third specific accusation was related to the relationship between Ellen White's gift and the "remnant" question. Based on Rev 12:17 the Sabbatarians had claimed in the 1850s to be the true remnant people of God because they "kept the commandments of God" (referring to the Sabbath) and had the "testimony of Jesus" (referring to the prophetic gift of Ellen White).¹⁹ Contrary to the Sabbatarians, the Messengers argued that the "testimony of Jesus" was not necessarily a reference to the prophetic gift (in this case a reference to the prophetic gift of Ellen White). It did not mean that "we are to be prophets," they noted, in order to have the spirit of prophecy. Using a logical comparison, they explained further: "In order for Elisha to have the spirit

¹⁷ Ibid. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸ H. C. Mason, "Extracts from Letters," *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

¹⁹ See for example: James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," *RH*, Dec. 18, 1855, 92-93; R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 25, 1858, 126. The Sabbatarians made a connection between Rev 14:12 and 19:10 and claimed that the "testimony of Jesus" meant "the Spirit of prophecy."

of Elijah[,] II Kings ii: 9, 15, it was not necessary for him to be Elijah. It is not necessary for us to be God, or Christ, in order that the spirit of God dwell in us, or that we possess the spirit of Christ. Rom. 8:9.” For them the spirit of prophecy was the spirit of Christ that the true remnant needed to possess in them and had nothing to do with the gift of prophecy.²⁰

We must note here that one of the most frequent accusations of the Messengers against the Sabbatarians and their leaders was their unforgiving and harsh spirit toward those people who had joined the Messenger Party. Thus Russell believed that the third angel’s message, which according to him was still a future proclamation at that time, was “reserved” for the true remnant. He further noted that “those that preach it will live it out; those that hate their brethren and cast them out, cannot be keeping the commandments of God. Isiah [*sic*] Lxvi, 5, 1st John, iii, 15, Rev. xiv. 12.”²¹

In his article “Who Are the Remnant?” R. R. Chapin used Zeph 3 as a platform to establish the fact that they, and not the Sabbatarians, were the true remnant. He wrote:

I understand that they [the remnant] are an afflicted and poor people, and they trust in the name of the Lord, Zeph[aniah]. III, 12:13, and dare not lean upon the arm of flesh, for God has pronounced a curse upon such as “Trust in man, and make flesh their arm,” Jer. XVII, 5. We learn also that this afflicted people are the remnant, – and they are not to speak lies, “Neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.” Zep[haniah]. III, 18: 19, shews [*sic*] that this people have been made sorrowful, and the burden (the visions) they have had to bear has been a reproach unto them which has caused many to halt. But the Promise is, “I will gather them that are sorrowful and I will save her that *halteth* and *gather* her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.”²²

²⁰ R. R. Chapin, “Who are the Remnant?” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

²¹ C. P. Russell, “From Bro. Russell,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 2, 1854.

²² R. R. Chapin, “Who Are the Remnant?” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

Chapin then quoted Isa 66:5 (“Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word, your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed”) and Mic 4:6 (“In that day saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted. And I will make her that halteth a remnant”), and noted that the Messengers were the ones who were hated and cast out by “those that have professed to be our brethren, and commandment keepers.” Since the Sabbatarians hated them, he concluded, they did not keep the law (according to 1 John) and thus were not the true remnant.²³ The Sabbatarian claim that Ellen White’s gift was a mark of the remnant people of God, therefore, was false.

A fourth specific point argued by the critics was the negative influence of the visions as contrary to the positive “fruits” that the Sabbatarians claimed for their belief in Ellen White. The Messengers in particular argued that the visions were causing divisions, that they brought confusion, and that they stopped the progression of truth. Based on Eph 4 and 1 Cor 12, the Sabbatarians had begun arguing in the early 1850s that the gifts, including the prophetic gift, were needed “for the perfecting of the Church of Christ” and to bring all into the “unity of faith.”²⁴

R. R. Chapin challenged the Sabbatarians that their interpretation of Eph 4:11-13 (“and he gave *some* apostles, and *some* prophets; and *some* pastors and teachers; for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”) was wrong. “For any one to argue from this text that the saints cannot be

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 69.

perfected without living prophets now,” Chapin argued, “would also be to argue that they cannot be perfected without living apostles at this time.”²⁵ According to his interpretation, God saw the necessity “to give prophets and apostles at that time” because of the important “mission” that was at hand. Their role, he noted, was to give the doctrines to the Christian church by the aid of the Holy Spirit and it ended with John’s vision on the Isle of Patmos. After that, God used pastors and teachers in the church “to watch over them [the doctrines] and to teach the doctrines left on record by the apostles and prophets.” Logically the gift of pastors and teachers was necessary and had to continue until the end, but those of apostles and prophets were not necessary. Hence Ellen White’s gift was not needed.²⁶

Several of the authors in the *Messenger of Truth* tried also to show the “confusion” that Ellen White and her visions were bringing among the believers. In his article “Test of fellowship,” for instance, J. B. Bezzo noted that the visions were perplexing the Sabbatarians concerning such issues as “gospel order” and church discipline, church fellowship with Messengers (or people who did not believe the visions), baptism, inspiration, and others.²⁷ Ransom Hicks agreed with Bezzo that Ellen White’s visions were not of God “because of their confusion.” He hoped that God would help the believers (most probably referring to the Sabbatarians) to get rid of this “vile deception” and the “error” which had brought “so much injury and disgrace” upon God’s

²⁵ R. R. Chapin, “Who Are the Remnant?” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ J. B. Bezzo, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

cause.²⁸ In his letter to the *Messenger of Truth*, John A. Hardy also expressed his belief that there was so much “confusion contained in the visions” that “any one” could see it.²⁹

According to some, the visions were also a hindrance for the development and spreading of the “present truth.” A. N. Seymour, for example, accused the Sabbatharians in supporting the shut door theory³⁰ after the Disappointment in October 1844 because of Ellen White’s visions.³¹

R. Hicks complained that he was not able to share the “present truth” with much success with his “old Advent friends” because of their prejudice against the visions of Ellen White. He shared that although he did not say anything about her or James White, “yet my friends knew she was connected with the Sabbath question, and for that reason it appeared to be entirely useless for me to say any thing to them about the Sabbath.”³²

George Cottrell admitted that “the visions never were any help” to him “in believing the present truth.” On the contrary, he found some things that he could not reconcile between the visions and word of God and therefore could not believe in them.³³

²⁸ R. Hicks, “From Bro. Hicks,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

²⁹ John A. Hardy, “Extracts from Letters,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

³⁰ The “shut door” theory was a belief that salvation was not possible after October 22, 1844, the day of the Great Disappointment. The Sabbatharians, including Ellen White, supported this idea for some years after the Disappointment but then rejected it.

³¹ A. N. Seymour, “Delusion—E. White's Visions,” *Adventist Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Mar. 26, 1854, 323. See also Mary A. Seymour, “Seventh-Day Sabbath,” *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Jan. 31, 1852.

³² R. Hicks, “From Bro. Hicks,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 2, 1854.

³³ George Cottrell, “From Bro. Cottrell,” *The Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854. Some examples are: the saints judging the wicked during the 1,000 years and the

Others considered the visions of Ellen White to be “mental hallucinations” and felt embarrassed because of them. Solomon Myers, for example, wrote to the publishing committee of the *Messenger of Truth* and acknowledged that once he became “more intimately acquainted with the result of faith in them” he was “more shy [*sic*] of them than before.”³⁴ Thus for the Messengers the Sabbatarian understanding that Ellen White’s gift bore positive fruits was illusory and deceptive.

A fifth objection given by the critics of Ellen White’s prophetic gift was that the Sabbatarians made her gift a “test of fellowship” and a “rule of action.” In a letter to C. P. Russell on August 1, 1854, R. R. Chapin wrote that despite the Sabbatarians’ denial of making the visions “a test of christian [*sic*] fellowship” he knew of many who were “cut off” because they did not believe the visions.³⁵ The *Messenger of Truth* published several stories to prove that fact. J. B. Bezzo, for instance, gave a lengthy description of H. S. Case’s trial and his disfellowshipping from the Sabbatarian group because of doubts toward Ellen White and her prophetic gift.³⁶ The same fate awaited a certain “Bro. Drew,” who did not believe that the visions were “equally inspired with the visions of Daniel and John.”³⁷

Sabbatarian belief that none would die after “the third angel’s message was first proclaimed.”

³⁴ Solomon Myers, “From Bro. Myers,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

³⁵ R. R. Chapin, “Extracts from Letters,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

³⁶ J. B. Bezzo, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854; “H. S. Case,” *RH*, Apr. 18, 1854.

³⁷ J. B. Bezzo, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

They also accused the Sabbatarians of making the prophetic gift of Ellen White a “rule of action.” In the article “Test of Fellowship” Bezzo noted that because of the visions, certain brethren were asked to make public confessions and then those visions were published and sent out “as a rule of action for the brethren to give.” He noted, for instance, that the push for “Gospel Order”³⁸ among the Sabbatarians came as a result of a vision of Ellen White. “It is well known that Br’n M. E. Cornell and S. T. Cranson made no attempt at establishing ‘Gospel Order’ in this State,” Bezzo wrote, “until they had received Sr. White’s vision on that subject.”³⁹ He continued,

It is well known that when these brethren went about establishing “Gospel order,” that they *did take this vision* and read therefrom [*sic*] to the brethren, *certain instructions and directions for the church*, in regard to the call and qualifications of messengers, and the church’s responsibility in sending them out to lecture, and *did dwell and comment with emphasis* upon those directions, and *then* brought up Paul’s instructions in *1st Tim 3d ch.*, to support the vision. Here then, it is evident that this vision, as Bro. Cornell lately acknowledged to me, was made a rule of action.⁴⁰

One can read several other examples published in the *Messenger of Truth* accusing the Sabbatarians of making the visions a “rule of action” and/or a “test a fellowship.”⁴¹ It is not surprising then that Bezzo challenged the Sabbatarians:

³⁸ The term means “church organization.” In the early 1850s the Sabbatarian group experienced rapid growth and the need for church organization and church discipline became highly discussed topics. The Sabbatarians, however, did not organize officially as the Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1863. Ellen and James White played a major role in the establishment of the new denomination.

³⁹ J. B. Bezzo, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ J. B. Bezzo, “H. S. Case,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 2, 1854; *idem*, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854; R. R. Chapin, “Extracts from Letters,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854; R. Hicks, “From Bro. Hicks,” *Messenger of Truth*, Nov. 2, 1854; H. C. Mason, “Extracts from Letters,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

Brethren, if you believe with Brother Cornell, that “The visions are a part of the third angel’s message,” why do you withhold them in your lectures? Why put your candle under a bushel? Why not let the light so shine before men that they may see the good work and glorify your Father which is in heaven?⁴²

A sixth objection raised against Ellen White’s prophetic gift was the “gender” question. It was claimed that since Ellen White was a female she could not have the true gift of prophecy. Although it seems that this objection was not widespread between 1851 and 1862, we find a mention of it in the *Advent Harbinger*. In giving her opinion why she could not accept Ellen White’s gift and visions, Mary A. Seymour noted a single fact: “I do not feel bound to believe Mrs. White’s visions, for my *guide* does not show me that women shall have visions in the last days.”⁴³ Mary Seymour, however, did not elaborate further on this question and we do not find discussions on the issue among the Messengers either.

The Sabbatarians, of course, had to answer the objections raised by the first dissidents from their own ranks and defend their belief in Ellen White as a modern prophet of God. The rest of this chapter will examine their answers and the subsequent further developments of the Sabbatarian understanding of the gift of prophecy between 1851 and 1862.

Sabbatarian Adventist Responses to Objections

The Sabbatarian Adventists were forced to give answers to challenges against Ellen White’s gift of prophecy. While in the 1840s they had to answer objections from

⁴² J. B. Bezzo, “Test of Fellowship,” *Messenger of Truth*, Oct. 19, 1854.

⁴³ Mary A. Seymour, “Seventh-Day Sabbath,” *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Jan. 31, 1852, 264.

non-Sabbatarians, this time the challenges came from people within their midst. The main question of concern was the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's prophetic visions. The Sabbatarians were resolute to show that they were a people of the Bible *alone* in spite of their belief in a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift as seen through Ellen White. They also tried to respond to all of the other accusations raised by the critics. This section will give a brief overview of the Sabbatarian ways of responding to the opposition and then it will examine in more detail their answers to the specific accusations.

Historical Overview of Sabbatarian Adventist Responses to Objections

There were three major ways through which the Sabbatarian Adventists responded to the critics concerning Ellen White's prophetic gift between 1851 and 1862. First, they sought to answer the objections through the pages of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, their major periodical. Second, they published books related to Ellen White's gift of prophecy. And third, they made important general conference declarations (resolutions) concerning their belief in Ellen White's gift and her role for the Sabbatarian group.

The primary response to the raised objections against Ellen White's prophetic gift came through the pages of the *Review and Herald*, the newly established publication of the Sabbatarian Adventists. Most of the time the arguments appeared in articles responding to particular issues. The main spokesman on the issue was James White. Even before the appearance of any internal opposition, James White published the first

extensive article especially devoted to the justification of the prophetic gift in 1851.⁴⁴ The article was re-published twice, subsequently, after the Messengers' challenges.⁴⁵ James White continued to speak on the topic of the gift of prophecy and defend Ellen White's gift between 1851 and 1862 and to shape the Sabbatarian understanding on the topic.⁴⁶

Other major articles answering the raised objections by Ellen White's critics and defending her prophetic gift were written by David Arnold,⁴⁷ R. F. Cottrell,⁴⁸ S. C. Welcome,⁴⁹ B. F. Robbins,⁵⁰ Uriah Smith,⁵¹ D. T. Bourdeau,⁵² and others. Thus the *Review and Herald* became the major forum of the Sabbatarian defense of the prophetic gift and a tool for shaping the Sabbatarian understanding of Ellen White's gift of

⁴⁴ James White, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 69-70.

⁴⁵ James White, "Gifts of the Gospel Church," *RH*, June 9, 1853, 13-14; idem, "Gifts of the Gospel Church," *RH*, Oct. 3, 1854, 60-62. Only two sentences were omitted from the original article. The last reprint also had an additional note at the end written by James White.

⁴⁶ Some examples are: James White, "The Counterfeit and No Genuine," *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61; idem, "The Testimony of Jesus," *RH*, Dec. 18, 1855, 92; idem, "The Gifts—Their Object," *RH*, Feb. 28, 1856, 172-173; idem, "Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 1," *RH*, Dec. 3, 1857, 29; idem, "Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4," *RH*, Jan. 7, 1858, 68-69; [idem], "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 18, 1862, 92-93.

⁴⁷ David Arnold, "The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God's Appointment for Its Purification and Unity," *RH*, June 26, 1855, 249-251.

⁴⁸ R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 25, 1858, 125-126; idem, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Mar. 24, 1859, 137-139.

⁴⁹ S. C. Welcome, "Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?" *RH*, Feb. 23, 1860, 109-110.

⁵⁰ B. F. Robbins, "Joel ii, 28-32," *RH*, Apr. 12, 1860, 165-166.

⁵¹ Uriah Smith, "The Visions a Test," *RH*, Jan. 14, 1861, 52-53.

⁵² D. T. Bourdeau, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Dec. 2, 1862, 5-6.

prophecy. It is interesting, as we will see, that in their answers to objections, the early Sabbatarian Adventists avoided making direct reference to Ellen White's prophetic gift and spoke more in general terms about the gift of prophecy, although their allusions to Ellen White's gift can be clearly noted.

The second way of responding to critics was through book publications. Between 1851 and 1862 the Sabbatarians published a number of important books related specifically to Ellen White's gift. In the summer of 1851 circumstances led to the publication of Ellen White's first sixty-four-page booklet, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen White*. A second small booklet, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen White*, was published in 1854.⁵³ The two booklets were autobiographical in character. Their aim was to introduce Ellen White and her visionary experiences, especially to those Sabbatarians who did not know her personally and needed to examine her life in order to make a decision to believe or reject her claimed prophetic gift.

In 1855 the Sabbatarians also began publishing Ellen White's messages (or "testimonies," as they started to be called) in a small booklet format. The testimonies usually addressed individuals or churches and discussed various issues of concern. The Sabbatarians, however, took a decision to publish them so that all believers could benefit from them.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Rochester, NY: James White, 1854).

Moreover, in 1858 and 1860 Ellen White's first two volumes of the four-volume series entitled *Spiritual Gifts* appeared.⁵⁴ Although, volumes one, three, and four dealt with what would become the predominant theme in her writings—the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan—volume two was a much more detailed account of her Christian experience and prophetic ministry than the biographical publications from 1851 and 1854.

The first two Sabbatarian tracts written exclusively to address and defend Ellen White's prophetic gift were also written between 1851 and 1862. R. F. Cottrell's sixteen-page booklet entitled *Spiritual Gifts* was published in 1858.⁵⁵ Most of the material was also published in two articles in the *Review and Herald*⁵⁶ and later appeared as a preface to Ellen White's book *Spiritual Gifts*, volume one.⁵⁷ In 1862 the Sabbatarians published M. E. Cornell's *Miraculous Powers*.⁵⁸ This 143-page work included a preface written by James White and was revised and republished several times through the years.⁵⁹ As in the

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts: Vol. 1, The Great Controversy, between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels; Vol. 2, My Christian Experience, Views and Labors in Connection with the Rise and Progress of the Third Angel's Message; Vol. 3, Important Facts of Faith, In Connection with the History of Holy Men of Old; Vol. 4, Important Facts of Faith: Laws of Health, and Testimonies Nos. 1-10* (Battle Creek, MI: James White [Vols. 1 and 2] and Steam Press [Vols. 3 and 4], 1858-1864).

⁵⁵ R. F. Cottrell, *Spiritual Gifts* ([Battle Creek, MI: Uriah Smith], 1858).

⁵⁶ R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 25, 1858, 125-126; idem, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Mar. 24, 1859, 137-139.

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, 5-16.

⁵⁸ Merritt E. Cornell, *Miraculous Powers: The Scripture Testimony on the Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts, Illustrated by Narratives of Incidents and Sentiments Carefully Compiled from the Eminently Pious and Learned of Various Denominations* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1862).

⁵⁹ Republications of the book appeared in 1864, 1875, 1882, and 1901.

case with the articles in the *Review and Herald*, the two works seemed to be a general discussion on the subject of spiritual gifts (plural), but their underlying purpose was to defend Ellen White's prophetic gift. Their central theme was to show the continuity of the gift of prophecy after the apostolic era until the Second Coming. Beyond that, the works tackled questions raised by the opposition against the gift of prophecy, such as the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's gift, the remnant, the last days, and the positive influence of the gifts. Although the arguments were mostly repetitive of those produced in the *Review and Herald*, the tracts were the first Sabbatarian effort to give a more extended answer to objections and to show the legitimacy of their belief in the gift of prophecy. Cornell's tract also provided historical data and insights demonstrating the existence of the prophetic gift throughout the Christian era.

A third way the Sabbatarians responded to critics was through general conference declarations or resolutions. These resolutions were not so much an answer to specific objections as they were the Sabbatarians' way of expressing their understanding and attitude concerning Ellen White's prophetic role in a more official way. The important conferences held in 1855 and 1856 addressed the role of Ellen White and her prophetic gift. But before we look at those general conference declarations, we will examine the Sabbatarian answer to the specific accusations of the critics of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

Sabbatarian Adventist Responses to Specific Objections

The first main issue that the Sabbatarians had to respond to was the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's visions. It seems, though, that the Sabbatarians were clear on this subject even before the appearance of any internal opposition. As noted

already, in 1851 James White published the first extensive article justifying the Sabbatarian belief in the gift of prophecy. It was based upon the already established arguments that the gift of prophecy was supported by the Bible, that it was related to the last days, and that it bore positive fruit among the believers.⁶⁰ A main element of the article, however, was White's explanation of the relationship between the Bible and the gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Without giving any doubts about the Sabbatarian understanding on the issue, he noted that

*the gifts of the Spirit should all have their proper places. The Bible is an everlasting rock. It is our rule of faith and practice. . . . Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position. The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom from which to learn duty in "all good works." But if a portion of the church err from the truths of the Bible, and become weak, and sickly, and the flock become scattered, so that it seems necessary for God to employ the gifts of the Spirit to correct, revive and heal the erring, we should let him work.*⁶¹

For the Sabbatarians the Bible had a primary leading role for the establishment of their beliefs while the gifts had an aiding or corrective function. The Sabbatarians never claimed equality between the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit.

Of interest is the additional note that James White wrote at the end of the last reprint of his "Gifts of the Gospel Church" article in October 1854. It seems that he wanted for one last time to re-emphasize the Sabbatarian position on the relationship between the

⁶⁰ See chapter 1, 60-73.

⁶¹ James White, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 70. Emphasis supplied.

Bible and the gift of prophecy for the readers of the *Review*. He stated that the reason for re-publishing the article was that “our readers may see for themselves what our position has ever been on this subject” and that “they may be better prepared to dispose of the statements of those who seek to injure us.” “The position that the Bible and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and duty,” James continued, “does not shut out the gifts which God set in the church. To reject them is shutting out that part of the Bible which presents them. We say, Let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty. Place the gifts where they belong and all is harmony.”⁶²

We must make one more interesting observation. It is an unquestionable fact that James White’s underlying objective was to defend the prophetic gift of Ellen White. Yet, he does not refer specifically to her gift anywhere in the original 1851 article and its later reprints, although his allusions can be clearly noticed.

White gives us a clue as to why he was very cautious about making references to the prophetic gift and visions of Ellen White. That clue had to do with the widened prospect of evangelism. White recognized that the attitude of many of the former Millerites, who became indifferent towards their belief in the second coming of Christ, had started to change. Thus in August 1851, he wrote, “Now the door is open almost everywhere to present the truth, and many are prepared to read the publications who have formerly had no interest to investigate. Now we may all do something for the Lord who has done so much for us.”⁶³ For that reason, James White wanted to make the *Review and Herald* a tool for evangelism. In order to preserve the fundamental Sabbatarian belief that

⁶² James White, “Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *RH*, Oct. 3, 1854, 61-62.

⁶³ James White, “Our Present Work,” *RH*, Aug. 19, 1851, 13.

“the Bible only” was their rule of faith and at the same time to escape any form of prejudices against the visions, he decided not to publish them in the main issues of the *Review*. As an alternative, he decided to publish the visions for the Sabbatarian Adventists in a *Review and Herald.....Extra*. In its first edition he wrote:

This SHEET is the form of the paper that we hope to publish once in two weeks, only it will probably be some[what] longer, and will contain eight pages. We do not design this extra for so general circulation as the regular paper, for the reason that strong prejudice exists in many minds against a portion of its contents. . . . But as many are prejudiced against visions, we think best at present not to insert anything of the kind in the regular paper. We will therefore publish the visions by themselves for the benefit of those who believe that God can fulfill his word and give visions “*in the last days*.”⁶⁴

The policy of not promoting the visions through the *Review* continued for the next several years. In general, however, Ellen White seems to have been accepted by the Sabbatarian Adventists. Certain Sabbatarians even offered to pay for the publication of *Experience and Views*, a small pamphlet containing the visions of Ellen White.⁶⁵ Thus in the summer of 1851 Ellen White’s first booklet, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*, was published. As noted, Ellen White’s *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen White* was published in 1854. A year later, in 1855, Ellen White’s testimonies began to be published individually in a small booklet format. The 1851 and 1854 booklets and the publication of the testimonies apparently proved to be the substitute for the *Review and Herald.....Extra*.

The publishing committee of the *Review* also noted that the Sabbatarians did not adopt the visions as “another rule of faith.” As they put it, “the columns of the ADVENT

⁶⁴ [James White], *Review and Herald.....Extra*, July 21, 1851, 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

REVIEW, from the first volume until the present number, are a sufficient refutation of this charge [obviously a reference to James White's decision not to publish the visions]. We do not deny the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but we regard them as designed only to lead men to the word of God. This has ever been our position, the malice of our enemies to the contrary notwithstanding."⁶⁶ They made it clear, however, that the *Review* would not engage in endless arguments with the opposition since they did not want to engage in controversy that would lead them away from the word of God. Nevertheless, they felt that because of the numerous attacks, and because some people were influenced by the false ideas given by the objectors, they needed to address the readers of the *Review*. They also expressed their full confidence in James White as the editor of the paper.⁶⁷ Thus the Sabbatarians rejected the main accusation of the Messengers—that they held the visions as an addition to the Bible or another rule of faith.

Similar views showing the Sabbatarian understanding of the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's gift continued to appear throughout the 1850s. G. W. Holt, for example, wrote that the Bible "as ever" was his "rule of faith and duty." That did not mean, however, that he had to "deny the gifts of the Holy Spirit" which, he thought, were designed for the "benefit of the church."⁶⁸ James White noted that very often the opposition would take advantage of the "common prejudices against Visions" and misrepresent them as the "work of Satan." They would brand "any view held by the body

⁶⁶ J. N. Andrews, R. F. Cottrell, and Uriah Smith, "To the Readers of the Advent Review," *RH*, Nov. 7, 1854, 101.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; J. N. Andrews, R. F. Cottrell, and Uriah Smith, "Malicious Insinuation," *RH*, Nov. 21, 1854, 117.

⁶⁸ G. W. Holt, "From Bro. Holt," *RH*, Nov. 21, 1854, 120.

of Sabbath-keepers as the ‘Vision view,’ and not the Bible view of the subject.” White, however, wanted it to be understood that all of the beliefs of the Sabbatarians were “brought out from the Scriptures before Mrs. W[hite] had any view in regard to them.”⁶⁹ Then in a rather humorous voice he wrote that “in order to be sure to avoid the charges of infidelity and heresy from these men [referring most probably to the opposition of the Messengers] it is necessary to renounce every point of religious faith with which Mrs. W[hite]’s views are in harmony.” “Brethren,” advised James, “be on your guard against this crafty mode of action to divide the Church of God. Let the Visions stand upon their own merits. It is our duty to teach, and to hold up the hands of those who teach the word of God; also to mark those who cause divisions.”⁷⁰

In October 1861 when the Sabbatarians discussed the issue of creeds at a general conference meeting they confirmed again their view on the conformity between the Bible and the gifts. They rejected any kind of human creeds and noted that the Bible was their only creed. Because of their acceptance of the Bible, they accepted the gifts. As they put it, “We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time.”⁷¹ A year later, in 1862, M. E. Cornell made a similar declaration. He wrote that the Sabbatarians believed in the spiritual gifts because they accepted the “whole Bible” and that the acceptance of both human creeds and the gifts was incompatible. “It is evident that if the gifts were received, they would destroy human

⁶⁹ James White, “A Test,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷¹ [James White], “Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861,” *RH*, Oct. 8, 1861, 148.

creeds,” he wrote, “and that if creeds be received, they shut out the gifts.”⁷² Evidently, for the majority of Sabbatarian Adventists, Ellen White’s gift of prophecy and the Bible were “in harmony.”⁷³

The second response of the Sabbatarians addressed the “last days” question. Both the Messengers and the Sabbatarians believed that they were living in the last days. The main issue of disagreement, however, was their interpretation of Joel 2 and Acts 2 in relation to the gift of prophecy. Contrary to the Messengers, the Sabbatarians argued that the prophecy of Joel 2 was not entirely fulfilled during the time of the apostles. James White, for example, argued that if this was true,

then the church of Christ has been destitute of “the word of wisdom,” “word of knowledge,” and the gifts of “faith” for about 1800 years, and those who have professed to be “teachers” and “pastors” have assumed a calling which ceased to exist at the death of the apostles. It is therefore very evident that all the gifts run parallel with each other, none of them ending before the rest, and they were to extend quite through the gospel age.⁷⁴

Then he quoted the familiar texts of Joel 2 and Acts 2 and explained that their entire fulfillment was to happen in the “last days.” Again he reminded the readers that the gift of prophecy, dreams, and visions were “signs” of the remnant people of God and evidence that they were living in the last days of human history.⁷⁵ He also believed that

⁷² M. E. Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 28.

⁷³ D. T. Bourdeau, “Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Dec. 2, 1862, 6.

⁷⁴ James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 70. The “remnant” argument will be covered on pages 109-112 below.

the last days should have witnessed a much greater display of the gifts in the church but because of pride and disbelief the gifts had not been displayed in their fullness.⁷⁶

Another Sabbatarian, Francis Gould, noted in a letter to the *Review* that while Jesus is doing His work as a High Priest in heaven, “there remains a work for us to do.” This work could be accomplished only through the gifts that God has given to His people. “Many assert,” Gould wrote, “that the gifts were not designed for us in these [last] days, but were given to the Apostles to confirm the covenant; but this is mere assertion. When the Son of God was taken up out of the church, it appears evident that he left all the gifts in the church, and after the mission of the apostles, they were to be perpetuated through to the end of the world.”⁷⁷ Based on Mark 15:15-18 and Acts 2:38, 39, Gould argued that the promise of the gifts was for all of God’s people, including the believers of the last days.⁷⁸

On June 26, 1855, the *Review* published a major article by David Arnold discussing the issue of God’s way of communication with people through dreams and visions.⁷⁹ Part of the article dealt with the question of the perpetuity of the gift of prophecy in relation to the “last days.” Making a connection between Joel 2 and Amos 3:7 that “the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets,” Arnold pointed out that this was a “definite promise that in the ‘last days’ God

⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁷ Francis Gould, “From Bro. Gould,” *RH*, Oct. 24, 1854, 87.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See: David Arnold, “The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God's Appointment for Its Purification and Unity,” *RH*, June 26, 1855, 249-251.

will prepare by the out-pouring of his Spirit, his servants and handmaids for prophesying” and that “this is done by dreams and visions.” A further proof for him was the numerous examples of God communicating with people by dreams and visions after Christ’s ascension and the Pentecost story in Acts 2. In Acts 9, for instance, Saul and Ananias had visions a year after the ascension. Acts 10 recorded the visions of Peter and Cornelius, “eight years after Christ gave gifts to men.” “In Acts 16 Paul also through vision had the assurance that God was with him, and none should hurt him while at Corinth.” Paul also spoke of the “abundance of the revelations” and visions he received from the Lord in 2 Cor 12. The apostle John also spoke of seeing visions recorded in the book of Revelation on the Isle of Patmos. All these facts showed for Arnold that God used the Holy Spirit not only on the day of Pentecost, “but as the circumstances demanded. . . . Thus we see God’s plan of communicating with fallen man unchanged from the days of Adam to ‘the last days,’ where salvation’s work will be completed.” In addition, he observed that God’s plan of pouring out His Spirit included not only the sons but also the “daughters.” Thus he defended the fact that both genders were to be included as possible recipients of the gift of prophecy in the last days. Although he did not mention Ellen White personally, the reference to her gift as coming from God is obvious. He noted that “even in the Advent church” some believers rejected “this important gift,” but he reminded them to “despise not prophesying” since God was to give revelations to his people to the very end.⁸⁰

The October 16, 1855, *Review* published several small articles dealing with different questions related to the gift of prophecy. Part of the arguments continued to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 250.

support the Sabbatarian belief that the gifts, and the gift of prophecy in particular, were to continue “in the last days.”⁸¹

In the late 1850s and early 1860s there continued to be sporadic articles defending the Sabbatarian view connecting the gift of prophecy and the “last days.” In 1858, for example, James White gave an extended interpretation of Joel 2:28-32 and related the gift of prophecy to the “latter rain” promised in the last days. He also saw it as one of the “signs of the near approach of the great and the terrible day of the Lord.”⁸² The same relationship was expressed in 1862 in a series of articles called “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts.”⁸³ The Sabbatarians even started to argue that the last great commission of Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-20 included the manifestation of spiritual gifts until “the end of the world.”⁸⁴ As James White put it, “this high commission relates to the gospel, to faith, to baptism, to salvation, *and to spiritual gifts.*”⁸⁵ Thus the Sabbatarians were convinced that the gift of prophecy was to be displayed one more time in the “last days” just before Christ’s second coming.

The third response to objections by the Sabbatarian Adventists was related to the “remnant” question. The Sabbatarians believed that the true remnant people of God

⁸¹ James White, “The Counterfeit and No Genuine,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61; idem, “Jannes and Jambres,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61; idem, “Peter’s Testimony,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 60-61; idem, “A Test,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61-62.

⁸² James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church. No. 4,” *RH*, Jan. 7, 1858, 69.

⁸³ [James White], “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Feb. 18, 1862, 92-93; idem, “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Feb. 25, 1862, 100.

⁸⁴ Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 37.

⁸⁵ James White, “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” in the introduction to Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 11-12. Emphasis supplied.

would possess the gift of prophecy. “God has by the prophet Joel,” James White wrote, “promised to do great things for the REMNANT” just before his coming. “It is the REMNANT that is to witness these things,” he continued. “It is the remnant (or last portion of the Church) that keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, (which is the spirit of prophecy, Rev. xix, 10).”⁸⁶

Explaining the idea of the characteristics of the remnant, B. F. Robbins noted that “John saw the remnant mentioned in this prophecy [Rev 12:17], and he states their peculiar characteristics so that they need not be mistaken amid the multitude of nominal Christians.” “How is this remnant characterized,” Robbins asked. “By keeping the commandments of God,” and by “having the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the “spirit of prophecy,” he explained.⁸⁷

A main element of the Sabbatarian understanding of the gift of prophecy was the connection that they began to build between Rev 12:17 and 19:10. James White explained the importance of this:

“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.” Rev. xii, 17.

Sabbath-keepers often quote this text, yet we think but few understand and realize its full import. There can be no doubt but the “commandments of God,” mentioned in the text, are the Decalogue; but what is the “testimony of Jesus Christ?” Men may give different answers; but it should be distinctly understood that the Bible gives but one answer to this important question. Said the angel to John, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Rev. xix, 10.

John fell at the angel’s feet, and was about to worship him, when the angel said to him, “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.”

⁸⁶ James White, “Peter’s Testimony,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61.

⁸⁷ B. F. Robbins, “Joel II, 28-32,” *RH*, Apr. 12, 1860, 165.

Compare this with the angel's testimony in Chap. xxii, 9: "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." It will be seen that the two expressions—"thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus," and, "thy brethren the prophets"—mean one and the same thing. This is in harmony with the expression, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."⁸⁸

R. F. Cottrell and M. E. Cornell also pointed out that "the testimony of Jesus" in Rev 12:17 was "the spirit of prophecy" in Rev 19:10.⁸⁹ This interpretation of the above biblical passages became the standard proof of the Sabbatarian understanding that the true remnant people of God had to possess the gift of prophecy and that Ellen White's gift was a legitimate confirmation of their claim to be the remnant end-time people.⁹⁰

The Sabbatarians went further and explained that the two main causes of the dragon's (Satan's) wrath against the remnant mentioned in Rev 12:17 was the Sabbath and the spirit of prophecy. James White wrote: "Well, is this all the cause [referring to the keeping of the Sabbath in particular] of the war from the dragon?" "No," he answered, "they also have the testimony of Jesus Christ. . . . The spirit of prophecy, then, will be with the Sabbath-keeping remnant, and will be one thing to cause the dragon to make war on them." James even believed that perhaps there was nothing, including the Sabbath, "that will excite the dragon's wrath more, than for the spirit of prophecy to be in the

⁸⁸ James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," *RH*, Dec. 18, 1855, 92.

⁸⁹ Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 42; R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 25, 126; idem, *Spiritual Gifts*, 15.

⁹⁰ See for example: James White, "Unity and Gifts of the Church. No: 3," *RH*, Dec. 31, 1857, 60-61; idem, "Unity and Gifts of the Church. No. 4," *RH*, Jan. 7, 1858, 68-69; R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Mar. 24, 1859, 137-139; B. F. Robbins, "Joel II, 28-32," *RH*, Apr. 12, 1860, 165-166; [James White], "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Feb. 25, 1862, 100.

church.”⁹¹ That is why the “dragon spirit” was against the church and was “manifested by some who reject the work of the Spirit, and teach that the law of God is abolished.”⁹² In 1862 he wrote again in the introduction to M. E. Cornell’s *Miraculous Powers* that the Devil’s final “warfare” upon the remnant (Rev 12:17) was caused by the remnant’s “teaching of the ten commandments,” “the revival of the gifts,” and specific acknowledgement of the “gift of prophecy among them.”⁹³ Thus for the Sabbatarian Adventists there was a clear connection between Ellen White’s gift and their understanding of being the end-time remnant people of God.

The fourth response of the Sabbatarians tackled the issue related to the influence of Ellen White’s gift upon the believers and the Sabbatarians in particular. Although this was an old argument, the Sabbatarians re-emphasized this point because of the opposition during this period. While the opposition saw Ellen White’s gift as something that caused divisions and confusion, the Sabbatarians continued to argue that her gift had brought positive “fruits” among the believers. This was another proof for the validity of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. They were quick to point out that the divisions that started among the Sabbatarians were caused by the Messenger Party, the “Age to Come” supporters, and others who opposed Ellen White’s gift.⁹⁴ The believers were advised “to have as little to

⁹¹ James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 3,” *RH*, Dec. 31, 1857, 60-61.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹³ James White, “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” in the introduction to Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 25.

⁹⁴ “The Advent Harbinger,” *RH*, July 4, 1854, 172-173; J. N. Andrews, “Advent Harbinger Alias Prophetic Exposition,” *RH*, Nov. 21, 1854, 117; “Mark Them Which Cause Divisions,” *RH*, Aug. 22, 1854, 14.

do with them as possible. Theirs is a spirit of war, and they will find much less to do if they are left to themselves to finish their short work of death. Brethren, be not deceived and led from the work of God by them.”⁹⁵

Two issues that particularly showed up in the Sabbatarian response concerning the above argument were: first, that the gift of prophecy brought unity among them, and second, that the gift helped them to come to a more perfect stage in their Christian journey and prepared them for the Second Coming. The Sabbatarians based their argumentations on such biblical passages as Eph 4:11-14; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Cor 1:4-10; Rom 15; and others.

James White started his April 1851 article entitled “The Gifts of the Gospel Church” by quoting Eph 4:11-14 and 1 Cor 12:28 and pointing out that the believers needed “all” the gifts in order to reach “unity” and “perfection” of their faith.⁹⁶ The gifts, he wrote, “were to be employed for this purpose ‘till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.’” He went on to say that the gifts were also given “for ‘the perfecting of the saints.’” Since the church was still in “an imperfect state” they needed “*all*” the gifts in order to reach that state of “unity, knowledge, fullness and perfection.”⁹⁷

It seems that James used the word “all” intentionally, implying that the prophetic gift was not excluded as claimed by the Messengers. His logic confirms this assumption:

⁹⁵ ““Mark Them Which Cause Divisions,” *RH*, Aug. 22, 1854, 14.

⁹⁶ James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 69.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

It is universally admitted that a portion of the gifts exist in the church at this day, such as “the word of wisdom,” and “the word of knowledge,” and no one denies that “pastors” and “teachers” were to be in the church until its perfection. Then if a portion of the gifts were to remain in the church, why not all of them remain?⁹⁸

James White went on to say that the gifts were also needed to prepare the believers “to stand firm in the time of trouble” that was just ahead of them. “If the apostolic church needed the gifts to enable them to stand in their peculiar trials,” White wrote, “how much more” were the gifts needed for the believers who were living at the end of time. According to White, all the gifts (including the gift of prophecy) were needed and beneficial for the church until the second coming of Christ.⁹⁹

Like James White, G. W. Holt, in a letter to the *Review* in 1854, noted that the gifts were “designed for the benefit of the church.”¹⁰⁰ The main emphasis of David Arnold’s 1855 article, “The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God’s Appointment for Its Purification and Unity,” was also on the unity and perfection of the saints. Arnold made it clear that full perfection was not possible without the gift of prophecy:

Apostles may go forth to proclaim their special messages, evangelists may publish and preach the gospel of the kingdom from church to church, pastors may feed and watch over their flocks, teachers may instruct, but without the prophets, the efforts for the perfection of the church would be marked with human creeds, human zeal, human wisdom, human union, and human imperfection. No wonder that Paul was inspired to say to his brethren who should live in the days just before the coming of the Son of man [*sic*], “Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesying.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ G. W. Holt, “From Bro. Holt,” *RH*, Nov. 21, 1854, 120.

¹⁰¹ David Arnold, “The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God’s Appointment for Its Purification and Unity,” *RH*, June 26, 1855, 251.

The positive impact of the gifts continued to be emphasized in the second part of 1850s. In November 1857, for example, the *Review* gave a report of “the most profitable” Sabbatarian conference ever held up to that time. A major subject discussed at the conference was the relationship between the unity and the gifts of the church.

The subject of the unity and gifts of the church was presented, which seemed to have a place in the hearts of the people. Many expressed themselves happy to see this subject taking its proper place in the church. During this meeting Mrs. W.[hite] read a recently received testimony for the church, which was received as the voice of the Lord to his people. And before the large assembly a proposition was made to have it published. A vote was taken, when more than 200 brethren and sisters arose in favor of its publication. A call was made for objectors to rise but all kept their seats. . . . We are fully satisfied that an important era is dawning upon the remnant. A testimony is ripening in the church which will raise the church to a higher state of spirituality and consecration.¹⁰²

Following the conference, the *Review* published a series of articles devoted to the connection between the gifts and the unity of the church.¹⁰³ As James White put it in the introduction, “It may be thought, by reading the caption of this article [“Unity and Gifts of the Church. No. 1”], that we have undertaken two subjects at once. But we regard the unity and the gifts of the church as being so closely connected, one dependent on the other, that we introduce them as one subject.”¹⁰⁴ Toward the end of the article, he noted that as the gifts were necessary “to guide and sustain the early church,” they were also needed in the current time “to preserve the unity and purity of the church” and to prepare them “to be translated to heaven, as were Enoch and Elijah.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² James White, “Conference,” *RH*, Nov. 12, 1857, 4.

¹⁰³ The articles were published in the *Review and Herald* from December 3, 1857, to January 7, 1858.

¹⁰⁴ James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church. No. 1,” *RH*, Dec. 3, 1857, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The same kind of arguments continued to echo in the beginning of the 1860s. E. B. Saunders noted in 1860 that “Satan has succeeded in dividing the professed followers of Jesus into a multitude of factions, and then has arrayed these factions against each-other [*sic*] till a complete babel [*sic*] of confusion exists.” “No wonder,” he continued, “that some are blinded and confused amid all this uproar, and walk like blind men seeking to be led, till Satan’s own professed ministers of light lead them whither they know not. . . . The gifts of the Holy Spirit, those present blessings which the church was to enjoy till made perfect are almost universally denied.”¹⁰⁶ In an 1861 article entitled “Desire Spiritual Gifts,” J. H. Waggoner noted the purpose of spiritual gifts as to “guide us into the truth,” to “reprove [us] of sin,” to “aid us in coming to ‘the unity of faith,’” and to “show us things to come.” Therefore, he argued that the believers were to expect the gift of prophecy and its “work of restoration” as the “most necessary” and the “most desired” gift according to 1 Cor 14:1.¹⁰⁷ In 1862 M. E. Cornell also noted that “the necessity for . . . unity in faith, was never greater” than at their time and that is why the gift of prophecy was especially needed.¹⁰⁸

It is not surprising to see that the emphasis on the relationship between the gifts and unity had a role as the Sabbatarians formally organized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. In the early 1850s the Sabbatarians experienced rapid growth. This growth, however, brought legal, financial, spiritual, and other related problems for

¹⁰⁶ E. B. Saunders, “The Perils of the Last Days,” *RH*, Mar. 1, 1860, 114.

¹⁰⁷ J. H. Waggoner, ““Desire Spiritual Gifts,”” *RH*, Mar. 5, 1861, 125.

¹⁰⁸ Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1862), 38.

the leaders and the group as a whole.¹⁰⁹ With the appearance of the Messenger Party the Sabbatarians also had to deal with the issue of admitting and dismissing of members. It is in this context that James and Ellen White started to discuss the necessity for formal organization and the need to strengthen unity among the believers. In 1853 Ellen White used her gift to speak for “gospel order” and the importance of unity. She wrote:

The Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected. There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. And now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it. . . . Men whose lives are not holy and who are unqualified to teach the present truth enter the field without being acknowledged by the church or the brethren generally, and confusion and disunion are the result.¹¹⁰

James White wrote in a similar tone in that same year:

We think that it [Gospel Order] has been much neglected, and that the attention of the church should be turned to this subject, and vigorous efforts should be put forth to restore as fast as possible the order of the gospel. . . . It is the will of the Lord that his people should be called away from the confusion and bondage of man-made creeds, to enjoy the oneness and freedom of the gospel. But it is a lamentable fact that many of our Advent brethren who made a timely escape from the bondage of the different churches, who as a body rejected the Advent doctrine, have since been in a more perfect Babylon than ever before. Gospel order has been too much overlooked by them. . . . They will have to learn that God has not called any of his people away from the confusion of the churches, designing that they should be left without discipline. . . . To suppose that the church of Christ is free from restraint and discipline, is the wildest fanaticism.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 59.

¹¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (2000), 97.

¹¹¹ [James White], “Gospel Order,” *RH*, Dec. 6, 1853, 173.

The Sabbatarians became formally organized in May 1863 when the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was established.¹¹² Because of the leadership role of James and Ellen White, they were now officially unified and organized.

The fifth concern of the Sabbatarians was the relationship between the gift of prophecy as a test of fellowship within their group. Although they were not officially organized until 1863, the question had come into discussion by the mid-1850s, mainly because of the Messengers and the “Age to Come” controversies. The critics charged that many former believers who were part of the Sabbatarian group were denied fellowship because they questioned or expressed unbelief in the visions of Ellen White.

In response, the Sabbatarian view on the issue developed gradually during the 1850s and 1860s. The initial understanding was set by James White in 1855. He denied the charge of the objectors entirely. “There is a class of persons,” he wrote, “who are determined to have it that the REVIEW and its conductors make the views of Mrs. White a Test of doctrine and Christian fellowship. It may be duty to notice these persons on account of the part they are acting, which is calculated to deceive some.”¹¹³ He continued in the same line by asking: “What has the REVIEW to do with Mrs. W[hite]’s views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the REVIEW has ever referred to them as authority on any point. The REVIEW for five years has not published one of them.”¹¹⁴ Its motto has been, ‘The Bible and the

¹¹² Knight, *A Brief History*, 63-64.

¹¹³ James White, “A Test,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61.

¹¹⁴ This statement is true if James White was referring to his wife’s visions. However, he did publish seven of her articles between 1851 and 1855 in the regular columns of the *Review* on general, rather than doctrinal, topics.

Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty.”¹¹⁵ White then quoted a statement written by the Sabbatarian group (most probably the Battle Creek believers) concerning their attitude towards the visions of Ellen White: “This certifies that we have been acquainted with Bro. and Sr. White, and their teachings, and labors in church trials, and have never known them *to urge the visions on any one as a portion of religious faith, or make them a test of fellowship.*”¹¹⁶ White made it clear that all of the beliefs “held by the body of Sabbath-keepers, were brought out from the Scriptures before Mrs. W[hite] had any view in regard to them.” He went on to accuse the objectors as the ones who made the visions a test. While the Sabbatarian leaders were engaged in teaching the word of God, the objectors were busy dividing and separating churches. “While we take the Bible, and the Bible alone as our rule of faith and duty, and are rigidly devoted to teaching the word,” White noted, “these persons, as they go out from us, seem to become at once enraged against the Visions, and embued [*sic*] with bitterness against their former brethren, . . . and engage with a rash zeal to divide Churches, and separate the nearest and dearest friends. What is their test in this work?—The Visions!”¹¹⁷ In the case of Case and Russell, the Messenger leaders, the Sabbatarians pointed out that they were not disfellowshipped because they did not believe the visions of Ellen White but “on account of their unchristian conduct.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ James White, “A Test,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1855, 61.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁸ “The Advent Harbinger,” *RH*, July 4, 1854, 173; “H. S. Case,” *RH*, Apr. 18, 1854, 102.

In December 1855 the *Review* published an interesting letter from the church in Mill Grove, New York, to Elder J. M. Stephenson. Stephenson did not believe the visions of Ellen White but intended to visit the Sabbatarians at Mill Grove and speak to them. The church received his letter but declined to accept his visitation. The reason for that, however, was not his unbelief in Ellen White but rather his work against the brethren and the causing of divisions among the believers. The letter read,

If you [Stephenson] were laboring in unison with the body of the brethren who were first in the message of the third angel, and through whose instrumentality God brought the message to us and you, we would most gladly welcome you, *whether you believed the visions of Sr. White or not*. But we cannot engage in a faction against those whom God made choice of to introduce the last message to the world; and we fear that, if you persist in your present course, you will find, when it is too late, that you have run in vain, and labored in vain.¹¹⁹

As seen earlier, the Sabbatarians made it very plain that for them the Bible was the only “test” and “rule” of fellowship. In 1856 James White re-emphasized this Sabbatarian understanding again. In his article “The Gifts—Their Object,” he noted that the gifts were not to take the place of the Bible and as such were not to be seen as a test of fellowship or a rule of action. “The Word should be in front,” White wrote, “and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom, from which to learn duty in ‘all good works.’” People needed to search “the Word” for the truth and only if they erred or “urged erroneous views” would God use the gifts to correct them.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ R. F. Cottrell, “Letter from the Church at Mill Grove, N. Y., to Elder J. M. Stephenson,” *RH*, Dec. 18, 1855, 93.

¹²⁰ James White, “The Gifts—Their Object,” *RH*, Feb. 28, 1856, 173, 172.

James White's article might have been a response to some confused Sabbatarian Adventists over some of his statements regarding the visions. Two weeks earlier Hiram Bingham had written to him that some churches felt concerned about some of his expressions made in the *Review* in regard to the visions. The people were troubled that (1) he placed them "too low," and (2) that the visions were not considered a test by him.¹²¹

In his answer, White defended himself against the charge that he had lightly esteemed the visions. If he had created such an impression, it had been because of his desire for the "welfare of the cause."¹²² Concerning the visions being a test, White made a slightly different statement than previously:

It is well known that we have been charged with testing all men by the visions, and of making them *the* rule of our faith. . . . This I have denied, and deny it still. But there need not be so much blind-fold stumbling over this matter. To say unqualifiedly that they are a test, and carry out the principle with those who know nothing of their teachings, spirit and fruit, at the time when the world is full of manifestations as near the genuine as Satan can get up, would be the wildest fanaticism. On the other hand, for those who profess to believe them to say they will in no wise be tested by them, is most irrational. . . . I believe them to be the property of the church, and a test to those who believe them from Heaven.¹²³

James White here gave an important nuance on his position on the subject. He suggested that although the visions were not a test of fellowship, they were a test to those who had already accepted them as coming from God. James's position seems to resonate

¹²¹ Hiram Bingham, "From Bro. Bingham," *RH*, Feb. 14, 1856, 158.

¹²² *Ibid.*, (in James White's reply to the letter of Bro. Bingham).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, (in James White's reply to the letter of Bro. Bingham).

with the view taken by the Sabbatarian Adventists at a general conference held in November 1855 at Battle Creek.¹²⁴

In 1861 Uriah Smith refined the “test” question and its relationship to the gift of prophecy further. In January 1861 he published an article entitled “The Visions a Test,” and tackled the question directly. “The oft re-iterated fear is still occasionally expressed,” Smith wrote, “that the visions are to be made a test of fellowship. We have heard a great deal, first and last, about the visions being made a test; and many are the panics that some have tried to raise over this subject.”¹²⁵

In harmony with James White, Smith noted that people who professed to believe the visions were logically bound to be tested and corrected by them. “In such cases the visions necessarily make themselves a test,” Smith wrote.¹²⁶ On the other hand, he argued that even those who did not accept Ellen White’s visions did not have grounds to deny the belief in the doctrine of spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy). Thus Smith made a distinction between Ellen White’s specific gift (visions) and the doctrine of spiritual gifts in general.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell, “Address of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 16th, 1855,” *RH*, Dec. 4, 1855, 78-79. See the discussion about the 1855 general conference on pp. 131-132 below.

¹²⁵ Uriah Smith, “The Visions a Test,” *RH*, Jan. 14, 1861, 52.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ After the initial introduction where Smith addressed the vision of Ellen White in particular, he continued to discuss the belief in spiritual gifts as a doctrine. His allusions to Ellen White’s prophetic gift, however, are clearly noticed as one reads the whole article. The title of the article also confirms this assumption.

Although the Sabbatarian Adventists held that the belief in the visions of Ellen White was not a test of fellowship, they did teach that belief in the doctrine of spiritual gifts was a test of fellowship. Using a logical argument, Smith noted that just as the Sabbatarians could not “feel union” with believers who did not agree with them on such fundamental points of belief as “the second coming of Christ,” “the Sabbath,” “baptism,” “the sleep of the dead,” and “the destruction of the wicked,” likewise, they could not experience union with those who rejected the doctrine of spiritual gifts. “This principle,” Smith argued, “applies to the subject of spiritual gifts just as it applies to every other [doctrine].”¹²⁸ He continued and explained:

The perpetuity of the gifts is one of the fundamental points in the belief of this people; and with those who differ with us here, we can have union and fellowship to no greater extent than we can with those who differ with us on the other important subjects of the coming of Christ, baptism, the Sabbath, &c. And this is the sum and substance, the length and breadth, the hight [*sic*] and depth, of that great bugbear which Satan has conjured up to frighten the timid about making the visions a test of fellowship.¹²⁹

Interestingly, he truly believed that the Sabbatarians did not have to feel uneasy about making belief in the continuity of spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy) a test. He wrote:

We may be sure that God has given no gifts unto men, which he is willing to have neglected and despised; he has set nothing in his church, but what he designs should be loved and cherished, and revered by all his people. . . . Yet this is the course that some would have us take. They would have us say in effect like this: You must agree with us in all the fundamental points of our belief, with one exception, before we can receive you into our fellowship; that exception is spiritual gifts. That you may treat with as much neglect as you choose. It is a matter of indifference to us whether

¹²⁸ Uriah Smith, “The Visions a Test,” *RH*, Jan. 14, 1861, 53.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

you love or hate it. . . . We shall extend to you the hand of fellowship alike whether you receive or reject, honor or despise it. How could a doctrine be more effectually degraded than by such a course. . . . If we are cherishing doctrines that deserve no better treatment than this, let us give them up completely and at once.¹³⁰

Smith concluded his article by arguing that even if Seventh-day Adventists would “stand with open arms ready to receive all whether they receive the gifts of not,” in practicality there could not be a “true union” with those who rejected the gifts. “From the very nature of the case they cannot have it,” he wrote, “and though they may for a while maintain their connection with it, they are unprepared to weather with this people the storms which they have yet to encounter.”¹³¹ Thus according to Smith the acceptance and non-acceptance of the belief in spiritual gifts was a test of fellowship and a divider of believers.

In 1862 T. M. Steward noted that the gifts would not benefit the believers unless they “acknowledge them” and were “willing to be reprov'd and corrected by them.” “I can see no way,” Steward wrote, “to be consistent with them, *without making them a test.*”¹³² Steward, like Smith, saw the gifts (including the gift of prophecy) as a test of fellowship. Thus by early 1863 many Sabbatarian Adventists had begun to consider the doctrine of spiritual gifts (which included the gift of prophecy) as a test of fellowship, even though they did not hold Ellen White’s visions to be such. Her visions were only a “test” for those who had already accepted them. It seems that the Sabbatarians (including Ellen White herself) were very careful in dealing with believers who doubted or needed time to examine and study Ellen White’s prophetic gift in particular.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² T. M. Steward, [“Letter”], *RH*, Feb. 11, 1862, 87.

A sixth concern of the Sabbatarians was the “gender” question. This argument appeared from time to time in the *Review*, but did not seem to be a really controversial issue between 1850 and 1862, as we have noted already. The Sabbatarians, however, did answer the objection. In 1855, for example, David Arnold argued that the gift of prophecy was not designed for men only. He alluded to Joel 2 and noted that “God’s plan is to ‘pour out his Spirit,’ not only upon the sons, but also upon the daughters,’ and they shall prophesy.”¹³³

A major discussion of the issue was published by S. C. Welcome in 1860. After a lengthy examination of 1 Cor 14:34, 35 (“Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”), Welcome concluded that the passage had nothing to do with the gift of prophecy. As he put it, “it is evident that as the prohibition of the apostle in the passage above cited, related to asking of questions, and such as could properly be answered at home by their husbands, it had no relation to the exercise of a gift which God had given them to use for the advancement of his cause.”¹³⁴ According to the Joel’s prophecy, Welcome argued, “the promise of the Spirit is as positive to the daughters and handmaidens, as to the sons and servants.” He next asked: “Then where is the authority for saying that females should not receive a gift of the Holy Spirit in these last days. Verily God hath promised it; and I would to God that more of his

¹³³ David Arnold, “The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God’s Appointment for Its Purification and Unity,” *RH*, June 26, 1855, 250.

¹³⁴ S. C. Welcome, “Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?” *RH*, Feb. 23, 1860, 109-110.

handmaidens were endued with power from on high.”¹³⁵ Welcome then gave numerous examples from the Bible¹³⁶ of female prophetesses and concluded his argument (which clearly defended Ellen White’s gift even though he did not refer specifically to her anywhere in the article) in the following words:

Seeing that females were admitted to the high office of prophecy under the old dispensation, and in the promise of the more general effusion of this gift, the daughters and handmaidens were equally included with the other sex, that they were among the first messengers of the gospel, and after the churches were formed and settled received particular instruction how to conduct themselves in the church, in the exercise of their gifts, it is strange that the privilege should have ever been called in question.

We are informed on the authority of divine revelation that male and female are one in Christ Jesus; that in the relation in which they both stand to him, the distinction is as completely broken down as between Jew and Gentile, bond and free. Thus revelation has made known the important truth, and reason will bear testimony to the same thing. . . . Then let no stumbling-block be thrown in their way, but let them fill the place that God calls them to fill, let them not be bound down to silence by church rules, but let their tongues speak forth the praises of God, and let them point sinners to the Lamb of God, and grieve not the holy Spirit by silence in the congregation.¹³⁷

When answering some objections against the gifts, D. T. Bourdeau also noted that according to numerous examples from the Bible¹³⁸ it was “lawful for women to speak in meetings, and that our [Seventh-day Adventist] position in regard to the gift of prophecy that is among us, is not invalidated” by the biblical account. He went on to say that “the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 110.

¹³⁶ His list included: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna, Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist), Priscilla, and others.

¹³⁷ S. C. Welcome, “Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?” *RH*, Feb. 23, 1860, 110.

¹³⁸ Bourdeau quoted biblical passages such as: Phil 4:3; Rom 16:3; Acts 18:2, 26; Titus 2:3; 1 Cor 15:5, 16-18; 1 Cor 14:23-31; Acts 21:8, 9; 1 Cor 14:3, 4; Luke 2; and Heb 10:25.

most pious and consecrated among us testify that they have been blessed” by the visions manifested among us (obviously referring to the visions of Ellen White) and that “the same influence that attended the word that converted them, attended the visions.”¹³⁹ Thus the Sabbatharians argued that according to the biblical account women had the right to the gift of prophecy as much as men.

In addition to answering the objections through the printing press, the Sabbatharians also came up with general conference resolutions defending the gift of prophecy.

Responses to Objections through General Conference Resolutions

The second way by which the Sabbatharians responded to the opposition was by issuing special general conference resolutions. The two important conferences were held in 1855 and 1856. The conference in 1855 marked a turning point for the Sabbatharian Adventists regarding their attitude and public promotion of the gift of prophecy. The second conference in 1856 confirmed the new actions taken a year earlier and encouraged the new policy of dealing with the gift of prophecy in the public arena. The Sabbatharians’ aim was to show that they did not need to be ashamed of believing in Ellen White’s prophetic gift and acknowledging it publicly.

The 1855 conference took place in November, in Battle Creek, Michigan, which was becoming the headquarters of the developing denomination. Because of the constantly growing controversy with the Messenger Party in the mid-1850s, the Sabbatharians saw the need of dealing with the issue of the gift of prophecy in a more

¹³⁹ D. T. Bourdeau, “Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Dec. 2, 1862, 6.

“official” way. The delegates immediately appointed a committee composed of Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell “to address the saints in behalf of the Conference on the gifts of the church.”¹⁴⁰ As we may expect, the main concern was not the gifts in general, but the gift of prophecy in particular. The committee acted immediately and made their report to the leaders the same day. Interestingly, they did not deal with apologetics concerning the gift of prophecy but were concerned primarily with the practical application related to their belief and attitude toward the visions of Ellen White. The reason for that may be twofold. First, the *Review and Herald* (as we have seen) had published several theologically argumentative articles defending the Sabbatarian acceptance of the modern gift of prophecy. Second, the Messengers were causing a lot of disunity and stir among the churches and believers (particularly in Iowa) with their hostile attitude towards the visions and the Whites.¹⁴¹

In its address the committee noticed several significant concerns. First, they pointed to spiritual decline among the Sabbatarians. The main reason for that, according to the committee, was the negligence of the gifts of the Spirit on the part of the believers. “Dear Brethren and Sisters in Christ,” they wrote, “while we have professed to stand upon the Word, and walk in ‘the whole counsel of God,’ we feel to confess that we as a people have not obeyed the above divine injunction, nor have we appreciated the glorious privilege of claiming the gifts which our blessed Master has vouchsafed to his people;

¹⁴⁰ “Business Proceedings of the Conference at Battle Creek, Mich.,” *RH*, Dec. 4, 1855, 76.

¹⁴¹ See for example: J. N. Andrews, R. F. Cottrell, and Uriah Smith, “To the Readers of the Advent Review,” *RH*, Nov. 7, 1854, 101; J. N. Andrews, “Advent Harbinger Alias Prophetic Exposition,” *RH*, Nov. 21, 1854, 117; “Mark Them Which Cause Divisions,” *RH*, Aug. 22, 1854, 14.

and we greatly fear that we have grieved the Spirit by neglecting the blessings already conferred upon the church.”¹⁴²

Related to spiritual decline was a second concern of the committee: the issue of unity among the Sabbatarian group. They noted that the visions were one of the basic means that could correct their errors and bring the desired unity of faith between them as a body of believers. There was a genuine need to put Ellen White’s visions in their rightful place. They wrote:

We have also, in our past experience, been made to rejoice in the goodness of our God who has manifested his care for his people by leading us in his way and correcting our errors, through the operation of his Spirit; and the majority of Sabbath-keepers in the Third Angel’s Message, have firmly believed that the Lord was calling his church out of the wilderness by the means appointed to bring us to the unity of the faith. We refer to the visions which God has promised to the remnant “in the last days.” . . . We hope and pray, dearly beloved, that you will strive together with us for holiness of heart, for the unity of the faith and spirit, and the knowledge of the Son of God, that the power of Christ our Lord may rest upon us, that we may stand complete in him, and grow into him in all things. . . . Let love be without dissimulation; abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.¹⁴³

Third, the committee emphasized the positive influence of the gifts. They re-emphasized the important Sabbatarian understanding that by accepting the visions they did not put them on an equal ground with the Bible. “On the contrary,” they noted, “we test them by the Bible, making it [the Bible] the great rule of judgment in all things; so that whatever is not in accordance with it, in its spirit and its teachings we unhesitatingly

¹⁴² Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell, “Address of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 16th, 1855,” *RH*, Dec. 4, 1855, 79.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

reject.”¹⁴⁴ The committee argued, however, that the visions did not contradict the Bible and thus brought only positive results:

But as we cannot believe that a fountain sends forth at the same place sweet water and bitter, or that an evil tree brings forth good fruit, so we cannot believe that that is of the enemy which tends to unite the hearts of the saints, to lead to meekness and humility and holy living, and incites to deep heart-searching before God, and a confession of our wrongs. As having such a tendency we recommend to your candid consideration the contents of the book entitled, “Experience and Views,” believing them to be agreeable to the word of God, and the spirit of the Gospel.¹⁴⁵

We must note here that for the first time the Sabbatarians became much more open regarding the publicity of Ellen White’s visions. Up to 1855 they generally avoided publicizing Ellen White’s writings and defending them openly. They spoke and defended the gifts (plural) in general terms and tried not to engage in unnecessary controversy on the topic. It is true that in 1851 James White published Ellen White’s first book, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White*,” a sixty-four-page booklet describing her spiritual journey and initial visionary experiences. That book, however, was specifically designed for the Sabbatarians who had already accepted Ellen White’s prophetic gift or for those who did not know her personally and needed to get acquainted with her life and visionary experiences. In 1854 Ellen White wrote a *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views* to clarify some of her previous positions and to add some new materials since the first publication. That also was for believers in her visions. But the 1855 conference marked a new direction in the Sabbatarian attitude toward the visions of Ellen White and their publicity. “Dear Brethren,” the committee observed,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

“while we hold these views as emanating from the divine Mind, we would confess the inconsistency (which we believe has been displeasing to God) of professedly regarding them [the visions] as messages from God, and really putting them on a level with the inventions of men.”¹⁴⁶ “We fear,” they continued, “that this has resulted from an unwillingness to bear the reproach of Christ, (which is indeed greater riches than the treasures of earth,) and a desire to conciliate the feelings of our opponents; but the Word and our own experience have taught us that God is not honored, nor his cause advanced, by such a course.”¹⁴⁷

But that change did not come immediately. The Sabbatarians continued to be cautious because of outside prejudices against Ellen White’s gift and visions. The 1855 conference, nevertheless, became the turning point in the new direction.

The committee also addressed the question of the visions being a “test.” In dealing with the issue they made a difference between two groups of believers: those who accepted Ellen White’s gift and those who rejected or doubted her gift. They noted that logically the visions were to be a test for those who had accepted Ellen White’s divine authority. Thus the committee argued:

While we regard them as coming from God, and entirely harmonizing with the written word, we must acknowledge ourselves under obligation to abide by their teachings, and be corrected by their admonitions. To say that they are of God, and yet we will not be tested by them, is to say that God’s will is not a test or rule for Christians, which is inconsistent and absurd.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

On the other hand, Ellen White's visions were not considered a test for those who doubted them. The committee opened a door of tolerance for such believers and wrote:

But if any ask how we regard those who do not acknowledge them as of God, we answer that we are very willing to exercise toward them that spirit of toleration which is taught in the Bible, believing that "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin"; we are willing to make due allowance for the impressions received in youth, and the prejudices of the age; and even concerning the doctrines of the Word, we are told to receive "him that is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations."¹⁴⁹

As we have noted previously, James White's position on the "test" question in 1856 seemed to resonate the important nuance made by the conference committee concerning the Sabbatarian attitude towards those who accepted Ellen White's gift and those who doubted her experiences.¹⁵⁰

The 1855 general conference was an important step in the Sabbatarian development of understanding concerning Ellen White's prophetic gift. Although it took more than a decade for the full change of policy to take place, the changed attitude of the Sabbatarians towards the public promotion of her prophetic work started to be immediately obvious in several ways.

First, it seems that there was general acceptance of the decisions made at the Sabbatarian meeting in 1855 concerning the role of the gift of prophecy of Ellen White. In a report from the Oswego Conference held in December of the same year, J. N. Loughborough wrote the following: "The address of the Battle Creek Conference on the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ See: Hiram Bingham, "From Bro. Bingham," *RH*, Feb. 14, 1856, 158 (in James White's reply to the letter of Bro. Bingham).

gifts of the Church, prepared by Bro. Bates, Waggoner and Cornell, was then read, and unanimously adopted.”¹⁵¹

Second, as we have already noted, there was a change in the Sabbatarian attitude toward publications related to or by Ellen White after the 1855 conference. The Sabbatarians published R. F. Cottrell’s sixteen-page tract *Spiritual Gifts* in 1858, followed by M. E. Cornell’s *Miraculous Powers* in 1862. The two booklets were solely devoted to the gift of prophecy of Ellen White. Moreover, Ellen White’s more extensive biographical account of her life and initial prophetic ministry appeared in 1860 as the second volume of *Spiritual Gifts*. As she put it, “Having borne my testimony, and scattered several books containing my visions, in the Eastern, Middle, and Western States, and formed many happy acquaintances, I have felt it my duty to give to my friends and to the world a sketch of my Christian experience, visions, and labors in connection with the rise and progress of the third angel’s message.”¹⁵²

In addition, at the end of volume four, Ellen White’s first ten testimonies for the Church were republished.¹⁵³ These testimonies had been written and published individually between 1855 and 1864. Introducing them, Ellen White wrote a short “Remarks” section:

During the last nine years, from 1855 to 1864, I have written ten small pamphlets, entitled, Testimony for the Church, which have been published and circulated among Seventh-day Adventists. The first edition of most of these pamphlets being exhausted,

¹⁵¹ J. N. Loughborough, “Oswego Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 27, 1855, 101.

¹⁵² Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, iii.

¹⁵³ See: Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts, Important Facts of Faith: Laws of Health, and Testimonies Nos. 1-10*, vol. 4 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864).

and there being an increasing demand for them, it has been thought best to re-print them, as given in the following pages, omitting local and personal matters, and giving those portions only which are of practical and general interest and importance.¹⁵⁴

Interestingly, it was at the end of the 1855 general conference that Ellen White received a vision which she shared before the members of the Battle Creek Church. When the believers heard the message, they voted unanimously to publish it for the benefit of all other Sabbatarians as the *Testimony to the Church*, number one.¹⁵⁵ From that beginning came eventually the “Testimony to the Church” series. Thus after 1855 the Sabbatarians started to publicize Ellen White more openly. That trend would continue to develop.

The next general conference meeting of the Sabbatarians took place in July 1856. It addressed the gift of prophecy question again, but only to affirm the actions taken at the previous general meeting. According to the address of the conference, the results of putting the visions in their rightful place were clearly seen.

Dear brethren and sister, we have great reason to have increased confidence in the gift which God has already bestowed upon us in these last days; for whereas, many murmurers and complainers have arisen and openly avowed that the visions which God had given for his glory and our good were causing division and confusion in the church, we find that since we have been free from the unhallowed influence of such persons, and have humbled ourselves before God, and he has more frequently bestowed such favors on the church, our peace has increased, and the bond of our union has been strengthened, while confusion and distraction, and every evil work is in the midst of our enemies.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., in “Remarks.”

¹⁵⁵ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1969), 53.

¹⁵⁶ “Conference Address,” *RH*, July 24, 1856, 94.

Thus by the end of the 1850s there seemed to be a growing confidence and unity within the Sabbatarian group regarding the gift of prophecy and its public promotion. It took them another decade, however, until a complete change of direction concerning publicizing Ellen White's ministry would take place.

Ellen White's Self Understanding of Her Prophetic Gift

Ellen White continued to see her prophetic role mainly in the practical realm between 1851 and 1862. The 1850s brought the first internal controversies and fanatical extremes within the Sabbatarian group. At the center of these controversies stood Ellen White's visions and her prophetic gift. Ellen White, who considered herself a unifier, saw her main work as dealing with fanaticism, encouraging the believers, and bringing unity among the Sabbatarians. Thus her messages during this period of time dealt mostly with practical and not theological issues. At the beginning of the 1860s, however, Ellen White addressed some theological concerns related to her prophetic gift, namely the source of her visions, the time of her visionary experiences, and the messages of her revelations. She also addressed the question of her gift (visions) being a "test" of fellowship.

During the 1850s Ellen White saw her gift as a means of fighting fanaticism and restoring unity among the Sabbatarians. She, as the rest of the Sabbatarian leaders, saw the Messenger Party and the "Age to Come" movements as the main reason for disunity among the Sabbatarian Adventists. As we have seen, when the Messenger Party started in Jackson, Michigan, Ellen White was personally involved to clarify the issue about her visionary experiences and bring unity among the confused believers. She, for example,

wrote of Case and Russell that “their influence in the church was to cause divisions.”¹⁵⁷

Ellen White claimed that although they initially believed her visions, when she received a testimony against their deeds they turned against her and “began to fight against her testimony.”¹⁵⁸

Ellen and James White spent significant time trying to restore unity because of the Messengers controversy. Ellen White also claimed to have visions concerning the situation and believed that her gift played a positive role for the believers. In 1853, for instance, she wrote a letter to the church in Jackson, Michigan, saying that “some have been in an awful state in Jackson and would have remained in that dreadful state had not the Lord taken hold of the work and shown them it was not peace, that they did not understand themselves and must die, die to self, and be Christians, (Christ like) in every sense of the word.”¹⁵⁹ She also encouraged the believers not to give up their belief in the visions after seeing what God had done “to set the church right” in Jackson through her visionary messages.¹⁶⁰

Two years later, in June 1855, she wrote again in relation to the Messengers: “I was shown that God’s people have been weighed down with cloggs [*sic*], that there have been Achans in the camp. . . . The Messenger party has arisen, and we shall suffer some from their lying tongues, and misrepresentations, yet we should bear it all patiently; for

¹⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 181.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁵⁹ Ellen G. White to the Church in Jackson, June 29, 1853, Letter B-3, CAR, AU.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

they will not injure God's cause."¹⁶¹ According to her, the Messengers were led by "selfishness and exaltation," but she believed that every honest believer would "remain with God's peculiar people," would "hold fast the truth," and would be unaffected "by the influence" of the followers of the Messenger Party.¹⁶² Ellen White appealed to the Sabbatarian Adventists to stay united and leave the Messengers alone, since they had a great work to be done. "Truth, present truth, we must dwell upon it," she wrote. "We are doing a great work, and cannot come down. Satan is in all this, to divert our minds from the present truth, and the coming of Christ."¹⁶³

On another occasion in 1855, Ellen White reported visiting Sabbatarian groups in Pittsfield and Hartland, Maine, in order to encourage the confused believers. A certain brother Howard Lothrop and his wife of Eaton, Canada East, were causing divisions by promoting the *Messenger of Truth* and downplaying Ellen White's prophetic gift.¹⁶⁴ Thus Ellen White was personally involved in criticizing the divisive work of the Messengers and in bringing unity among the confused believers.

Ellen White also spoke critically against the fanatical ideas of the "Age to Come" followers among the Sabbatarians. In 1851, for example, she reported having visions in which she saw the state of several individuals who believed the "Age to Come" theory. She accused them of causing a lot of confusion and distraction among the Sabbatarians,

¹⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church* [No. 1] (Battle Creek, MI: Advent Review Office, 1855), 11.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁴ Ellen G. White to Sister Harriet, 1855, Letter S-2, CAR, AU.

of circulating false reports against the Whites, and of “fighting against the visions.” Because of James and Ellen White’s personal work among those groups and Ellen’s visions in particular, “sweet union and love prevailed” among the troubled believers. She claimed that her visions usually had a “powerful effect” on people, although in some cases she had to give some hard and “straight messages.”¹⁶⁵

Ellen White also spoke critically of Stephenson and Hall, the two leaders of the “Age to Come” movement in Wisconsin. In 1854 the Whites visited them. Ellen White claimed that she had a vision which revealed to her that the two men initially believed in her prophetic gift. Since their views of the “Age to Come,” however, did not agree with the messages of her visions, they “sacrificed the visions for the Age to come [*sic*]” theory.¹⁶⁶ She again appealed to the believers not to unite with these people and to be aware of their deceptive and lying spirit. Concerned with the union of the Sabbatharians, she appealed again that “the Church of God should move straight along as though there was not such a people in the world.”¹⁶⁷

In 1862 she wrote against a certain brother Riley Cooper who had accepted the “Age to Come” theory and confused new Sabbatharian believers concerning her gift and the third angel’s message. “Satan has been using him to throw minds into confusion,” she wrote. “What little influence he had he has used to prejudice minds against the third angel’s message. He has by false reports presented the visions in a wrong light, and weak

¹⁶⁵ Ellen G. White to Bro. and Sister Howland, Nov. 12, 1851, Letter H-8, CAR, AU.

¹⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church* [No.1], 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

souls who were not established in all the present truth have fed upon these things instead of clean provender thoroughly winnowed.”¹⁶⁸ Ellen White again appealed for unity: “God is leading out a people, and bringing them into the unity of the faith, that they may be one, as he is one with the Father. Various views and differences of opinion must be yielded, that all may come in union with the body, that they may have one mind and one judgment.”¹⁶⁹ As demonstrated, Ellen White’s messages were concerned mostly with practical issues and dealt with fanaticism and unity among the Sabbatarians. The messages were usually addressed to individuals or groups of believers and showed their mistakes or wrongdoings.¹⁷⁰

The reaction to Ellen White’s testimonies (visions) was mixed. Some rejected her messages and consequently discarded her prophetic gift altogether (as in the case of Case and Russell). Others accepted her testimonies and confessed their mistakes. Despite the reactions of the concerned individuals, however, Ellen White was determined to relate her visions at any cost, since she felt that it was her duty to do so. Thus in 1853 she wrote that even if all would turn against her messages and become her enemies she would still “lift up” her voice and would declare “faithfully” what God had shown to her. “I

¹⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 8* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1862), 39-40.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷⁰ See for example: Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church* [No. 1], 5-12; *idem*, *Testimony for the Church No. 3* (Battle Creek, MI: Advent Review Office, 1857), 7-16; *idem*, *Testimony for the Church No. 6* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1861), 30-54; *idem*, *Testimony for the Church No. 8*, 10-47.

cannot[,] I dare not hold my peace,” she wrote; “the curse of God will rest upon me if I do.”¹⁷¹

Interestingly, in the mid-1850s Ellen White did have some doubts about the continuation of her prophetic gift. As we have seen, the decision of the Sabbatarian Adventists in 1851 not to publicly promote her visions led many individuals to doubt her prophetic gift and its usefulness. By 1855 Ellen White reported of being quite depressed regarding the neglect of the visions and “what little effect they have had upon others.” At one point she even thought that her work as a prophet was finished. “I have been discouraged,” she wrote, “the visions have been of late less and less frequent, and my testimony for God’s children has been gone. I have thought that my work in God’s cause was done, and that I had no further duty to do, but to save my own soul, and carefully attend to my little family; have a good influence over my children, pray with them, and for them, that they may be saved.”¹⁷²

But the 1855 general conference marked a new direction for the Sabbatarian Adventists. They took a decision to become more open regarding their public promotion of Ellen White and her prophetic gift. Ellen White was quite pleased with the results of the conference. Reflecting a few months later, she noted: “At our late Conference at Battle Creek, in Nov. God wrought for us. The minds of the servants of God were exercised as to the gifts of the Church, and if God’s frown had deen [*sic*, been] brought upon his people because the gifts had been slighted and neglected, there was a pleasing

¹⁷¹ Ellen G. White to the Church in Jackson, Jun. 29, 1853, Letter B-3, CAR, AU.

¹⁷² Ellen G. White, “Communication from Sister White,” *RH*, Jan. 10, 1856, 118.

prospect that his smiles would again be upon us, and he would graciously and mercifully revive the gifts again.”¹⁷³

By the 1860s we again find Ellen White quite confident concerning her prophetic work. In a letter to John Andrews in 1860 she noted that those who neglected her messages (visions) as coming from God were “subject to wrong influences and the temptations of the devil.” “They will appear to be united with us,” she warned, “but when plain dealing or reproofs are given all the past is called up and the same warfare commences and they sympathize with those who are wrong.”¹⁷⁴ Ellen White believed that Satan was secretly working to make people doubt her prophetic gift and testimonies, and that when people had “rejected the means which God had chosen to correct them,” then “their discernment between a right and a wrong spirit was gone.”¹⁷⁵ Despite the disbelief and the doubt of some, however, Ellen White was determined to do her prophetic job.

Thus she wrote:

I have ever been shown that individuals will rise up against the plain testimony, for it does not suit their natural feelings. They would desire smooth words spoken unto them and to have peace cried in their ears, but this is not the work God has assigned us. . . . Many times have I felt to say, O, my soul, can’st thou persevere in such a warfare as this? Then again I could say, The battle is the Lord’s, and if I am a co-worker with Him, the victory will be ours.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ellen G. White to Brother John [Andrews], June 11, 1860, Letter A-8, CAR, AU.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

In addition to her practical role, Ellen White gave some theological insights regarding how she perceived her prophetic gift. Although those insights were short and not developed fully at that time, they give us some clues about Ellen White's self-evaluation from a theological standpoint.

First, she spoke about the source of her messages. She firmly believed that all of her visions had a divine origin. When some believers tried to make a distinction between her visions, she noted that they were "either of God or the devil" and that there was "no half-way position to be taken in the matter." She then argued that "God does not work in partnership with Satan. Those who occupy this position cannot stand long. They go a step farther and account the instrument God has used a deceiver and the woman Jezebel."¹⁷⁷

Ellen White then asked the rhetorical questions:

Has God placed His work in such a careless manner that man can fashion it to suit his own inclinations, receive that which is agreeable to him and reject a portion? Would God give visions to correct His people of their errors and then trust to the erring one's judgment to receive or reject what portion of them he pleased? What would be the use of visions in the church if held in this light, or if erring individuals in their darkness were left to make what application of them they please?¹⁷⁸

Then she answered her own question, saying that this was "not the way that God works." "If God reproveth His people through an individual, He does not leave the one corrected to guess at matters, and the message to become corrupted in reaching the person it is designed to correct. God gives the message and then takes especial care that it is not corrupted."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

To bolster her point, Ellen White pointed to the truthfulness of her messages as sufficient evidence that they had come from God. Thus she wrote to Andrews that when different people have “risen up against the visions” and considered them untrue, “time has proved” them to be correct and “facts” have confirmed and established their truthfulness.¹⁸⁰ Ellen White was convinced, therefore, that her messages bore the truth and that nobody should question that fact.

Second, Ellen White spoke concerning the timing or frequency of her visionary experiences and the messages given to her. She noted that both the timing and the messages were out of her control. God gave her visions whenever He chose and she saw only what the angel had shown to her. Thus Ellen wrote: “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.”¹⁸¹

There were times when she did not remember what she was shown until later on. Ellen White acknowledged that she was “as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision.” And, she continued, “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.”¹⁸²

Third, Ellen White indirectly alluded to the issue of divine revelation in the preface of the second volume of *Spiritual Gifts*. From her explanation concerning the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

preparation of the book, it is evident that although she believed that her visionary experiences were from God, not all her writing was based on divine revelation. “In preparing the following pages, I have labored under great disadvantages,” she wrote, “as I have had to depend in many instances, *on memory*, having kept no journal till within a few years. In several instances *I have sent the manuscripts to friends* who were present when the circumstances related occurred, for their examination before they were put in print. I have taken great care, and have spent much time, in endeavoring to state the simple facts as correctly as possible.” Ellen White also used much assistance “in arriving at dates” by those to whom she had written letters as she sought to give her experiences as correctly as possible.¹⁸³ As we will see in future chapters, she would elaborate on the issues of revelation and inspiration in greater depth later in her ministry.

Ellen White also spoke concerning the test of fellowship question in relation to her gift and visions. In harmony with other Sabbatarian Adventists, she did not consider her gift to be a test of fellowship, and she appealed for patience in dealing with people who had not made a decision concerning her gift. Ellen White noted that some doubted the visions or were not ready to take a stand concerning her gift because of many “false visions” and “fanatical exercises.” Those false manifestations brought a lot of confusion and made people “jealous of everything bearing the name of visions.” “All these things should have been taken into consideration, and wisdom exercised,” she advised.¹⁸⁴

There were also those who were not well acquainted with her personally. Towards such, Ellen White advised:

¹⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, iii-iv.

¹⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 8*, 31.

No trial should exist, or labor be taken up with, those who have never seen the individual having visions, and have no personal experience with the influence of the visions. Such should not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the church, if their Christian course is otherwise correct, and they have formed a good Christian character. . . . Such must not be set aside, but long patience and brotherly love should be exercised toward them until they find their position and become established for or against.¹⁸⁵

On the other hand, she had a different approach towards those who had no knowledge of the visions (or herself) but fought against them or opposed those who believed in them. “If they fight against the visions which they have no knowledge of,” Ellen White wrote, “if they carry their opposition so far as to oppose that which they have had no experience in, and feel annoyed if those who believe the visions are of God speak of them in meeting, and comfort themselves with the instruction given through visions, *the church may know that they are not right*. God’s people should not cripple and yield, and give up their liberty to such disaffected ones.”¹⁸⁶ The believers, according to Ellen White, had the right to take a stand against such people because their actions had a bad influence and caused divisions.¹⁸⁷

Thus, for example, Ellen White wrote about a certain sister who “had no personal acquaintance” with her but “despised the visions” and united with those who reported “false stories” about her work. “They have strengthened each other by loving and reporting false stories coming from different sources, and in this way nourished their prejudice,” she wrote. “There can be no union between their spirit and the spirit of the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 31-32.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

messages, which the Lord sees fit to give for the benefit of his humble people. The spirit which dwells in their hearts cannot harmonize with the light given of God.”¹⁸⁸

Evidently Ellen White’s approach in dealing with people who doubted her visions depended on their honesty and sincerity. While she advised for tolerance and patience concerning those who honestly sought to find the truth about her gift, she spoke against those who despised her gift without taking the time to get acquainted with it. She believed that for the sake of unity such people had to be disfellowshipped from the Sabbatarian group. Ellen White’s prophetic gift and the “test” question continued to be discussed in subsequent years. She would also continue to provide more insights about her own understanding of her prophetic role in the later years.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the development of the Sabbatarian understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift from 1851 to 1863. During this period the Sabbatarians were forced to justify their belief in Ellen White because of internal controversies over the issue of the gift of prophecy. The first offshoots from the Sabbatarians, the Messenger Party and the Age to Come movement, arose mainly as a result of argumentations over the validity of Ellen White’s gift. Although the controversies seemed to be initially personal in character, the objections rose to the level of a theological debate. As a result, the first significant periodical against the Sabbatarians and Ellen White’s visions, the *Messenger of Truth*, appeared. Consequently, the Sabbatarians were forced to respond to specific objections and thus developed further their understanding of the gift of prophecy.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 34.

Several important developments took place between 1851 and 1862. First, the Sabbatharians were very conscientious regarding the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's prophetic gift. James White was the main writer on that relationship. From the very beginning the Sabbatharians had pointed out the clear distinction that they had always made between the Bible and Ellen White's gift. However, between 1851 and 1862 that issue was further clarified in response to the gift's detractors. Contrary to the Messengers and other opposition, the Sabbatharians argued that the Bible was their only rule of faith and that all of their doctrines had a biblical foundation. Their distinctive beliefs were not based upon Ellen White's prophetic gift as the opposition argued. To the contrary, the prophetic gift manifested among them confirmed that they had accepted all the teachings of the Bible. But, as a result of the controversy, Ellen White's gift was not publicly promoted and given prominence in the 1850s. That would not significantly change until the 1870s.

Second, the Sabbatharians continued to use the prophecies of Joel 2 and Acts 2 as evidence that the prophetic gift (as displayed through Ellen White) was to be expected in the last days. Their underlying purpose was to show that the gift of prophecy did not stop with John but was to continue until the end of time. Between 1851 and 1862, however, the Sabbatharians strengthened their "last days" argument by including passages such as Acts 9 and 10, 1 Cor 12, and others, to show the perpetuity of spiritual gifts. They even saw the great commission of Christ in Matt 28 and Mark 16 as proof that the gift of prophecy was to be expected in the last days and pointed out its eschatological significance.

Third, the Sabbatharians started to see the gift of prophecy as a necessary characteristic, as much as the Sabbath, of the remnant people of God. Their

understanding was based primarily on their interpretation of Rev 12:17 and 19:10. The Sabbatarians connected the two passages and argued that the end-time remnant had to possess the gift of prophecy. They saw it now not only as a “sign,” but as one of their identifying marks. Thus Ellen White’s gift was viewed as a legitimate confirmation of the Sabbatarians’ claim to be God’s remnant people.

Fourth, the practical implications of the gift of prophecy continued to be used as another argument for the validity of Ellen White’s prophetic gift between 1851 and 1862. During that period, however, the Sabbatarians stressed its positive role even more because of the first internal controversies among their group. When the first offshoots appeared, in the early 1850s, her gift of prophecy was seen as the unifying force for the divided Sabbatarian believers. Its positive fruits were to bring unity and perfection of faith among the believers. The paradox was that while Ellen White’s gift was to be a tool to bring the believers to unity, it was not publicly promoted during that time.

The general conference in 1855 marked a turning point in relation to the public acknowledgment and publicity of Ellen White’s gift of prophecy. Beginning at that time, a change of attitude gradually took place. The gift of prophecy began to be promoted more and more openly. The complete change, however, would not take place until years later. Nevertheless, the Sabbatarian general conferences in 1855 and 1856 marked the turning point in the new direction.

One other important issue during the period of time extending from 1851 to 1862 was the “test” question. Should the prophetic gift of Ellen White be a test of fellowship? The majority of the Sabbatarian Adventists, including Ellen White, believed that acceptance of her gift of prophecy was not a test of fellowship. Their position, expressed initially by James White in the mid-1850s, seemed to be related to the Sabbatarian

principle that the Bible was their only rule of faith and action. Gradually, however, the Sabbatarians started to give different nuances to their understanding on the “test” question.

One important nuance was their view that Ellen White’s gift of prophecy (or visions) was to be a test for only those who accepted her gift as having a divine origin. The resolution of the 1855 general conference and James White’s statement in 1856 confirmed this modification in their understanding of the relationship between Ellen White’s gift and the “test” question. It is remarkable, however, to note that the first Sabbatarian leaders, including Ellen White, were willing to show a spirit of tolerance toward people who were honestly searching for the truth concerning the gift of prophecy as it was displayed through her.

In 1861 Uriah Smith came up with a new nuance on the “test” issue when he made a distinction between the doctrine of spiritual gifts and the specific gift of Ellen White. While he saw the belief in spiritual gifts to be a test of fellowship, he did not consider Ellen White’s specific gift as such.

Another Sabbatarian understanding of the gift of prophecy that appeared for the first time between 1851 and 1862 was related to the “gender” question. This issue, however, did not seem to be very controversial since we find only sporadic mention of it during that period. By giving several biblical examples, the Sabbatarians established the case that the gift of prophecy could be given to women as well as to men. Thus they held that Ellen White’s gift was not invalidated by the gender issue.

Ellen White’s self-understanding did not experience much change between 1851 and 1862. She continued to see her major role as being in the practical sphere—fighting against fanatical opposition and using her gift to bring unity among the believers. During

this period, however, she was much more personally involved in the controversies among the Sabbatarians than she had been previously. This may be because her visions were used by the opposition to prejudice people against her prophetic gift and thus to bring disunity among the Sabbatarians. It seems that she felt it to be her personal duty to clear up her name and defend her prophetic work.

In the early 1860s, Ellen White provided for the first time some theological insight as to how she understood her prophetic gift. It was important for her to emphasize that her visions had a divine origin and were utterly beyond her control. On the other hand, she alluded to the fact that her writings were not all based on divine revelation. Thus she demonstrated that her prophetic gift was a combination of divine and human elements. In later years she would further develop her theological understanding regarding her gift.

Between 1860 and 1863 the Sabbatarians officially organized and became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The newly organized church would continue to deal with the question of Ellen White and her prophetic role. Between 1863 and 1882 it would have to answer further objections raised by both those inside and outside of their ranks. As a result, their understanding of the gift of prophecy continued to be refined and developed.

CHAPTER 3

THE TURNING POINT: THE GIFT OF PROPHECY BECOMES A PART OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST STATEMENT OF BELIEFS, 1863-1882

From 1863 to 1881 the Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to deal with issues related to the gift of prophecy and its role for the new denomination. Its leaders who had already dealt with opposition in the 1840s and internal controversies in the 1850s had to confront a more organized and focused attack against Ellen White's claim of the prophetic gift by dissident Sabbatarian and non-Sabbatarian Adventists. James White, Uriah Smith, M. E. Cornell, and other Seventh-day Adventists not only continued to defend the initial Sabbatarian belief in the modern prophetic gift (as manifested through Ellen White) but made it a part of the first Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal statement, published in 1872. Although that statement was not officially adopted, the Seventh-day Adventist Church formally acknowledged the gift of prophecy as an inseparable part of their doctrinal package and as being one of their unique distinguishing marks from the other Adventist and Christian denominations.

This chapter will examine first the opposing views to Ellen White's prophetic gift. The new wave of opposition came from internal and external sources and included objections raised by rebel church groups and individuals, former Sabbatarian ministers, and publications against Ellen White. Although the majority of the arguments were repetitive from the previous years, there were some new or modified ideas raised by the opposition. These included such accusations as doctrinal inconsistencies between the

Bible and Ellen White's visions, the influence of others on Ellen White, the claim that she did not originate any new idea in the doctrinal realm of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, and the belief that her visions were a result of mental illness. This chapter will deal primarily with the new challenges that faced the Seventh-day Adventists, although the old ideas may be mentioned in the course of the discussion.

In the second part, the chapter will examine the responses of Seventh-day Adventists to the new opposing ideas between 1863 and 1881. These included a much more intentional ministerial work among the believers in the troubled areas than before, publications of articles mainly through the *Review and Herald*, the appearance of the first Seventh-day Adventist apologetical books in response to the opposition to Ellen White, and General Conference resolutions affirming the belief in the gift of prophecy. Of particular importance is the publication of the first Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs.¹ The 1872 declaration included the gift of prophecy as part of the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental principles. Since then, the gift of prophecy (and Ellen White in particular) has been a consciously recognized part of the Seventh-day Adventist belief system and one of the denomination's unique marks. The last section of the chapter will examine Ellen White's self-evaluation concerning her prophetic role and ministry in the newly established denomination.

Opposing Views of Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

The period from 1863 to 1881 marked the beginning of more organized and systematic opposition to Ellen White's prophetic gift. The challenges included questions

¹ *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872).

over the validity of Ellen White's gift of prophecy coming from both dissident Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists. While the majority of objections against her visions had already been raised in the previous years, there were new nuances of the older arguments that were voiced between 1863 and 1881. Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to the new objections and thus developed further their understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift. This section will give a brief historical overview of major opposition to Ellen White and then examine the new objections that were raised against her claim to possess the genuine gift of prophecy.

Historical Overview of Opposition to Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

The opposition to Ellen White's prophetic gift in the period between 1863 and 1881 came from three main venues: church groups and individuals, dissident Sabbatarian ministers, and publications disclaiming her prophetic gift. One of the strongholds of opposition came from Sabbatarian Adventist groups in Iowa. In January 1863, B. F. Snook, an Adventist minister, wrote to the *Review* about a "rebel conference" held in Marion, Iowa, "by those Adventists who oppose organization and sister White's visions."² While it was a fact that there were Sabbatarian believers who opposed the plan for formal organization of the Sabbatarians into a church, this does not seem to be the main concern of the rebellion in Iowa. The rebellious believers were not so much against organization itself as against the foundation upon which the Sabbatarians were founding their church.

² B. F. Snook, "The Rebel Conference," *RH*, Jan. 6, 1863, 46.

The rebels, as Snook reported, met on November 27, 1862, and accused the Sabbatarians of trying to “re-organize on the visions of sister White” and for wanting “to secure the recognition of Bro. White as the ‘*latter-day Moses*.’” The Sabbatarians, they believed, had “left the Bible” and had “gone after fables,” obviously a reference to Ellen White’s visions.³ Snook would respond to the challenges of the Iowa Adventists and show that the rebellion was based on personal rather than theological arguments.

The Wisconsin area was another place where some believers doubted Ellen White’s gift. It seems that the main reason for that was T. M. Steward’s family, who were involved in some kind of fanaticism in the early 1860s. In addition, Myrta E. Steward also claimed to have received visions. When Ellen White criticized the Stewards and their supporters, they turned against her and James White. Since the relatively new believers in Wisconsin were not well acquainted with Ellen White, the Stewards were able to prejudice many against her work and the visions.⁴ Similar to the opposition in Iowa, the rebellion against the visions in Wisconsin seemed to have been based primarily on personal rather than theological disagreements.⁵

Interestingly enough, toward the end of 1863 the Steward family confessed their wrongdoings and accepted Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Myrta E. Steward wrote a letter to James White, which was published in the *Review* on September 22, 1863, in which she

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 8*, 29-47; Arthur L. White, *The Progressive Years: 1862-1876*, 26-27.

⁵ Like in Iowa, in addition to objections against Ellen White’s prophetic gift, some believers in Wisconsin also accused James White of false financial dealings regarding his work in the publishing business. This charge would, eventually, develop into a major crisis toward the end of the 1860s.

confessed that although she had gone through many “dark” and “lonely” days, God had brought her back through the “gift” that He had placed in the church for its good. She was confident that God was leading His last-day remnant people and expressed her desire to be found “in perfect union with the body and their closing work of mercy.”⁶ T. M. Steward also reconciled with the church. By February 1864 he was doing evangelistic work for the Seventh-day Adventist cause.⁷ Subsequently Steward became the Secretary of the Conference for the Illinois and Wisconsin Seventh-day Adventist churches.⁸ These crises over the gift of prophecy among Seventh-day Adventists died out toward the end of 1864 without bringing any major divisions among the believers.

A second wave of opposition that caused a much more serious challenge for the Seventh-day Adventist Church came in 1865 when two leading Seventh-day Adventist ministers, B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff, left the church because of their rejection of the gift of prophecy as manifested through Ellen White. Snook and Brinkerhoff were major Seventh-day Adventist ministers in the Iowa area. They worked as a team with visible success and people enjoyed their presence.⁹ Between 1863 and 1865 almost every issue of the *Review* carried a report from Snook about the work in Iowa. James White

⁶ Myrta E. Steward, “From Sister Steward,” *RH*, Sept. 22, 1863, 135.

⁷ T. M. Steward, “Meeting in Iowa,” *RH*, Feb. 2, 1864, 78; idem, “Note from Bro. Steward,” *RH*, Oct. 4, 1864, 152.

⁸ T. M. Steward, “To the Churches in Ill[inois] and Wis[consin],” *RH*, Jan. 10, 1865, 56.

⁹ See for example: B. F. Snook, “Report from Bro. Snook,” *RH*, Feb. 11, 1862, 84-85; idem, “Report from Bro. Snook,” *RH*, Dec. 22, 1863, 29; J. H. Waggoner, “Report from Bro. Waggoner,” *RH*, Sept. 9, 1862, 118-119.

described Snook as “a sweet, good man” and “a good preacher.”¹⁰ At one time the General Conference Executive Committee even wanted to send Snook as a missionary to Europe.¹¹ At Iowa’s first conference session, held in January 1863, Snook was chosen to be one of the conference committee members.¹² By late 1864 Snook was the president of the Iowa Conference and Brinkerhoff was the secretary.¹³ Sometime before May 1865, however, the two leaders started to have doubts and concerns related to Ellen White’s prophetic gift, James White, and the Battle Creek Church.¹⁴ At the heart of their rebellion were Ellen White’s visions and her claim of the gift of prophecy.

Snook and Brinkerhoff attended the annual General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists in Battle Creek in May 1865. At that meeting, however, they did not give any indication of their doubts and concerns.¹⁵ E. S. Walker, the Battle Creek Church clerk, reported in response to Snook’s and Brinkerhoff’s doubts in July that “at the late General Conference at Battle Creek, the utmost unanimity of sentiment seemed to prevail, no word being spoken by brethren from Iowa or elsewhere, that there was any cause of disagreement or occasion of trial. . . . We had no suspicion that there existed on

¹⁰ James White to Ellen G. White, Oct. 22, 1860, CAR, AU.

¹¹ [James White], “God’s Free-Man,” *RH*, June 2, 1863, 8.

¹² J. T. Mitchell and M. B. Smith, “Doings of the Iowa State Conference,” *RH*, Feb. 17, 1863, 91.

¹³ William H. Brinkerhoff, “Minutes of the Iowa Conference, of 1864,” *RH*, Oct. 4, 1864, 149.

¹⁴ William H. Brinkerhoff, “From Bro. Brinkerhoff,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63; B. F. Snook, “From Bro. Snook,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 62.

¹⁵ Uriah Smith, G. W. Amadon, and J. J. Aldrich, “Remarks,” *RH*, Jan. 23, 1866, 63.

the part of any one, the least want of harmony, or that any causes were at work calculated to bring disunion into the body.”¹⁶ Smith also reported that this was one of the most “delightful yearly gatherings” for the believers.¹⁷

Snook’s and Brinkerhoff’s rebellion became apparent at the Iowa State Conference held in July 1865, two months after the General Conference at Battle Creek. Snook later admitted that he had for some time been harboring “apparent difficulties in relation to sister White’s visions,” but had kept those feelings to himself. Thus he “went to the Iowa Conference full of opposition and strongly fortified against sister White’s visions.”¹⁸

Brinkerhoff had the same difficulties as Snook. It is hard to determine, but it seems quite possible that Snook may have influenced Brinkerhoff to one degree or another. Brinkerhoff wrote to the Battle Creek Church:

On the 16th of May, 1865, I visited your place to attend the General Conference, with my mind poisoned to a considerable extent against you, and hence I was on the lookout to see if I could not find something by which I might have the wherewith to reproach you.

After the Conference, my mind being still more poisoned, when I arrived home I began to circulate impressions of what I had seen in Battle Creek, among my brethren in Iowa.¹⁹

Brinkerhoff also noted that he considered James and Ellen White “enemies” and went to the Iowa meetings “without any confidence in the testimonies of sister White.”²⁰

¹⁶ E. S. Walker, “Response of the Battle Creek Church,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63.

¹⁷ [Uriah Smith], “The Conference,” *RH*, May 23, 1865, 196.

¹⁸ B. F. Snook, “From Bro. Snook,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 62.

¹⁹ W. H. Brinkerhoff, “From Bro. Brinkerhoff,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

During the Iowa Conference meetings, however, the two ministers understood their wrongdoing and were willing to repent. James and Ellen White were also present at the meetings. A few weeks after the 1865 Iowa Conference, Snook and Brinkerhoff sent letters of confession to the *Review*. The letters were published on July 25, 1865. Snook admitted that he had been led “by the wicked One” and begged for forgiveness from the Battle Creek Church and the Whites.²¹ Brinkerhoff confessed to being “deeply under the influence of Satan” and also asked for forgiveness. To the Whites he wrote:

To Bro. and sister White I would say, I have also deeply wounded you, and caused you much anguish of heart and mind. I have listened to reports against you, and although while at Battle Creek enjoying your hospitalities, I had a good opportunity to talk with you about said reports, I waited until I came home, then began to spread them, thus alienating the minds of the brethren away from you. I did not stop to investigate them, and while you were far away I was trying to injure you. Oh, why did I do so! You had never harmed me in any way.²²

Brinkerhoff’s appeal at the end of his confession summarized the new, changed attitude of the two ministers:

Let me here say that my experience, though a sad one, has taught me that to doubt the truth, and the instrumentalities used to bring it out by the Lord, is to speedily lead one into the enemy’s dark dominions, where he can be taken captive at his will. Oh, doubt not this truth. Fear not its ultimate results. Put not forth your hands to steady the ark, as I thought to do. And though angry waves may roll high, God will take care of this truth, and bless its upbuilders, and send confusion and weakness upon those who, like some people anciently, thought to stay the work of God. I shall try in the future to humbly follow on where the Lord may lead. Pray for me.²³

²¹ B. F. Snook, “From Bro. Snook,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 62.

²² W. H. Brinkerhoff, “From Bro. Brinkerhoff,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*

After the confessions of Snook and Brinkerhoff and the apparent reconciliation with the church, the controversy seemed to disappear for a while. Snook continued to work successfully as a minister.²⁴ H. E. Carver, the new Iowa Conference secretary, reported encouraging news about Snook's work.²⁵ Toward the end of 1865, however, Snook and Brinkerhoff seemed to have relapsed into a renewed round of doubts and criticisms. In December 1865, William S. Ingraham, a minister in Iowa, wrote to the *Review* that "the Devil was reviving his work through some of his agents, and they were determined to destroy what they once tried to build up."²⁶ By January 1866, Ingraham would report that "Elder Snook had changed his views on some points of our faith. . . . I have not seen Eld. Brinkerhoff, but am informed by those that have heard him talk and preach, that he agrees with Eld. Snook."²⁷

It seems that the crisis caused by Snook and Brinkerhoff made quite a stir among the believers in Iowa. G. I. Butler wrote years later that the two ministers "went from church to church in that State, and did their utmost to destroy the confidence of our people in the work and in the visions. They had great advantages at the time, as they had been the only ministers of our people in the State, and the principal officers in the Conference." As a result, a number of churches were broken up and nearly "one-third of

²⁴ See, for example, B. F. S[nook], "Report from Bro. Snook," *RH*, Sept. 12, 1865, 116-117.

²⁵ H. E. Carver, "Report of the Late Marion Quarterly Meeting," *RH*, Oct. 3, 1865, 141.

²⁶ W. S. Ingraham, "Report from Bro. Ingraham," *RH*, Dec. 19, 1865, 22.

²⁷ W. S. Ingraham, "Matters in Iowa," *RH*, Jan. 23, 1866, 63.

the membership went with them for a time.”²⁸ Those disaffected groups formed what came to be known as the “Marion Party,” named after Marion, Iowa, where the movement established its headquarters in 1866. The movement attracted earlier defected groups from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They also revived the anti-Seventh-day Adventist periodical, the *Hope of Israel*, first published in Michigan by disaffected Seventh-day Adventists led by Gilbert Cranmer.²⁹ The periodical became another vehicle through which certain unique beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists were questioned. Among them was Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Many articles questioned her claims of having the gift of prophecy. There were also personal letters and reports of people who once believed but later rejected Ellen White’s visions.³⁰

A third source of opposition came through publications written specifically against the Seventh-day Adventists and their belief in Ellen White’s gift. In the second half of the 1860s and in the 1870s there appeared major books and articles criticizing her prophetic gift in a more systematic way than ever before. In 1866 Snook and Brinkerhoff published the first book against the prophetic gift of Ellen White, entitled *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*. This short, twenty-seven-page booklet put forth numerous arguments aimed at demonstrating that the visions of Ellen White were “short of the

²⁸ G. I. Butler, “A Brief History of The ‘Marion’ Movement,” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 7.

²⁹ Towards the end of the 1850s Gilbert Cranmer was not given permission to become a Sabbatarian preacher because he refused to stop using tobacco and had some family problems. In the beginning of the 1860s he defected from the Seventh-day Adventists and started to publish the *Hope of Israel* periodical in 1863. It ran for about two years but was discontinued because of a lack of finances.

³⁰ See, for example, J. F. Chaffee, “From Bro. Chaffee,” *Hope of Israel*, Sept. 4, 1866, 63; A. B. Hanner, “From Bro. A. B. Hanner,” *Hope of Israel*, Sept. 4, 1866, 63.

divine standard.”³¹ The authors divided the book into two parts: (1) claims of Scripture, and (2) claims of the visions. In the first part they tried to show that the Bible did not support the modern practice of the gift of prophecy. In the second, longer part, they set forth more than thirty objections against Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Snook and Brinkerhoff’s specific objections would become the starting point of criticism by later opponents. The book set the course for more publications by former Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists against the denomination’s understanding and belief in Ellen White’s prophetic gift.

In September 1866, William Sheldon, a non-Sabbatarian, wrote to J. V. Himes’s *Voice of the West* about his plan to expose the fallacy of Ellen White’s visions.³² A few months later, in January and February of 1867, he published a series of articles entitled “The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible.”³³ The articles became the basis for his sixty-four-page book by the same title, which he published in 1867.³⁴ Sheldon expanded on Snook and Brinkerhoff’s ideas and put forth several new nuances to the arguments against the visions. Sheldon was the first non-Seventh-day Adventist to publish a book against Ellen White’s prophetic claims.

³¹ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 3.

³² William Sheldon, “Ellen’s Visions,” *Voice of the West*, Sept. 18, 1866, 140.

³³ William Sheldon, “The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible,” *Voice of the West*, Jan. 1, 1867, 52; idem, “The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible,” *Voice of the West*, Feb. 5, 1867, 72;

³⁴ William Sheldon, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible* (Buchanan, MI: The W.A.C. P. Association, 1867).

The 1870s continued to see the publication of books against Ellen White. In 1870 H. E. Carver, a former Seventh-day Adventist, published *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined*.³⁵ His arguments were similar to those of Snook and Brinkerhoff, aiming to show that Ellen White's gift did not have a divine origin. In 1877 he published a second edition of his book containing essentially the same material with few modifications.³⁶

Miles Grant, editor of the Advent Christian periodical *World's Crisis*, was another major non-Seventh-day Adventist who criticized the Seventh-day Adventists and their belief in Ellen White. In 1874 he published a series of articles against Ellen White's visions. The series concluded at the beginning of 1875.³⁷ Meanwhile, by December 1874 Grant had published a book entitled *The True Sabbath: Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions*.³⁸ While his main intent was to critique the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the seventh-day Sabbath as being the true day of worship, he also gave numerous arguments (about forty pages) against Ellen White's prophetic gift and concluded that her visions did not come from God.³⁹ The book was

³⁵ H. E. Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870).

³⁶ H. E. Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate Press, 1877). It seems that Carver modified some of his arguments because of the Seventh-day Adventist responses to his earlier arguments.

³⁷ Miles Grant, "Visions and Prophecies," *World's Crisis*, June 10, 1874, 38; idem, "Visions and Prophecies," *World's Crisis*, Jan. 20, 1875, 58.

³⁸ Miles Grant, *The True Sabbath: Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions* (Boston: Adventist Christian Publication Society, 1874).

³⁹ See: *ibid.*, 61-104.

especially intended to be read by Seventh-day Adventists. Grant's accusations were similar to those of Snook, Brinkerhoff, Sheldon, and Carver. Interestingly, Ellen White herself would respond to some of Grant's criticisms. Grant's book was republished in 1877 and 1890.⁴⁰

Isaac Wellcome was another major non-Sabbatarian who opposed Ellen White's gift. In 1874 he published the first extensive history of the Millerite Adventism. In his work he briefly discussed the Sabbatarian appearance and Ellen White's visionary experiences after the Great Disappointment. Having personally met Ellen White several times, Wellcome depicted her as being a self-proclaimed prophet and objected to her visionary manifestations as untrue and unbiblical.⁴¹

Another publication against Ellen White, *The Testimonies of Mrs. E. G. White Compared with the Bible*, was published in 1877 by H. C. Blanchard. He had become a Seventh-day Adventist in 1861 and soon started working as a licensed minister for the new denomination. After reading several writings of Ellen White, Blanchard had believed that her gift was of "heavenly origin." When Ellen White had her health vision in 1863, however, he started having questions about her gift.⁴² Eventually he rejected Ellen White's health views as being inconsistent and contrary to the Scriptures and denied her

⁴⁰ Miles Grant, *The True Sabbath: Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions* (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1877); idem, *The True Sabbath: Which Day Shall We Keep? An Examination of Mrs. Ellen White's Visions* (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1890).

⁴¹ Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message*, 397-409.

⁴² H. C. Blanchard, *The Testimonies of Mrs. E. G. White Compared with the Bible* (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate, 1877), 2.

prophetic gift all together. In 1876 Blanchard lost his ministerial credentials and separated from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴³

The content of Blanchard's book is mainly a comparison between Ellen White's visions and the Bible regarding health-reform issues such as the health reform being a part of the third angel's message, the implications of the Old Testament dietary laws (mainly related to meat eating), the dress reform, and the use of medicine. According to him, Ellen White's testimonies contradicted the Bible and its teaching on health and therefore were untrue and did not come from God.⁴⁴

Specific Objections Raised against Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

In addition to the already established arguments, the opposition to Ellen White's prophetic gift between 1863 and 1881 voiced some new or slightly modified accusations against her claim of having divine revelations. One specific accusation continued to be the claim that the Seventh-day Adventists had taken the visions and testimonies of Ellen White as another rule of faith instead of the Bible only. This time, however, the opposition introduced a slightly new nuance to the old argument. They accused the Seventh-day Adventists of taking the visions above the Bible and making them equal to or more authoritative than the Bible itself.

In the first published book against Ellen White, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, Snook and Brinkerhoff argued that Seventh-day Adventists settled biblical

⁴³ Ibid., 3-6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

questions “not by an appeal to the Bible, but to the vision.”⁴⁵ In doing that, they noted, the Seventh-day Adventists “*bent*” the Bible to conform to the “new light” which they claimed to have received through Ellen White’s visions.⁴⁶ They also could not reconcile Ellen White’s claim to be “as dependent upon the spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision” and argued that her claim made her writings “infallible” and equal in authority with the biblical authors. Snook and Brinkerhoff saw this as the most dangerous “creed” of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and therefore could not accept Ellen White’s claim of prophetic gift.⁴⁷

They further accused the Seventh-day Adventists of using the visions to correct and to unite the believers as well as to explain the Bible through them. Using 1 Tim 3:14-17, Snook and Brinkerhoff argued that the Scriptures “were all sufficient for correction, and every other necessary thing” that God required for his people. Thus the visions were not needed.⁴⁸ At the end of the book they concluded:

The Shaker must have Ann Lee’s visions, and the Mormon must have the Book of Mormon, and the Seventh Day Adventist must have the visions of E. G. White, besides the Bible as his rule of faith. —What a serious thing to be led by any leader save Jesus, and to receive any rule of faith besides God’s word; Oh, that all would be honest and cut loose and throw off every human fetter. The Bible contains all the light we need. It brings to view every duty that God requires of us, in order to our salvation.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, 19. See also Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, 293.

⁴⁸ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

Snook and Brinkerhoff appealed to the believers to embrace only the Bible as “their rule of faith and life” and reject any kind of prophets, including Ellen White and her visions.⁵⁰

J. F. Chaffee from Newton, Iowa, who seemed to be a part of the Seventh-day Adventist movement for some time in the 1860s, also accused the Seventh-day Adventists of taking the authority of the visions above that of the Bible. “I for one look upon those visions as not being from God,” Chaffee wrote, “because most all that endorse them are ready to tell us that there are contradictions in the Bible, therefore the Bible is laid aside and the visions take the lead.”⁵¹ At one point he told James White that many Seventh-day Adventists quoted “from the visions to prove their points” of belief instead of quoting the Bible. He expressed his concern that if they continued in the same manner many of the Seventh-day Adventist believers “would take the visions” instead of the Bible as their rule of faith. He, like Snook and Brinkerhoff, however, believed that the Bible was sufficient for one to know the right doctrines, for “reproof,” for “correction,” and for “instruction in righteousness.”⁵²

In September 1866 William Sheldon announced his plan to publish a work against Ellen White. The main reason for that was that many believers placed her visions “*on a par with the Bible*,” or as he wrote, “*above the Bible*.” The Seventh-day Adventists, Sheldon believed, considered the testimonies of Ellen White as the “‘pure testimony’” in contrast with the “‘diluted Bible.’” “If ‘pure testimony’ and ‘straight testimony,’” he alleged, “is above impure, crooked, or second handed testimony [the Bible], then Ellen’s

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ J. F. Chaffee, “From Bro. Chaffee,” *Hope of Israel*, Sept. 4, 1866, 63.

⁵² Ibid.

visions are exalted above the old Bible by some at least.” Sheldon intended to prove that Ellen White’s visions were opposed to the Bible and were not to be trusted. Through his future works he wanted to reach those of her sympathizers who had not placed her visions above the Bible.⁵³

Similar accusations continued to be voiced in the 1870s. Miles Grant, for instance, accused the Seventh-day Adventists of putting Ellen White’s prophetic gift above the Bible in the context of the sanctuary doctrine. Amidst his arguments against the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the sanctuary (they believed on the basis of Dan 8:14 that Christ moved from the holy to the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844), Grant made the provocative statement: “If any one should ask why they thus believe, the answer would be, the information came through one of Mrs. E. G. White’s visions.”⁵⁴ In the article “Visions and Prophecies” in 1875 he made a similar conclusion. “Why do the seventh-day people believe and teach such strange doctrine?” he asked. “Because they have confidence in Mrs. White’s visions, which are the chief source of information on this subject.”⁵⁵

H. C. Blanchard, likewise, rejected Ellen White’s gift. According to his understanding her visions contained some health principles that were “an addition to the Bible.” Blanchard, for example, disagreed with Ellen White’s claim that the health

⁵³ William Sheldon, “Ellen's Visions,” *Voice of the West*, Sept. 18, 1866, 140. As noted earlier, in 1867 Sheldon published a series of articles and a book (*The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible*) to show some of what he considered to be contradictions between the Bible and Ellen White’s visions.

⁵⁴ Miles Grant, “The Sanctuary,” *World's Crisis*, Nov. 25, 1874, 26.

⁵⁵ Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *World's Crisis*, Jan. 20, 1875, 58.

reform was “to be a part of the third angels’ [*sic*] message.” For him this was an unbiblical idea, hence he could not trust the visions of Ellen White.⁵⁶ As we will see later in this chapter, Seventh-day Adventists would argue that all of the above arguments were a gross misrepresentation of their views and understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. They would try to prove that they had never put her on equal ground or above the Bible.

The second specific accusation was closely related to the first. The opposition claimed that Ellen White’s visions taught false doctrines and thus contradicted the Bible, contradicted themselves, and contradicted well-known facts. Snook and Brinkerhoff’s book gave a good start for this kind of critique. In the second part of their critical work the authors set forth more than thirty objections against Ellen White’s visions, such as the visions contradicting each other, teaching doctrines contrary to the Bible, or giving untrue facts. After each objection the authors gave examples from the writings of Ellen White to prove their point. Some of these examples included the “shut door” and the salvation of sinners after the 1844 disappointment, the shortness of time and the Second Coming, the nature of the Black race, the eternal state of the saved that may cease should they stop eating from the tree of life, the Sabbath not being a test before 1849, vegetarianism and meat eating, the 144,000, the explanation of the 1,000 years, the beginning of the time of trouble, and others.⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, at the end of the book they appealed to the believers to reject Ellen White as a false prophet and embrace only the Bible.⁵⁸ As we

⁵⁶ Blanchard, *The Testimonies of Mrs. E. G. White Compared with the Bible*, 26.

⁵⁷ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 3-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

will see later, Uriah Smith would respond to each objection and argue for a harmony between Ellen White's visions and the Bible.

The opposition continued to build further upon Snook's and Brinkerhoff's objections. In the *Hope of Israel* periodical, for example, T. Hamilton argued that Ellen White's claim of seeing a literal temple in heaven contradicted Rev 21:22, "'And I saw no temple therein for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.'"⁵⁹ Like Snook and Brinkerhoff, the author asked the readers to decide for themselves whether to believe the Bible or Ellen White's visions.⁶⁰

In 1866 William Sheldon made known his intention to write against Ellen White not because of his desire to pay attention to "her great ability" but because some believers were "under the influence of her visions, which positively *clash with the Bible*."⁶¹ Sheldon then gave an example of what he meant by using Ellen White's discussion on the second beast of Rev 13.⁶² According to his interpretation of Ellen White, she placed the appearance of the second beast *after* all faithful martyrs were killed. But according to Rev 20: 4, he argued, the faithful martyrs were the ones who did not worship the beast and its image and therefore were killed. Hence the martyrs were to be alive while the

⁵⁹ Thos. Hamilton, "The Nature and Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts, or 'Objections Answered' Reviewed," *Hope of Israel*, Sept. 4, 1866, 58. Hamilton quoted from Ellen White's 1851 booklet *Experience and Views*, 16.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ William Sheldon, "Ellen's Visions," *Voice of the West*, Sept. 18, 1866, 140.

⁶² Sheldon does not provide a reference for his sources of Ellen White's interpretation of Rev 13.

beast and its image existed. Sheldon concluded that Ellen White contradicted the Bible and could not be trusted.⁶³

A year later, in 1867, he published other material against Ellen White. In the *Voice of the West*, for example, he critiqued her belief in the “shut door” theory as unbiblical.⁶⁴ The “shut door” taught that salvation for sinners ended in October 1844 and that no one could be saved after that time. Ellen White’s visions, Sheldon argued, initially supported that theory. Since she later changed her position, Sheldon felt he had the right to question her claim to having the true prophetic gift. Thus he wrote:

If she then saw in vision things which are alike averse to the Bible, and contrary to her present faith, may she not now see things out of harmony with the Bible? And if her visions were not of God then, are they now of God? . . . This is too plain to be evaded. Ellen’s visions once taught the shut-door theory. If they are right now, were they not correct then? But she, and her party, now discard the very theory that was once taught in her visions.⁶⁵

Also in 1867 Sheldon gave a comprehensive list of contradictions between Ellen White’s visions and the Bible in his newly published book, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible*. His list of accusations included such subjects as the “shut door theory,” the saints having wings, Christ leaving the throne in 1844, the existence of a literal temple in the new Jerusalem, the tree of life as food for

⁶³ William Sheldon, “Ellen's Visions,” *Voice of the West*, Sept. 18, 1866, 140.

⁶⁴ For Ellen White’s explanation of the “shut door” see: Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views* (1851), 24-27. See also Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, L-2c, CAR, AU.

⁶⁵ William Sheldon, “The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Eillen G. White in Conflict with the Bible,” *Voice of the West*, Jan. 1, 1867, 52.

the continuation of eternal life, and others. Note that most of Sheldon's arguments against Ellen White were arguments directed against Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in general.

H. E. Carver also criticized Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventists of teaching doctrines contrary to the Bible. Similarly to Sheldon, he gave the example of the "shut door" theory and noted that Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventists taught unbiblical doctrines at least for a while (since they changed their position later). He also argued that Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventists had wrong interpretations on a number of other biblical concepts, such as the Sabbath as the sealing message, the desolation of the earth for 1,000 years (Rev 20), several lifestyle issues, and others.⁶⁶ Carver claimed that the unbiblical teachings (or change of understanding) of Ellen White proved that her visionary experiences were "a great mistake, and instead of being of divine inspiration had their origin in human frailty."⁶⁷

Miles Grant also criticized Ellen White's prophetic visions as being contrary to the Bible, herself, and facts.⁶⁸ Like the rest of the critics, he focused on issues such as the "shut door," the beginning of Christ's intercessory work, the ending of the 2300-day period in 1844 and the cleansing of the sanctuary, false predictions concerning the Second Coming, Sunday being the "mark of the beast," and others. As biblical proofs for his conclusions he used such Bible texts as Deut 18:22, Lev 16:16-20, Rom 5:8-10, and Heb 9, claiming that there were obvious contradictions between the Bible and Ellen

⁶⁶ See: Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 50-58, 69-70, 74-76, 82-84, 92, 94-95.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁸ Miles Grant, "Visions and Prophecies," *World's Crisis*, July 1, 1874, 50.

White.⁶⁹ Grant also published numerous testimonies of believers who once believed the visions but later rejected them because of the realization that they taught things contrary to the Bible. Not surprisingly, Grant concluded, “We are bold to say that *not a single prophecy or vision of hers can be produced that may not have been given by a demon.*”⁷⁰

Blanchard also saw the visions as contrary to the biblical teaching on health and diet. He argued against Ellen White’s understanding that the health reform was part of the third angel’s message.⁷¹ Furthermore, Blanchard examined her writings concerning meat (pork) eating, butter, cheese, eggs, medicine, and clothes as contrary to the biblical teachings found in Gen 9:3, Gen 18:8, Luke 11:11-13, Luke 22, 1 Sam 17:18, 2 Sam 17:29, Prov 17:2, Jer 8:22, Jer 30:13, and other similar texts.⁷² Ellen White also contradicted her own writings, Blanchard claimed. She and some other Seventh-day Adventist leaders, for example, initially taught that pork was an acceptable food to eat, but later changed their position. As far as Blanchard was concerned, the Bible did not make a distinction between clean and unclean food and he favored eating any kind of meat. Based on this seeming contradiction, Blanchard concluded that Ellen White could not have the true gift of prophecy.⁷³

The third specific accusation claimed that Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist leaders suppressed or changed some of her earliest writings in order to avoid

⁶⁹ Ibid.; idem, “Visions and Prophecies,” *World’s Crisis*, Jan. 20, 1875, 58.

⁷⁰ Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *World’s Crisis*, July 1, 1874, 50.

⁷¹ Blanchard, *The Testimonies of Mrs. E. G. White Compared with the Bible*, 6-8.

⁷² Ibid., 9-13, 40-42.

⁷³ Ibid., 19-22, 26, 43.

many of the apparent contradictions and critiques of the opposition. *The Hope of Israel* periodical published a “Note” announcing that they were collecting compilations of Ellen White’s earlier published visions and testimonies in order to show how they had been suppressed when compared to later publications. Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the opposition claimed, had tried to make changes and hide some parts of the so-called revelations. The opposition desired “the public to understand the matter” and to “shun this ‘latter day delusion.’”⁷⁴

Snook and Brinkerhoff touched on the suppressed question briefly in their book against Ellen White. They noted, for instance, that when James White republished Ellen White’s first vision in *Experience and Views* in 1851 he left out (suppressed) the part that related to the “shut door” belief.⁷⁵ Exposing the issue they asked the provocative questions:

Now as this no salvation shut door is no longer indorsed nor practiced by this people, what becomes of the visions that taught it? Are they believed by them? No, they do not believe them and hence they have suppressed them and deny that they ever taught such a doctrine. How much better it would be to confess these visions to be false and publicly renounce them! May God help them yet to do it.⁷⁶

Carver also accused the Seventh-day Adventists of suppressing parts of Ellen White’s earlier claimed revelations. Similar to Snook and Brinkerhoff, he accused Uriah Smith of expunging portions of Ellen White’s vision concerning “false reformation” and

⁷⁴ “Notice,” *The Hope of Israel*, Sept. 4, 1866, 64.

⁷⁵ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 5-7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

the “shut door” theory while defending her gift.⁷⁷ Why did not Uriah Smith, Carver asked, “quote from ‘The Present Truth’ of Aug. 1849” (Ellen White’s earliest statement), rather than using the suppressed publication of her vision in *Experience and Views* from 1851. “Why has he been so careful not to give the entire quotation in any one place in his book?” As Carver put it, Smith either manifested “gross ignorance of the earlier visions,” or he practiced “wilful [*sic*] deception on his readers.”⁷⁸ For Carver it was the second option.

Carver then accused James White of suppressing part of Ellen White’s vision published originally in January 1849 in the broadside, *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God*. When the vision was republished seven months later (in August 1849) in the *Present Truth*, the part that described the fate of those who would disregard the visions as being lost because of their unbelief was left out.⁷⁹ The same “mutilated” version appeared in *Experience and Views* in 1851, Carver explained.⁸⁰ “What,” he wrote, “are we to think of a person who will suppress a portion of the word of God that is fraught with such terrible interest to those who may come in contact with the visions,—to know that a rejection of the visions will consign persons to irretrievable ruin, and yet fail to warn them of the consequences after being divinely instructed to do so!” Why would

⁷⁷ Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 51-60. Carver probably referred to Smith’s 1868 book *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*.

⁷⁸ Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 51, 56.

⁷⁹ See: Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *PT*, Aug. 1849, 21-24.

⁸⁰ Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 61-62.

James White take out this important warning for the believers not to reject the visions or else be lost, Carver asked logically?⁸¹

Carver also questioned the integrity of Ellen White and described her as being dishonest. When the errors of her visions were demonstrated, Carver noted, she did not give up the visions as “delusions” but “permitted them to be tampered with, amended, and obnoxious features expunged from them, so as to suit the change of views and circumstances in the church.”⁸² We must note, of course, that Carver’s conclusions were based on his belief that Ellen White claimed verbal inspiration.⁸³ Ellen White, however, never believed or claimed to be verbally inspired. This issue would come to a head in the 1880s as we will see in the next chapter.

The fourth specific accusation claimed that there was nothing extraordinary about Ellen White’s visions and that she did not originate anything new. Ellen White, the opposition argued, was either influenced by others or simply repeated things that others had already said. Snook and Brinkerhoff confirmed this opposing argument when they wrote that “Bible prophets speak of things *beyond* human foresight and human *wisdom*. She speaks, in the main, of matters known to herself and every body else. The difference between her prophecies and those of Daniel and John is that theirs point forward, but hers backwards.”⁸⁴ Thus they claimed that there was nothing extraordinary or supernatural about Ellen White’s visions.

⁸¹ Ibid., 62.

⁸² Ibid., 60.

⁸³ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁴ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 25-26.

The non-Sabbatarian William Sheldon also voiced the same idea when he wrote that what Ellen White claimed to see in visions was “in harmony with a previously received theory or impression.”⁸⁵ In his book, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible*, Sheldon gave examples to confirm his argument. He noted, for instance, that Ellen White had her vision about the importance of keeping the Saturday-Sabbath only after she heard about it from Joseph Bates in 1846. Ellen White, however, claimed visions before 1846. Why was not she shown that this was the right day for worship, Sheldon questioned? The same method, he continued to argue, happened with issues such as the organization of the Sabbatarians into a denomination, the systematic benevolence plan (a plan to finance the ministers and the work of the newly formed Seventh-day Adventist Church), and others. After an issue was established, she then saw in visions that it was according to God’s will. “Why could not God have revealed these items to her instead of waiting till men had devised the plans, and then sanction them,” Sheldon asked?⁸⁶

Carver, like Sheldon, had the same questions about Ellen White’s gift. Carver questioned Ellen White’s gift in relation to the beginning of the Saturday-Sabbath. Initially the Sabbatarians (including Ellen White) kept the Sabbath from six p.m. to six p.m. J. N. Andrews, a Seventh-day Adventist leader and theologian, studied the issue and concluded that the Bible taught sunset to sunset Sabbath observance. It was after the

⁸⁵ William Sheldon, "The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible," *The Voice of the West*, Jan. 11, 1867, 52.

⁸⁶ Sheldon, *The Visions and Theories of the Prophetess Ellen G. White in Conflict with the Bible*, 3-4.

Andrews' study that Ellen White had a vision confirming the sunset time.⁸⁷ The same was true for the sanctuary doctrine. Carver noted that the doctrine was developed by "another person making no claims to divine inspiration," and Ellen White "adopted" the theory and "incorporated" it into Seventh-day Adventist theology.⁸⁸ Carver concluded, like the rest of the opposition, that Ellen White's "claims to divine inspiration" were "unfounded and spurious."⁸⁹

There were also those who suggested that James White controlled Ellen White's visionary experiences and could bring her in and out of vision whenever "he pleased."⁹⁰ The opposition suggested that since Ellen White could be influenced by others, there was nothing supernatural about her experiences and they could not accept her visions as coming from God.

The fifth specific objection aimed at identifying Ellen White with other self-proclaimed prophets and spiritualists, particularly in the context of the nineteenth century. In the short introduction to their book, Snook and Brinkerhoff compared Ellen White to Ann Lee, Joseph Smith, and many spiritualists whose "visions, tongues, and new revelations" were "almost innumerable." "In the midst of these absurd, contradictory and unscriptural visions," they wrote, "appears another Prophetess [Ellen White], claiming, like all the others, to be favored specially of God, with visions, angels

⁸⁷ Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 34-35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Miles Grant, "Visions and Prophecies," *World's Crisis*, July 1, 1874, 50.

[sic] visits, transits to the New Jerusalem, views of God, Jesus and Satan. Her visions are revered so highly that many of her followers as firmly believe that there is no salvation for those who reject them.” Then the authors invited the candid reader to examine the various claims and see why the visions could not be received “as a divine revelation.”⁹¹

In an article against the Shakers and their claimed prophetess Ann Lee published in 1871, Miles Grant also compared Ann Lee to Ellen White. Thus he wrote that Ann Lee’s ““revelations,”” ““visions,”” ““tongues,”” and ““prophesying”” came from the “same source as those given to Swedenborg, the Spiritualists [sic], the Mormons, and Ellen White, the oracle of the Seventh-day Adventists.”⁹² A few years later Grant made the same comparison in his series of articles against the prophetic gift of Ellen White and her visionary manifestations. In June 1874, he wrote: “Satan has power also to speak through mediums as well as the Lord, and during the history of the human race, he has taken occasion to utter many prophecies, by means of which he has often deceived intelligent and good people. It is often a very successful way to lead men and women astray, and start up a new party.”⁹³ In July 1874 he noted again that there was abundant evidence that the visions of Ellen White were “no more reliable than those of Joanna Southcott, Ann Lee, Swedenborg, or those coming from the Spiritualist mediums of the present time.” “We are bold to say,” Grant concluded, “that *not a single prophecy or vision of hers can*

⁹¹ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 1.

⁹² Miles Grant, “The Shakers,” *The World's Crisis*, July 5, 1871, 58.

⁹³ Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *The World's Crisis*, June 10, 1874, 38.

be produced that may not have been given by a demon.”⁹⁴ Grant continued to give the same or similar comparisons in his later articles.⁹⁵

Some of the opposition went even further, suggesting that Ellen White’s visions were a result of mental illness. Carver, for instance, cited Dr. James C. Jackson’s medical opinion about Ellen White’s visionary manifestations. According to Dr. Jackson’s conclusion, Ellen White’s visions ““were the result of diseased organization of conditions of the brain and nervous system.”” Dr. William Russell, of the Battle Creek Health Institute, also is said to have written to Carver expressing his doubts about the “divine inspiration of the visions” of Ellen White. “Here then are two medical gentlemen,” Carver wrote, “in whose skill as physicians Mrs. White and S. D. Adventists generally have confidence, agreeing in their opinion as to her predisposition to a diseased condition of the brain and nervous system.”⁹⁶ Thus as with the rest of the self-proclaimed prophets, Ellen White was considered to be a self-deluded false prophet and her visions were seen as either coming from Satan or being a result of mental disorder.

The sixth and seventh arguments continued from the previous periods. Although not voiced widely, the “gender” and the “test of fellowship” questions continued to be used from time to time by the critics in order to disprove Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Among the many arguments that Snook and Brinkerhoff presented in their book against Ellen White was her gender. They argued that the prophecy in Joel 2 (and Acts 2) did not

⁹⁴ Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *The World's Crisis*, July 1, 1874, 50.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *The World's Crisis*, Jan. 20, 1875, 58.

⁹⁶ Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claims to Divine Inspiration Examined* (1870), 105.

mention specifically that “old or young women would see visions.” It only referred to “young men.” “Therefore,” they concluded that “her visions *came from the wrong sex* to be a fulfillment of this [Joel 2] prophecy.”⁹⁷

On the other hand, Miles Grant raised concerns about Seventh-day Adventists who made Ellen White’s gift a test of fellowship. He noted that whenever Satan succeeded in establishing a new religious body “by means of prophecies and visions,” he always tried to make a belief in the prophet or prophetess a test of fellowship in order to establish his or her authority. He wrote:

When Satan would divide the true flock of God, he does not attempt to lead its members to give up the Bible, but to persuade them to adopt false interpretations by which to sustain his *test* doctrine. He may give through his prophet, or prophetess, the most strict instruction in relation to diet, dress, and practical duties, in order to more fully secure the confidence of those whom he would deceive. In this way he confirms their belief that the instruction comes from the Lord, instead of a seducing spirit, transformed into an angel of light. This deception is kept up in some cases for many years, and managed so skillfully that the deceived are as confident they are led by the Lord, as is any Catholic that the Pope is Christ’s earthly vicegerent [*sic*].⁹⁸

Grant’s allusions to Ellen White in the article are unmistakable. The Seventh-day Adventists, of course, would disagree with the conclusions of Snook, Brinkerhoff, Grant, and the others. They would argue that their belief in Ellen White’s prophetic gift and visions was biblically sound. The next part of this chapter will examine Seventh-day Adventist responses to the new challenges and the further development of their understanding of the gift of prophecy from 1863 to 1881.

⁹⁷ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 2. Emphasis supplied.

⁹⁸ Miles Grant, “Visions and Prophecies,” *The World’s Crisis*, June 10, 1874, 38.

Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Objections

The Seventh-day Adventists were once again forced to respond to the new challenges against Ellen White's gift of prophecy raised by the opposition. Although many of the arguments against Ellen White were repetitive from the previous periods, there were some new nuances challenging her prophetic gift and the Seventh-day Adventists' integrity. The main questions were again related to her authority in relation to the Bible and her teaching of unbiblical doctrines. The Seventh-day Adventists, however, were determined to show that her gift did not supersede the Bible, was not considered to be of equal authority to the Bible, and that her messages did not contradict the Scriptures, but rather confirmed them. They also responded to all of the other arguments raised by the critics. In this section I will give a brief overview of Seventh-day Adventist responses to the opposition. The next section will examine their answers to specific accusations against Ellen White's gift.

Historical Overview of Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Objections

Seventh-day Adventists responded to the criticisms of Ellen White's gift between 1863 and 1881 in four major ways. First, they sent ministers to work with people in areas where controversies concerning Ellen White developed. They understood the importance of personal ministerial work concerning the proper understanding of the gift of prophecy and Ellen White. Second, they continued to use the *Review and Herald*, the main Seventh-day Adventist periodical, as a key avenue to answer the new objections against Ellen White. It became a platform where the Seventh-day Adventists could give their answers to objections to a wider audience of believers. Third, they published books, pamphlets, and declarations related to Ellen White's gift. These comprehensive new works attempted to answer the new objections and to clarify the role of Ellen White in the

Seventh-day Adventist Church. And fourth, the Seventh-day Adventists issued General Conference resolutions concerning their understanding of Ellen White's gift and its role for the church.

The first way of responding to the opposition was through utilizing ministerial work among believers in areas where controversies concerning Ellen White appeared. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sent ministers to the troubled areas in their attempt to answer questions related to Ellen White's prophetic gift. When Snook and Brinkerhoff, for example, caused the first serious internal crisis in the new denomination just before the Iowa State Conference in July 1865, the Whites attended the conference and "labored with intense feeling to save the poor sheep who had been wounded and torn, and left bleeding by these unfaithful shepherds."⁹⁹ Ellen White personally answered many objections raised by Snook and Brinkerhoff.¹⁰⁰ The work of the Whites seemed to pay dividends. A few weeks after the Iowa Conference Snook and Brinkerhoff sent letters of confession to the *Review* and admitted their wrong feelings against the church, the Whites, and Ellen White's prophetic gift.¹⁰¹ Snook wrote that "Bro. White took a bold, decided and thorough stand" against his wrongs and "faithfully exposed them." "Then God in mercy began to restore me from my crazy opposition," he

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, "Our Late Experience," *RH*, Feb. 20, 1866, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Uriah Smith, G. W. Amadon, and J. M. Aldrich, "Remarks," *RH*, Jan. 23, 1866, 63.

¹⁰¹ B. F. Snook, "From Bro. Snook," *RH*, July 25, 1865, 62-63; W. H. Brinkerhoff, "From Bro. Brinkerhoff," *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63.

confessed, “and I began to realize that I was the wrong one. In my distress I determined to confess my sins.”¹⁰²

Despite their confessions, however, it came as no surprise that the Iowa Conference committee led by James White elected a new president, George I. Butler, and a new secretary, H. E. Carver. At the same time Snook and Brinkerhoff submitted their resignations as ministers. The conference, however, “unanimously voted not to receive their resignation” but to place their cases “in the hands of the General Conference Committee.” The General Conference was asked to recommend to the Iowa Conference what actions were to be taken “in each case, as they [the General Conference] may deem best for the cause, and their own welfare.” In regard to the damaging work against Ellen White’s gift done by the two ministers, the conference also voted to invite Ellen White to labor within the area for as long as she considered it necessary.¹⁰³

The Battle Creek Church responded favorably to the confessions of Snook and Brinkerhoff and extended their “hand of forgiveness.” Its response was published in the *Review* immediately following the confessions of the two ministers.¹⁰⁴ The General Conference, however, did not take immediate action until 1866 when Snook and Brinkerhoff rebelled a second time against the church and Ellen White. The fourth annual session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which met in Battle Creek in May 1866, recommended to the Iowa State Conference to drop the names of the two

¹⁰² B. F. Snook, “From Bro. Snook,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 62.

¹⁰³ G. I. Butler and H. E. Carver, “Business Proceedings of the Iowa State Conference Held at Pilot Grove, Iowa, July 3, 1865,” *RH*, Aug. 1, 1865, 70.

¹⁰⁴ W. S. Walker, “Response of the Battle Creek Church,” *RH*, July 25, 1865, 63.

ministers “from their minutes” since they “openly renounced the work of the third angel’s message.”¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, some prominent Seventh-day Adventist ministers went to visit or work in the troubled areas. The *Review* reported the work done by W. S. Ingraham, Sanborn, and J. N. Andrews to encourage the believers to “hold on to the old landmarks.”¹⁰⁶ In June 1866, D. T. Bourdeau, A. C. Bourdeau, and J. N. Loughborough also went to Iowa. Their work included visits to those Seventh-day Adventist churches and believers who were mostly affected by the rebellion. On July 17, 1866, the Bourdeaus published a report in the *Review* noting that Snook and Brinkerhoff were going from place to place prejudicing people against them and the Seventh-day Adventists. They found, for example, “the brethren and sisters at La Porte City quite disheartened and discouraged.” The same perplexity was present in the churches in Waterloo, Fairview, Marion, Iowa City, Palestine, Pilot Grove, and other places.¹⁰⁷ Their work, however, seemed to bear positive results. In July 1866, the Bourdeaus reported that “those who had been affected by opposing influences were greatly established in the truth.”¹⁰⁸ A few weeks later they wrote again that “the Lord has greatly blessed and sustained us in our arduous labors” and “we have had special victories in the Lord at

¹⁰⁵ John Byington and Uriah Smith, “Fourth Annual Session of General Conference,” *RH*, May 22, 1866, 196.

¹⁰⁶ J. Dorcas, “Meeting in Marion, Iowa,” *RH*, Feb. 13, 1866, 86.

¹⁰⁷ D. T. Bourdeau, and A. C. Bourdeau, “Report from Iowa,” *RH*, July 17, 1866, 53.

¹⁰⁸ A. C. Bourdeau, and D. T. Bourdeau, “Report from Iowa,” *RH*, July 24, 1866, 62.

every place.”¹⁰⁹ “The battle,” as they put it on July 24, was going “well” and their “courage” held “good.”¹¹⁰

Because of the personal ministerial labor, many churches took a decisive stand against the defection in the state. The *Review* published several actions taken by Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Iowa. A signed resolution by nineteen members of the church of West Union, eight of the church of Elgin, and twenty-six of the church of Waukon reads as follows:

Resolved, That we, the undersigned, Seventh-day Adventist churches, do hereby declare that we have no confidence in those men, nor in their present work of trying to pull down and destroy those glorious truths which we believe and love. Therefore we warn our brethren everywhere, to have no sympathy nor fellowship with their unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.¹¹¹

After Snook desired to preach at the church at Palestine, the church:

Resolved, That we, the S. D. A. church at Palestine, knowing the tendency of such rebellion, and having good evidence that these ministers are determined to divide the flock, and scatter seeds of discord which must ruin our influence, would inform them that we have no fellowship nor sympathy for them in their work of tearing down what they once labored to build up; and we therefore have no desire to see them or to hear them preach.¹¹²

The church at Pilot Grove also decided not to open their “house of worship for the leaders in this rebellion to preach in.” The Washington church endorsed the action of the

¹⁰⁹ A. C. Bourdeau, and D. T. Bourdeau, “Report from Iowa,” *RH*, Aug. 14, 1866, 85.

¹¹⁰ A. C. Bourdeau, and D. T. Bourdeau, “Report from Iowa,” *RH*, July 24, 1866, 62.

¹¹¹ “A Good Move in Iowa,” *RH*, Feb. 20, 1866, 94.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Pilot Grove church.¹¹³ The Lisbon church, where Brinkerhoff was a member, remained “firm” and lost only “Eld. B[rinkerhoff] and wife” and two more believers as a result of the crisis.¹¹⁴ Interestingly enough, T. M. Steward, the former leader of the rebellion in Wisconsin, wrote to James White reassuring him that he did not have any sympathy “with the unholy rebellion in Iowa.”¹¹⁵ The Iowa believers were thankful to the General Conference for their “watch care” and for the “labor” sent among them “in times of great need.”¹¹⁶ The *Review* also reported the wide travelling of the Whites around the country to build confidence and trust in Ellen White’s prophetic ministry.¹¹⁷ Apparently, personal ministerial work in local churches played an important part in the education of believers concerning the perception of Ellen White and her prophetic role for the church.

The second way through which the Seventh-day Adventists responded to the criticism of Ellen White’s gift was through publication of articles in the *Review*. The main authors during this period were James White, Uriah Smith, George I. Butler, D. M. Canright, and J. H. Waggoner. Most of the time the articles elaborated on old arguments and attempted to answer the new objections by a general description of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy and Ellen White’s gift. There were a few articles, however, that addressed specifically the newly raised objections. In 1863, for

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹⁴ [W. S. Ingraham], “[Note],” *RH*, Feb. 27, 1866, 104.

¹¹⁵ T. M. Steward, “Note from Bro. Steward,” *RH*, Feb. 27, 1866, 94.

¹¹⁶ G. I. Butler, “The Iowa Camp-Meetings,” *RH*, July 4, 1871, 21.

¹¹⁷ See for example: James White, “An Appeal to the Friends of Truth,” *RH*, Jan. 14, 1868, 72; *idem*, “Eastern Tour,” *RH*, Jan. 28, 1868, 104-106; *idem*, “Western Tour,” *RH*, Oct. 26, 1869, 141; G. I. Butler, “The Iowa Camp-Meetings,” *RH*, July 4, 1871, 21.

example, Uriah Smith discussed the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's gift in an article entitled: "Do We Disregard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions."¹¹⁸ Between June 12, 1866, and July 31, 1866, he published a major series entitled "The Visions--Objections Answered."¹¹⁹ The articles, which appeared on the front page of the *Review*, were a point-by-point response to the objections raised by Snook and Brinkerhoff against Ellen White in their book *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*.

Smith expressed his desire to answer the criticisms of Snook and Brinkerhoff as early as January 1866. In a letter dated January 22, 1866, Smith asked W. S. Ingraham to contact Snook and ask him to submit all of his objections against Ellen White so that "someone here [from the General Conference Committee] will answer his objections."¹²⁰ It is not known if Snook responded directly to the letter, but soon after that he and Brinkerhoff published their objections in their book against Ellen White. Smith, it seems, was asked to respond to the listed objections in a book. His manuscript was ready sometime before the session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in May 1866. It was then distributed to the delegates in order to "decide upon its merits, and the disposition that should be made of it." The manuscript was examined and the following resolution was taken:

¹¹⁸ Uriah Smith, "Do We Disregard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?" *RH*, Jan. 13, 1863, 52.

¹¹⁹ Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, June 12, 1866, 9-10; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, June 19, 1866, 17-19; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, June 26, 1866, 25-27; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 3, 1866, 33-34; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 10, 1866, 41-42; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 31, 1866, 65-67.

¹²⁰ Uriah Smith to Bro. Ingraham, Jan. 22, 1866, CAR, AU.

Resolved, That we, the members of the General and Mich[igan] State Conference, having heard a portion of the manuscript read, which has been prepared by Bro. U. Smith, in answer to certain objections recently brought against the visions of Sister White, do hereby express our hearty approval of the same.¹²¹

The delegates thanked “Bro Smith for his able defense of the visions against the attacks of their opponents.”¹²²

Although many of Smith’s arguments had already been explored to one extent or another, his contribution was vital since he made the most comprehensive and detailed reply to that date to the objections raised by Snook and Brinkerhoff in the first published book against Ellen White’s gift. Two years later, in 1868, Smith’s articles were enlarged and published in a book entitled, *The Vision of Mrs. E. G. White, A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures*.¹²³

Other articles defending Ellen White’s prophetic gift continued to appear in the *Review* throughout the 1860s and 1870s. In 1868, D. M. Canright published a series of articles in the form of a conversation between believers and a minister.¹²⁴ Canright noted that the series was based on questions that he had been asked concerning Ellen White’s visions and testimonies. He hoped that the question/answer format of the articles “may help those in whose minds objections against these things still exist.”¹²⁵ In 1868 James

¹²¹ [Uriah Smith], "Objections to the Visions," *RH*, June 12, 1866, 16.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Uriah Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*.

¹²⁴ D. M. Canright, "Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 1," *RH*, Jan. 21, 1868, 84-85; *idem*, "Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 2," *RH*, Jan. 28, 1868, 98-99; *idem*, "Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 3," *RH*, Feb. 4, 1868, 114-115.

¹²⁵ D. M. Canright, "Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 1," *RH*, Jan. 21, 1868, 84.

White authored the article “Time to Commence the Sabbath,”¹²⁶ which seemed to be a response to the critics regarding Ellen White’s role in the development of Seventh-day Adventist theology. It also touched on the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of progressive revelation. In 1870 J. N. Andrews wrote a similar piece titled “Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White.”¹²⁷ James White also published two articles titled “The Spirit of Prophecy,” which established the biblical foundation for the prophetic gift and its presence throughout the Christian era.¹²⁸ Although most of the arguments were repetitive, the articles’ main object was to show the necessity of the spirit of prophecy until the second coming of Jesus as a way of communication between God and the fallen human race. The material was reproduced in small booklet format in 1878¹²⁹ and later was enlarged and revised with a new title: *The Spirit of Prophecy or Perpetuity and Object of the Gifts*.¹³⁰

On April 14, 1874, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a special edition of the *Review*. The *Review and Herald Extra* presented a brief history of Miles Grant’s critiques against the Seventh-day Adventists, including his attacks on James and Ellen

¹²⁶ James White, “Time to Commence the Sabbath,” *RH*, Feb. 25, 1868, 168.

¹²⁷ J. N. Andrews, “Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White,” *RH*, Feb. 15, 1870, 64-65.

¹²⁸ James White, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” *RH*, Jan. 25, 1870, 36-37; idem, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” *RH*, Feb. 1, 1870, 45.

¹²⁹ James White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1878).

¹³⁰ James White, *The Spirit of Prophecy or Perpetuity and Object of the Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1880).

White.¹³¹ It also contained an article regarding Seventh-day Adventist understanding on the perpetuity of spiritual gifts.¹³²

In May and June of 1874, G. I. Butler published another important set of articles entitled “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?”¹³³ The articles were a comprehensive defense of the Seventh-day Adventist claim of having the true manifestation of the gift of prophecy in its midst. Butler’s work seems to be a direct comprehensive response to the opposition of Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy during the 1860s and 1870s.

Articles presenting the biblical and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy continued to appear during the second part of the 1870s. In 1877 D. M. Canright published “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers” series giving facts in favor of the Seventh-day Adventist movement and its understanding of Ellen White in contrast to its opponents.¹³⁴ J. H. Waggoner also published a series of articles giving numerous

¹³¹ *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874.

¹³² “Our Views of Spiritual Gifts,” *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874, 4.

¹³³ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 12, 1874, 172-173; idem, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 19, 1874, 181-182; idem, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 26, 1874, 189; idem, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 2, 1874, 193-194; idem, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 9, 1874, 201-202.

¹³⁴ D. M. Canright, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body,” *RH*, Apr. 12, 1877, 116-117; idem, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body,” *RH*, Apr. 19, 1877, 124-125; idem, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body,” *RH*, Apr. 26, 1877, 132; idem, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body,” *RH*, May 10, 1877, 148-149; idem, “A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those

arguments to prove the biblical foundation for modern prophetic manifestations.¹³⁵ The material was slightly enlarged and published in book form two years later in 1877.¹³⁶

A third way of responding to critics of Ellen White's prophetic gift was through publications of books, pamphlets, and declarations. From 1863 to 1881 the Seventh-day Adventists published numerous important and comprehensive works explaining their understanding of the prophetic gift doctrine and defending their belief in Ellen White as a modern-day prophetess.

One of the most important apologetical works was Uriah Smith's 1868 book, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scriptures*.¹³⁷ As I have already mentioned, the book was an extended presentation of the

Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, May 17, 1877, 156-157; idem, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, May 24, 1877, 165; idem, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, May 31, 1877, 173; idem, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, June 7, 1877, 181; idem, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, June 14, 1877, 188-189.

¹³⁵ J. H. Waggoner, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 1," *RH*, Sept. 23, 1875, 89; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 2," *RH*, Sept. 30, 1875, 97-98; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 3," *RH*, Oct. 7, 1875, 105-106; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 4," *RH*, Oct. 14, 1875, 113-114; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 5," *RH*, Oct. 21, 1875, 121-122; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 6," *RH*, Oct. 28, 1875, 129-130; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 7," *RH*, Nov. 4, 1875, 137-138; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 8," *RH*, Nov. 11, 1875, 143; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 9," *RH*, Nov. 18, 1875, 153-154; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 10," *RH*, Nov. 25, 1875, 161-162; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 11," *RH*, Dec. 2, 1875, 169-170; idem, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit—No. 12," *RH*, Dec. 9, 1875, 177-178.

¹³⁶ J. H. Waggoner, *The Spirit of God: Its Offices and Manifestations, to the End of the Christian Age* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1877).

¹³⁷ Uriah Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*.

articles that he published for the *Review* in the summer of 1866. Smith attempted to give a comprehensive response to the specific objections raised by Snook and Brinkerhoff's book *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*.¹³⁸ Smith's work was considered to be of prime importance and was to be widely distributed among Seventh-day Adventists and their friends.¹³⁹ The book became the first Seventh-day Adventist apologetical work exclusively defending Ellen White's gift.

The same year, 1868, James White published his autobiography *Life Incidents*.¹⁴⁰ Although the book was not particularly related to Ellen White, it contained some information about her experience, work, and relationship to Seventh-day Adventism. White also explained the general Seventh-day Adventist understanding on the doctrine of spiritual gifts from a biblical perspective.¹⁴¹

A significant publication of the Seventh-day Adventists was their first statement of beliefs in 1872, *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*.¹⁴² Although the statement noted that Adventists did not have any "articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible," that this declaration did not have "any authority," and that it was not "designed to secure uniformity" among

¹³⁸ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*.

¹³⁹ James White, "New and Important Work," *RH*, Aug. 25, 1868, 160; N. Fuller and S. B. Whitney, "Seventh Annual Session of the N. Y. and PA. State Conferences," *RH*, Nov. 17, 1868, 246; D. T. Shireman, "Objections to the Visions," *RH*, Dec. 1, 1868, 264.

¹⁴⁰ James White, *Life Incidents*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 271-274, 324-331.

¹⁴² *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1872).

believers, it also noted that it needed to be published in order to correct “false statements” circulated against them. Its aim was “to remove erroneous impressions” from people who had not had opportunities to become acquainted with the Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice.¹⁴³ The declaration was a “concise statement of the more prominent features” of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Point 16 of the principles explained the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the gifts of the Spirit and their manifestation among the people of God throughout the ages.¹⁴⁴ Intriguingly, the declaration did not mention specifically Ellen White, but the allusions to her gift are unmistakable.

New publications explaining the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the gift of prophecy continued to appear throughout the 1870s. In 1873 James White published an interesting confession regarding some of his mistakes from the past. Part of the sixteen-page booklet, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People*, was a candid personal testimony about his struggles, experiences, and convictions regarding Ellen White’s testimonies.¹⁴⁵ In 1875 the Seventh-day Adventists revised and reprinted M. E. Cornell’s *Miraculous Powers*, which provided a historical account of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy.¹⁴⁶ In 1877 J. H. Waggoner published the book *The Spirit of God: Its Offices and Manifestations, to the End of the Christian Age*.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁵ James White, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1873).

¹⁴⁶ Merritt E. Cornell, *Miraculous Powers: The Scripture Testimony on the Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts, Illustrated by Narratives of Incidents and Sentiments Carefully Compiled from the Eminently Pious and Learned of Various Denominations*, 2d rev. ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1875).

Waggoner's material was initially published as articles in the *Review* between September 23 and December 9, 1875. Similarly, James White's articles entitled "The Sprit of Prophecy" (1870) were published as a small book with the same title in 1878.¹⁴⁷ The central theme of Cornell's, Waggoner's, and White's publications was to depict the continuity of the prophetic gift throughout the Christian era and to provide historical and Bible data for the validity of Ellen White's prophetic gift. Beyond that, the works reiterated some of the already discussed arguments in support of the Seventh-day Adventist belief in Ellen White. Thus Seventh-day Adventists continued to use their publications as means to show why they believed in Ellen White's gift.

In addition to books and other statements defending the gift of prophecy, the Seventh-day Adventists began to extensively publish and distribute Ellen White's personal works between 1863 and 1881. Her "testimonies" continued to be published in booklet format, regularly advertised in the *Review*, and people were encouraged to buy and read them for their spiritual benefit.¹⁴⁸ By 1881 Ellen White had written thirty testimonies for the church.

In 1864, volumes three and four of her *Spiritual Gifts* were published.¹⁴⁹ The volumes were a historical account of the world from the creation to the birth of Jesus. Following the historical account, at the end of volume four, Ellen White published an

¹⁴⁷ See p. 189.

¹⁴⁸ See for example: James White, "Testimony to the Church, No. 17," *RH*, Feb. 9, 1869, 56; idem, "Testimony to the Church, No. 18," *RH*, Dec. 7, 1869, 192; S. N. Haskell, "Testimony, No. 20," *RH*, June 20, 1871, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts, Important Facts of Faith: In Connection with the History of Holy Men of Old*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864); idem, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4.

extended article on health. The article followed her first health vision, which she claimed to receive on June 6, 1863, and emphasized the importance of health reform.¹⁵⁰ Volume four also contained her first ten testimonies for the church. As Ellen White noted, the testimonies were republished there since the first edition of the original pamphlets was “exhausted” and there was “an increasing demand for them.”¹⁵¹ Another booklet by Ellen White was *An Appeal to Mothers* published in 1864.¹⁵² She also wrote several chapters for the booklet *Health: Or How to Live* published in 1865.¹⁵³ These publications gave practical advice on Christian living and faith.

At the beginning of 1868, the Whites made a special appeal to Seventh-day Adventist believers for financial support for the publication and distribution of Ellen White’s writings. “In our travels,” they noted, “we find many persons, and sometimes, as in Maine, the majority of Sabbath-keepers, poorly prepared to receive our testimony, simply because they have not read such works as *Spiritual Gifts*, *Testimony to the Church*, *How to Live*, *Appeal to Mothers*, and *Appeal to Youth* [*sic*].” These works were important, the Whites noted, because people who had not read these books were “almost certain to receive prejudice against them,” “indulge in things reprovved by them,” “fall

¹⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, 120-151.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* in “Remarks.”

¹⁵² Ellen G. White, *An Appeal to Mothers: The Great Cause of the Physical, Mental, and Moral Ruin of Many of the Children of Our Time* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864).

¹⁵³ [James White, ed.], *Health: Or How to Live* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1865).

under the influence of our enemies,” “separate themselves from the body,” and “give up the cause.”¹⁵⁴

A special “book fund” was established to help those who were not well acquainted with Ellen White and those who could not afford to buy her books. In May 1868 James White reported that “during the past three months” he had given Ellen White’s books to many who had not read her books before. “The whole amount of what I have given,” White wrote, “is charged to the Book Fund. . . . There will be no profits on those books and tracts furnished to the poor from this fund, and our ministers will freely act in this matter without profit or pay.” White also published a letter by a family asking for Ellen White books to be sent to them. For some time the family wanted to read her books but could not afford to buy them. White admitted that he was getting these kinds of letters every day and appealed again to the believers to support the project so that Ellen White’s books could “go out in every direction.”¹⁵⁵ The “book fund” grew and was also utilized to distribute Seventh-day Adventist books defending Ellen White’s prophetic gift and other Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.¹⁵⁶

By 1869 the book fund was fulfilling its important task. “There are hundreds among us,” James White wrote, “who have been led to embrace the present truth from reading a pamphlet, or a tract, or a copy of the REVIEW AND HERALD. . . . Much must be done by our publications.” White was convinced that since the Seventh-day Adventist

¹⁵⁴ James White and Ellen White, “An Appeal to the Friends of Truth,” *RH*, Jan. 14, 1868, 72.

¹⁵⁵ James White, “Book and Tract Fund,” *RH*, May 26, 1868, 354.

¹⁵⁶ James White, “About the Book Fund,” *RH*, Oct. 26, 1869, 141.

Church did not have enough ministers, much of the work of proclaiming its beliefs (including the gift of prophecy) had to be done through the distribution of publications. Thus he wrote that “the people are perishing for want of knowledge. The laborers are few, the field is wide, and the harvest is plenteous. If this vast harvest work be left to living preachers, it never will be done. Much, very much, must be done with books, and many of our publications must be circulated gratuitously.”¹⁵⁷

In 1869 James White published a special booklet, *Report of the Book Fund for Tract and Book Distribution*, listing all the people and their giving that he had received by that time.¹⁵⁸ Similar financial reports continued to appear in the *Review*.¹⁵⁹ These reports seemed to be a reaction to accusations of financial fraud against James White circulated by some. The Seventh-day Adventists also formed a committee to investigate the reports. The committee asked the believers to send any questions or observations about the credibility of James White’s publishing work.¹⁶⁰ As anticipated, after months of investigation, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a small booklet in defense of James and Ellen White.¹⁶¹ The church’s leadership also accused the opposition of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ James White, *Report of the Book Fund for Tract and Book Distribution* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1869).

¹⁵⁹ See for example: James White, “About the Book Fund,” *RH*, Oct. 26, 1869, 141; idem, “Prices of Our Publications,” *RH*, Nov. 23, 1869, 173-174.

¹⁶⁰ J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and Uriah Smith, “Defense of Eld. James White,” *RH*, Oct. 26, 1869, 144.

¹⁶¹ *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: Vindication of Their Moral and Christian Character* (Battle Creek: MI: Steam Press, 1870).

inventing false and “wicked” reports aimed at turning people against James and Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists’ beliefs.¹⁶²

In the light of the ongoing internal and external controversies related to Ellen White’s prophetic gift, the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church made an effort through publications to acquaint people with Ellen White’s life, works, and relationship to the movement.¹⁶³ Furthermore, they sought to defend their understanding of the prophetic gift and Ellen White’s visions.

A fourth way through which the Seventh-day Adventists responded to critics of Ellen White was through official General Conference declarations and resolutions. As in the previous periods, the resolutions were not so much an answer to specific objections as expressions of their understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift and its role for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Affirmative resolutions of the doctrine of spiritual gifts and Ellen White’s gift appeared almost every year between 1863 and 1881. Interestingly, Ellen White began to be mentioned by name publicly.¹⁶⁴ There were also resolutions dealing with the importance of the publication and distribution of her writings

¹⁶² J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and Uriah Smith, “The Defense of Elder James White and Wife,” *RH*, Apr. 26, 1870, 152.

¹⁶³ S. N. Haskell, “Books for Family Reading,” *RH*, Jan. 1, 1880, 12; James White, “Earnest Appeal,” *RH*, Jan. 29, 1880, 80.

¹⁶⁴ See for example: J. M. Aldrich and Uriah Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 28, 1867, 284; James White and Uriah Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Feb. 14, 1871, 68; James White and A. B. Oyen, “Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Oct. 4, 1877, 105-106; S. N. Haskell and Uriah Smith, “The Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 13, 1881, 376.

and testimonies.¹⁶⁵ We will look at these resolutions in more detail after we examine the Seventh-day Adventist answers to the specific accusations of the critics of Ellen White.

Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Specific Objections

Seventh-day Adventists answered each of the specific objections raised against Ellen White during the period of 1863 to 1881. The first issue that they responded to was the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's prophetic gift. Seventh-day Adventists decisively denied the charge of making the visions equal or more authoritative than the Bible. As done previously, they continued to defend their stand on having the Bible alone as their standard for doctrine and belief. During this period, however, they would clarify their position further. They would argue that Seventh-day Adventists were the ones who accepted the "whole" Bible because of their belief in the gift of prophecy; that they did not consider Ellen White's testimonies as an addition to the Bible; and they attempted to explain the difference in purpose between the Bible and the visions.

In contrast to the critics, the Seventh-day Adventists argued that they were the ones who accepted the "whole Bible" because of their acceptance of the gift of prophecy. In "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?" Uriah Smith wrote:

The protestant principle, of "The Bible and the Bible alone," is of itself good and true; and we stand upon it as firmly as any one can; but when re-iterated in connection with outspoken denunciations of the visions, it has a specious appearance

¹⁶⁵ John Byington and Uriah Smith, "Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *RH*, May 31, 1864, 1; J. N. Andrews and Uriah Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *RH*, May 26, 1868, 356; James White and Uriah Smith, "Seventeenth Annual Session of the General Conference of the S. D. Adventists," *RH*, Oct. 24, 1878, 129; idem, "The Conference," *RH*, Dec. 4, 1879, 184.

for evil. So used it contains a covert insinuation, most effectually calculated to warp the judgment of the unguarded, that to believe the visions is to leave the Bible, and to cling to the Bible, is to discard the visions.”¹⁶⁶

He then gave three reasons why accepting the visions did not nullify the “Bible alone” principle. First, he noted that “when we claim to stand on the Bible and the Bible alone, we bind ourselves to receive, unequivocally and fully, all that the Bible teaches.” Second, he examined the purpose of the visions, which was to comfort believers, to lead them to the truth, and to bring unity. And third, he gave a theological and practical application of why the gifts were to exist until the second coming of Christ as a necessary aid for the people of God. Smith’s conclusion was clear. Seventh-day Adventists did not disregard the Bible by accepting Ellen White’s prophetic gift. On the contrary, it was those who reject such manifestations who disregard it. “Those who profess to stand on the Bible and the Bible alone,” he wrote, “are bound to receive what that Bible tells them will exist, and commands them to respect. . . . We do not, then, discard, but obey, the Bible by endorsing the visions. . . .”¹⁶⁷

In 1866, Smith gave similar arguments as he responded to the objections of Snook and Brinkerhoff. He pointed out again that “by taking our stand on the Bible and the Bible alone, we bind ourselves to receive all that it teaches, and to acknowledge every agency which it assures us that God has placed in the Christian church.”¹⁶⁸ Like Smith, A. P. Lawton noted that “in rejecting the visions we reject all those portions of scripture

¹⁶⁶ Uriah Smith, “Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?” *RH*, Jan. 13, 1863, 52.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objections Answered,” *RH*, June 12, 1866, 10.

relating to prophecy which are of vital importance to us who claim to be living in the closing scenes of earth's history." He also argued that the visions gave "no new rule of faith or practice."¹⁶⁹ In 1868, Uriah Smith noted again concerning the impression created by the critics that if one believed the visions of Ellen White he or she had to reject the Bible (or vice versa). "A greater fallacy never existed," Smith wrote. "The Bible is able to make us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnish us unto all good works. Do the visions propose to invade this field, and erect a new standard, and give us another rule of faith and practice? Nothing of the kind. On the contrary, they are ever in harmony with the word, and ever refer to that as the test and standard." Smith confirmed that because Seventh-day Adventists accepted the Bible as the only standard of faith, they were bound to receive "all that it teaches" including the gift of prophecy as an "agency" that God has placed in the Christian church.¹⁷⁰

Similar arguments continued to appear in the 1870s. G. I. Butler, for example, noted that a large part of the Bible was constituted of dreams and visions and observed that "if we reject visions from our system of religion, we must reject much of the Bible."¹⁷¹ D. M. Canright wrote in 1877 that if there were people who believed the Bible "strongly," who "loved it devotedly," and who referred to it "for everything," these people were the Seventh-day Adventists. "Here is our store-house of doctrine and truth," he wrote. "We preach this everywhere and always. We have no other authority. We do

¹⁶⁹ A. P. Lawton, "The Gift of Prophecy a Test of Fellowship," *RH*, July 2, 1867, 42.

¹⁷⁰ Uriah Smith, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*, 13-14.

¹⁷¹ G. I. Butler, "Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?" *RH*, May 12, 1874, 173.

this to test and prove the genuineness of Sr. White's labors and visions. If they did not harmonize with this in every particular, we would reject them. . . . We believe, however, that no doctrine of the Bible is plainer than that of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, and particularly that these gifts are to be restored in the last days. Joel 2:28-32; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 1 Thess. 5:1-21; &c."¹⁷² Canright confirmed the point that Seventh-day Adventists were the ones who believed in the whole Bible because of their acceptance of the gift of prophecy.

The Adventists also pointed out that they did not consider Ellen White as an addition to the Bible. This was an important point since many of the criticisms accused the Adventists of making Ellen White part of the Bible. When Uriah Smith answered the objections of Snook and Brinkerhoff, he noted that Rev 22:18 ("For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things, which are written in this book") was a reference to the book of Revelation alone and not to Ellen White's writings. Moreover, Smith argued that the opposition could not demonstrate that Seventh-day Adventists had made Ellen White "an addition to the word of God."¹⁷³

Smith re-emphasized this point again at the end of his series of articles when he wrote that Seventh-day Adventists had not made the visions a "second New Testament"

¹⁷² D. M. Canright, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, Apr. 19, 1877, 124-125.

¹⁷³ Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, June 12, 1866, 10.

or a “Mormon Bible.” “We have ever held, as set forth in this article, that the word of God, the Bible, is the great standard by which to test all these manifestations. ‘To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.’ All gifts of the Spirit in the church must be thus tested.” Smith made the point that if the gifts were tested by the Bible, the Bible logically occupied a “higher position” than the gifts. “This, in one word, expresses our view of the relative position which the Bible and the visions sustain to each other,” he concluded.¹⁷⁴

In a similar way, A. P. Lawton also noted that the objections of those who rejected Ellen White’s visions because they were “adding to the word of God” were “groundless.” The visions, Lawton explained, did not “add to, or diminish from this book; on the contrary they perfectly harmonize with, fulfill, and answer to it. John’s visions take nothing from Isaiah’s. Neither do sister W.’s take from, nor add to, John’s,” he noted.¹⁷⁵

Similar explanation was given by D. M. Canright in one of his series of articles answering questions about Ellen White’s prophetic ministry. The Scriptures confirmed, Canright observed, that throughout history the people of God were “placed in different circumstances” and needed new revelations from God to guide and teach them. The later prophetic revelations, however, did not “throw away what had been written before.” Some of them were not even recorded in the Bible. The same parallel could be made, claimed Canright, with Ellen White’s revelations. God needed to give additional

¹⁷⁴ Uriah Smith, “The Visions--Objections Answered,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66-67. See also: idem, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*, 127-128.

¹⁷⁵ A. P. Lawton, “The Gift of Prophecy a Test of Fellowship,” *RH*, July 2, 1867, 42.

instructions, but Ellen White's messages were not "adding to the Bible" or "taking from it any more than one prophet added to or took from the others."¹⁷⁶ Thus Ellen White's messages had a divine origin but were not part of the Bible according to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding.

In 1872, the denomination published their first *Declaration of Fundamental Principles*. Although this was not an official document nor did it have "any authority," it aimed to correct "false statements" and "to remove erroneous impressions" concerning Seventh-day Adventist theology.¹⁷⁷ Of interest to this study is point 16, which expressed their understanding of the gift of prophecy. The Seventh-day Adventists made it plain that they did not consider Ellen White's prophetic gift equal to or part of the Bible. Although the name of Ellen White was not used, the allusion to her gift is evident. Point 16 stated:

That the Spirit of God was promised to manifest itself in the church through certain gifts, enumerated especially in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4; that *these gifts are not designed to supersede, or take the place of, the Bible*, which is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation, any more than the Bible can take the place of the Holy Spirit; that in specifying the various channels of its operation, that Spirit has simply made provision for its own existence and presence with the people of God to the end of time, to lead to an understanding of that word which it had inspired, to convince of sin, and work a transformation in the heart and life; and that those who deny to the Spirit its place and operation, do plainly deny that part of the Bible which assigns to it his work and position.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ D. M. Canright, "Conversations on Important Subjects, No. 1," *RH*, Jan. 21, 1868, 85.

¹⁷⁷ *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

In 1876 Uriah Smith reminded the opposition again that Seventh-day Adventists held theological doctrines that were defended “wholly” by the Bible and had nothing to do with Ellen White or her gift.¹⁷⁹ In July 1880, W. C. White published an article giving a list of useful books (tools) as aids for studying the Bible and its doctrines. Not surprisingly, the list included Bible dictionaries, concordances, works on geography of Bible lands, and others, but not a single book by Ellen White. Seventh-day Adventists seemed to be careful in representing themselves as people of the Bible alone for learning and accepting theological beliefs.¹⁸⁰ A few months later the *Review* published another article entitled, “Are Seventh-day Adventists Teaching New Doctrines?” It confirmed the already established fact that all the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists, including that of the “gift of prophecy,” derived from the Bible alone. “We have not embraced ‘new doctrines,’” the author wrote, but “we are firmly planting our feet upon the doctrines taught by the prophets and by Christ and his apostles.”¹⁸¹ When D. T. Biggs wrote about his personal benefit from reading the three volumes of Ellen White’s *Spirit of Prophecy* in 1881, he noted that there could be “nothing, *outside of the Bible*, that could be read with so much interest and profit by all as these three volumes.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Uriah Smith, “Wroth with the Woman: Rev. 12:17,” *RH*, Aug. 17, 1876, 60.

¹⁸⁰ W. C. White, “Useful Books,” *RH*, July 15, 1880, 55. (See also, “Valuable Books of Reference: Manuals of Instruction for Sabbath-School Teachers and Bible Students,” *RH*, July 15, 1880, 55.)

¹⁸¹ “Are Seventh-day Adventists Teaching New Doctrines?” *RH*, Nov. 25, 1880, 341.

¹⁸² D. T. Biggs, “Spirit of Prophecy,” *RH*, Apr. 5, 1881, 219. Emphasis supplied.

Another point related to the fact that Seventh-day Adventists did not consider Ellen White as part of the Bible was related to the purpose of the visions. Smith noted that the purpose of Ellen White's visions and prophetic role was different from that of the Bible. The main focus of the visions was to lead people to the Bible. In 1863 Smith observed that the main object of the gifts was to "comfort" people, to "lead them into truth," and "to bring us into the unity of the faith."¹⁸³ A few years later, in answering questions about the role of Ellen White's gift, Seventh-day Adventists declared again that "in regard to doctrines, we would repeat that whatever theory enters into our system of belief, we prove by the Bible and the Bible alone. The visions are not given for the purpose of establishing a rule of faith, and are not designed to be quoted for that purpose."¹⁸⁴

The visions could confirm a belief but were never used to establish a doctrine. A good example of the confirmatory role of the visions is found in an article published in 1868 by James White. The Sabbatarians kept the Sabbath initially from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday. Later, some believers questioned the six o'clock time and claimed that the biblical time of the Bible Sabbath was from sunset to sunset. J. N. Andrews was asked to do a Bible study on the subject. Andrews shared his finding at a conference in Battle Creek in 1855 and concluded in favor of the sunset-to-sunset time. Afterward Ellen White had a vision confirming Andrews' findings. The question, however, arose as to why God did not reveal the issue to Ellen White earlier. James White's reply is an

¹⁸³ Uriah Smith, "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?" *RH*, Jan. 13, 1863, 52.

¹⁸⁴ [Uriah Smith], "Doubts and Queries," *RH*, July 30, 1867, 104.

insightful description of how the Seventh-day Adventists viewed the relationship between Ellen White's gift and the Bible. He penned,

Dear readers, the work of the Lord upon this point is in perfect harmony with his manifestations to us on others, and in harmony with the correct position upon spiritual gifts. *It does not appear to be the desire of the Lord to teach his people by the gifts of the Spirit on the Bible questions until his servants have diligently searched his word.* When this was done upon the subject of time to commence the Sabbath, and most were established, and some were in danger of being out of harmony with the body on this subject, then, yes, *then*, was the very time for God to magnify his goodness in the manifestation of the gift of his Spirit in the accomplishment of its proper work. The sacred Scriptures are given us as the rule of faith and we are commanded to search them. . . . *Let the gifts have their proper place in the church. God has never set them in the very front, and commanded us to look to them to lead us in the path of truth, and the way to Heaven.* His word he has magnified. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are man's lamp to light up his path to the kingdom. Follow that. But if you err from Bible truth, and are in danger of being lost, it may be that God will in the time of his choice correct you, and bring you back to the Bible, and save you.¹⁸⁵

J. H. Waggoner also argued that the purpose of the testimonies was to lead people to God and His law. "When visions are denied the people perish. Why?" Waggoner asked. "Because the law is no more regarded, and men are left to follow their own ways. And such has always been the case when God withdrew his gifts from the people."¹⁸⁶ J. N. Andrews also wrote that the Scriptures contained "the truth of God" as the "metals are contained in a mine." The work of the Holy Spirit, including the prophetic gift, was to "bring to light and vindicate the truth of God."¹⁸⁷ G. I. Butler similarly noted that "they [the visions] everywhere direct us to the Scriptures as the great source of true instruction,

¹⁸⁵ James White, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *RH*, Feb. 25, 1868, 168. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁸⁶ J. H. Waggoner, "The Law and the Testimony," *RH*, July 20, 1869, 27.

¹⁸⁷ [J. N. Andrews], "Our Use of the Visions of Sr. White," *RH*, Feb. 15, 1870, 64.

and to the example of Jesus Christ as the true pattern. They never claim to be given to take the place of the Bible, but simply to be a manifestation of one of those spiritual gifts set in the church by its divine Lord; and as such, should have their proper weight.”¹⁸⁸

Thus the Seventh-day Adventists denied the charge of making Ellen White’s visions a part of the Bible or an addition to the Bible.¹⁸⁹ They argued that the gift of prophecy was a biblical doctrine and therefore they believed in it. On the other hand, they never considered Ellen White’s messages to be part of the Bible. The function and the role of the visions were to lead people back to the Bible, the “only rule” of faith and action.

The second specific objection that the Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to was the claim that Ellen White’s visions taught false doctrines contradicting the Bible and well-known facts. The Seventh-day Adventists disagreed and argued that Ellen White’s visions were in accordance with the Bible and did not contradict themselves or facts. In 1863, Snook, who dealt with the initial rebellion in Iowa, responded to those who accused the Seventh-day Adventists of leaving the Bible and going “after fables.” “Those who believed in the visions,” he wrote, “are not afraid of being led away from the Bible. They know that as long as they believe sister [*sic*] White there is no danger.”¹⁹⁰ Obviously for Snook, Ellen White’s writings were not contrary to the biblical truths.

¹⁸⁸ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 9, 1874, 202.

¹⁸⁹ Other examples of articles denying the charge of making the visions equal to the Bible include: Joseph Clarke, “The Gift in the Church,” *RH*, Oct. 6, 1868, 198; A. S. Hutchins, “Reading the Bible,” *RH*, Apr. 11, 1878, 114; “Are Seventh-day Adventists Teaching New Doctrines?” *RH*, Nov. 25, 1880, 341; D. T. Biggs, “Spirit of Prophecy,” *RH*, Apr. 5, 1881, 219.

¹⁹⁰ B. F. Snook, “The Rebel Conference,” *RH*, Jan. 6, 1863, 46.

James White also argued that a belief in the gift of prophecy did not lead Seventh-day Adventists to accept unbiblical or fanatical ideas. “Many suppose that, because we believe in spiritual gifts,” White wrote, “we are open to all manner of fanaticism, and ready to harmonize with everything that *claims* to be the Spirit of God. This is a great mistake. The gifts of the Spirit do not lead us into fanaticism--they correct it and secure us from its influence.” In fact, White believed that the Seventh-day Adventists were “more free” from fanatical errors than any other group of believers because of the gift of prophecy manifested among them.¹⁹¹ D. H. Sanborn agreed with White and noted that having the visions saved the honest believers from incorrect doctrines and led them “to love and prize the Bible” even more.¹⁹² It was those who rejected the visions that usually began to question and deny other biblical doctrines. Thus Seventh-day Adventists noted that Snook and Brinkerhoff’s “downward course” of rejecting almost all of the “fundamental principles of the present truth” (doctrinal beliefs accepted by the Seventh-day Adventists) began after their rejection of Ellen White.¹⁹³ Likewise, J. Dorcas, who personally witnessed the controversy in Iowa, noted that Snook and Brinkerhoff’s denunciation of the visions led to rejection of the Sabbath, the 2300-day prophecy (Dan 8:14), the Three Angels Messages, and other biblical doctrines.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ James White, “They Are Mistaken,” *RH*, Mar. 31, 1863, 141.

¹⁹² D. H. Sanborn, “Characteristics of the Last Church,” *RH*, Feb. 2, 1864, 78.

¹⁹³ Uriah Sniht, G. W. Amadon, and J. M. Aldrich, “Remarks,” *RH*, Jan. 23, 1866, 63.

¹⁹⁴ J. Dorcas, “Meeting in Marion, Iowa,” *RH*, Feb. 13, 1866, 86; *idem*, “From Bro. Dorcas,” *RH*, Feb. 13, 1866, 87.

When Uriah Smith responded to the objections of Snook and Brinkerhoff in 1866, one of his main goals was to show that Ellen White did not contradict the Bible. After giving general principles concerning the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy, Smith began answering specific objections to the “teachings of the visions.” His second article, for example, was an attempt to synchronize Ellen White’s “shut door” statement with the Bible.¹⁹⁵ Smith took some time to answer the question because the “shut door” was perhaps the most controversial issue among those who rejected the visions.¹⁹⁶ Smith’s article was in a way a textual criticism of what Ellen White meant by the “shut door” phrase. He showed, first, that this was a biblical expression found in the parable of the ten virgins in Matt 25:1-13. Thus Ellen White did not teach “a more exclusive shut door” than the Scripture itself. Second, Smith explained that Ellen White’s meaning of the “shut door” had to be explained in the context of the Adventist experience in 1844 and its aftermath. As Smith saw it, what Ellen White meant by the phrase “the time for their [the sinners] salvation is past,” was a reference to the “false reformation” done by “false revivalists” in that time and did not refer to people in general.¹⁹⁷ Thus Ellen White’s “shut door” statement did not contradict the Bible. As we will see later, however, it seems that Smith went beyond Ellen White’s own explanation on the “shut door.”

¹⁹⁵ The “shut door” theory meant that the door of probation for sinners closed in October 22, 1844, and that there was no more chance for salvation.

¹⁹⁶ Uriah Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objections Answered,” *RH*, June 19, 1866, 17.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

The rest of his articles were an attempt to provide answers to other doctrinal challenges raised by Snook and Brinkerhoff against Ellen White. They dealt with questions such as: Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place, the delay of the Second Coming, immortality, slavery, the Sabbath as "a test" for the end-time, the meaning of the 144,000, the "temple" in heaven, and others.¹⁹⁸ Smith denied the existence of any contradiction between Ellen White and the Bible and noted that the critics either misinterpreted or took out of context her writings. "Two things we have gained by this examination," he concluded, "first, a deeper knowledge of the inherent weakness of the opposition, and [second] clearer views of the beauty and harmony of the visions themselves." For Smith, the Bible and the visions sustained "each other."¹⁹⁹ Smith's conclusions were in harmony with the Seventh-day Adventist position that Ellen White did not contradict but was in harmony with biblical teachings.

In 1866, D. T. Bourdeau made an interesting observation concerning the visions and things that seemed contradictory to them. He explained that apparent difficulties were not to "shake" one's confidence that the prophetic gift was a biblically founded doctrine. Based on examples of Daniel, Noah, Abraham, Jeremiah, and others, Bourdeau argued that many prophetic testimonies from God "were not fully understood in the times in which they were given." With the passing of time, however, they were explained and

¹⁹⁸ Smith listed 39 objections that he found necessary to answer. See: Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, June 26, 1866, 25-27; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 3, 1866, 33-34; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 10, 1866, 41-42; idem, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 31, 1866, 65-67.

¹⁹⁹ Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66; see also, idem, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*, 127.

understood. Therefore, he advised that it was “not prudent to be always looking at objections” but to trust and believe. After all, accepting the visions was a matter of faith. And it was always faith that was “attended with success,” while unbelief was “attended with failure.”²⁰⁰ D. M. Canright expressed the same attitude when he wrote that “the time has come for the people of God to go forward in faith, relying upon the Testimonies as they are in accordance with the teachings of the Scriptures.”²⁰¹

W. H. Ball agreed with Bourdeau on the issue of “apparent contradictions.” The fact that believers could not harmonize all messages of Ellen White did not mean they should reject her prophetic gift. “Do you not meet with the same difficulty in your study of the Bible?” Ball asked. “Are there no apparent contradictions to be found there? . . . Yet you do not reject the Bible as the word of God, but believe it to be an inspired book. Then why reject the visions because you fail to harmonize all their teachings,” he wrote.²⁰²

During the 1870s the Seventh-day Adventists continued to affirm their belief that Ellen White’s visions did not contradict the Bible. When Miles Grant accused the Seventh-day Adventists of keeping Saturday as the Sabbath because Ellen White saw it in vision and that Ellen White gave time predictions about the Second Coming, Canright replied that both of Grant’s conclusions were wrong. First, he noted that there were Adventists who kept the Saturday/Sabbath long before Ellen White “embraced it.” Ellen

²⁰⁰ D. T. Bourdeau, “Faith, Presumption, and Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Aug. 7, 1866, 74.

²⁰¹ D. M. Canright, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 2,” *RH*, Jan. 28, 1868, 99.

²⁰² W. H. Ball, “A Warning to Vision Haters,” *RH*, Mar. 23, 1869, 102.

White also began to observe the Sabbath based on “Bible evidence, and not from a vision.” Canright observed that “she kept it over one year before she saw anything about it in vision.” Second, he argued that after 1844 Ellen White had always opposed any “setting of time” for the Second Coming.²⁰³ In fact, Canright claimed that it was Grant who had been “a leading spirit among the fanatical timeists [*sic*], setting and preaching time after time as he had to publicly confess.”²⁰⁴

In 1876 Uriah Smith also responded to some of Grant’s charges against Ellen White’s visions being contrary to the Bible. In response to the “shut door” question, Smith summarized the Seventh-day Adventist understanding concerning Ellen White’s visions and their relationship to Bible doctrines. He wrote:

The visions have never taught the end of probation in the past, or the close of the day of salvation for sinners, called by our opponents the shut-door doctrine. No such proof can be shown. That they are self-contradictory, we deny. No evidence to sustain this assertion can be presented. That they contradict the Bible, we deny. They do contradict some things the objector sets forth as his views of the Bible; but that is a very different thing. If they did not contract some of his positions, we should consider it good cause for rejecting the visions themselves.²⁰⁵

Smith made another interesting observation when he wrote that most of those who were engaged in disproving Ellen White’s gift knew “very little” of her work or of her as a person. “We simply say to all,” Smith wrote, “acquaint yourselves with the writings of sister [*sic*] White, and with her history and work as far as possible. We have seen not a

²⁰³ There were a few Sabbatarians and Seventh-day Adventists who tried to predict dates for the second coming of Christ.

²⁰⁴ D. M. Canright, “Eld. Grant’s Attack upon Eld. James White and Wife at Napa, Cal., March 28, 1874,” *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874, 3.

²⁰⁵ Uriah Smith, “‘Wroth with the Woman’: Rev. 12:17,” *RH*, Aug. 17, 1876, 60.

few who have done this come to her at the camp-meetings and confess that they had been deceived by the false statements of those who are at war with her, but now they had seen for themselves and were constrained to confess that the Lord was with her; and they asked with tears her forgiveness for their opposition.”²⁰⁶

R. F. Cottrell also responded to Grant’s accusations about the seventh-day Sabbath. Similarly to Canright, Cottrell accused Grant of making a wrong assertion that Seventh-day Adventists kept the Sabbath because of a vision by Ellen White. Cottrell, nevertheless, believed that Grant knew better. He knew, Cottrell argued, that the Seventh-day Adventists always appealed “to the Bible alone” to sustain any of their beliefs and practices including the seventh-day Sabbath. Grant was doing that “simply to prejudice the reader” towards Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventists, Cottrell wrote.²⁰⁷ Thus the Seventh-day Adventists continued to affirm that Ellen White’s visions were in accordance with the Bible.

The third specific objection that the Seventh-day Adventists tackled was the “suppression” charges. The opposition claimed that in order to avoid theological contradictions the Seventh-day Adventists suppressed (changed, modified, or hid) some of Ellen White’s earlier writings. This argument would become more controversial during the 1880s, but I mention it here since a few persons (such as Snook, Brinkerhoff, and Carver) raised the issue between 1863 and 1881.²⁰⁸ The Seventh-day Adventists would answer the question of “suppression” not through the theological but through the practical

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 61.

²⁰⁷ R. F. Cottrell, “Specimens of Arguments,” *RH*, June 14, 1877, 185.

²⁰⁸ The main issue was again the “shut door” theory.

prism. For them, the issues were *not* related so much to theology (hiding previous beliefs) but rather to practicality and time relevancy.

Uriah Smith would be the first to note the absurdity of the “suppression” charges. “The main body of what we are accused of having suppressed,” Smith wrote, “is simply the editions of some visions, which having all been sold, have not yet been re-published.” However, Smith noted that there was not a law nor was it practically possible for them to re-publish every vision. He went on to point out that “if any wrong has been committed in this direction,” it had nothing to do with validity of Ellen White’s prophetic gift, but rather with those who were in charge of the publication of the visions. Smith, of course, did not believe that this was the case. The critics could not produce any evidence that “there has ever been any attempt or design on the part of the leaders in this work to suppress any of the visions.” After all, Smith argued, that “having once published them and spread them through the ranks of believers, any one could see that it would be sheer folly to attempt any such thing.”²⁰⁹ On the other hand, Smith admitted that whenever a decision to re-publish a vision was taken, it was not an unusual practice to omit some part from the earlier version. He gave two reasons for this practice. First, the “suppression” of certain things was related to the original circumstances and aim of the vision. Smith explained: “Portions which are claimed to have been suppressed . . . are simply some things which *related to particular and local circumstances*, and having accomplished their object, have not been inserted when that which is of general interest has been re-

²⁰⁹ See objection no. 39 in Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objection Answered,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66; idem, *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White*, 122-129.

published.”²¹⁰ Note that for Smith (and the Seventh-day Adventists) the “suppression” or the “left out” parts of the visions had nothing to do with hiding or changing a theological belief, but with the practicality of the visions for the general reader.²¹¹

Second, Smith observed that the “suppression” had to do with the style and the language of the vision. He noted that in cases where certain language or expressions were left out, the meaning of the vision had not changed. “Expressions are retained inculcating the same sentiments,” Smith wrote, “in language still stronger than those which the objector claims to have been suppressed on account of their objectionable features; so that *the teachings of the visions are not altered a whit by the omission of those things* which he [the critic] asserts have been left out because they are not now believed.” The visions contained “nothing but what we [Seventh-day Adventists] still fully endorse,” Smith argued.²¹² In 1876 Smith used some of the same arguments when he responded to the “suppression” charges voiced by Miles Grant. He again confirmed the Seventh-day Adventist position of not suppressing Ellen White’s writings at any time in order to hide or change a theological view. It was done only for practical reasons.²¹³

James White expressed the same view on “suppression.” In March 1880, he wrote a note in the *Review* about a decision to republish Ellen White’s earliest autobiographical booklet, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (1851), “with

²¹⁰ Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objection Answered,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66. Emphasis supplied.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* Smith explains that in a large part of his article.

²¹² Uriah Smith, “The Visions—Objection Answered,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66. Emphasis supplied.

²¹³ Uriah Smith, “‘Wroth with the Woman’: Rev. 12:17,” *RH*, Aug. 17, 1876, 60.

such remarks and notes as may seem necessary.” Part of the decision for the republication of the booklet was based on objections accusing the Seventh-day Adventists of hiding Ellen White’s earliest publications.²¹⁴ On April 1, 1880, James White wrote again that the new volume was to include a sketch of Ellen White’s “parentage, early life, Christian experience, views, and extensive labors, in connection with a full explanation of her peculiar and wonderful experience.” It was also to include answers to “common objections” to her views and prophetic ministry. White invited people who had “difficulties in their minds relative to the peculiar work of Mrs. White, or objections to her views,” to forward their questions to the “Review” office “at their earliest convenience.”²¹⁵ As we will see in the next chapter, the new volume appeared as *Early Writings* in 1882.²¹⁶

Meanwhile, *Life Sketches*, which recounted the life, Christian experience, and labor of James and Ellen White, was published in 1880.²¹⁷ The second part of the book contained materials taken from Ellen White’s earlier autobiography found in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume two (1860).²¹⁸ James White explained the process that guided the republication of some of that material. On May 27, 1880, he explained:

²¹⁴ James White, [“A Note”], *RH*, Mar. 25, 1880, 208.

²¹⁵ James White, “Experience and Views,” *RH*, Apr. 1, 1880, 224.

²¹⁶ Ellen White, *Early Writings of Mrs. White: Experience and Views and Spiritual Gifts, Volume One*, 2d ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1882).

²¹⁷ James White, *Life Sketches: Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White, and His Wife Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1880).

²¹⁸ See James White, “Life Sketches,” *RH*, May 27, 1880, 352; idem, “Life Sketches,” *RH*, July 15, 1880, 64.

Those who are urging the reprinting of that volume, should understand that there are many things in that sketch applying to the past, and having no special interest at the present time, which need not be reprinted. There are also personal testimonies in that volume which have recently been reprinted, and constitute a portion of the new edition of the testimony to the church. And while two or three pages only of the narrative have been omitted in the revision, eight or ten have been added, making the work more complete.²¹⁹

Clearly, for James White, like the rest of the Seventh-day Adventists, the “suppression” question was not connected to theology but practicality. Therefore, he did not see any controversy in leaving some parts out while including some new relevant material. The Seventh-day Adventists would clarify their position on “suppression” further when they explained their understanding of biblical revelation and inspiration. As we will see, the issue of “suppression” and biblical inspiration would become the focal point of discussion in relation to Ellen White’s prophetic gift in the period running from 1882 to 1889.

The fourth specific accusation was that Ellen White’s gift did not originate anything new and therefore there was nothing extraordinary or supernatural about her gift. The opposition claimed that Ellen White was either influenced by others or repeated already known information. The Seventh-day Adventists would disagree and explain their position.

It seems that up to that time the Seventh-day Adventists had intentionally left out of their argumentation the supernatural in Ellen White’s visions as proof for her prophetic gift. Since there were fanatical elements and spiritualizers whose main emphasis was placed on the “extraordinary” or the “supernatural,”²²⁰ the Seventh-day Adventists

²¹⁹ James White, “Life Sketches,” *RH*, May 27, 1880, 352.

²²⁰ The Seventh-day Adventist considered those to be satanic or false manifestations.

wanted to distinguish Ellen White from that fanaticism and thus rarely spoke about the supernatural aspects of her gift. In the mid-1860s, however, that would change. Seventh-day Adventists began to argue that Ellen White's gift had supernatural manifestations. These included: (1) revelations of previously unknown facts, and (2) the unnatural physical condition of Ellen White while in vision. In addition, Seventh-day Adventists argued that no one could control or influence her visionary manifestations.

E. B. Saunders was one of the first to explain that there were many examples when the visions corrected or reproved individuals whose "conduct" or names "had been previously entirely unknown" to Ellen White. The visions gave information which was "beyond human knowledge or foresight," Saunders explained.²²¹ Uriah Smith agreed with Saunders that "the visions take cognizance of persons and things, and bring to light facts known, not only by no person present, but not even by the one through whom the visions are given," obviously a reference to Ellen White.²²²

The objection that Ellen White's visions did not contain anything supernatural prompted the delegates of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in May 1866, to propose a publication of "some of the remarkable fulfillments of the visions that have occurred to the present time."²²³ Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, and J. N. Loughborough were specifically requested to write for the *Review* some of their experiences with the visions at their "earliest convenience."²²⁴ Surprisingly, by the end of

²²¹ E. B. Saunders, "A Few Thoughts on the Gifts," *RH*, Mar. 13, 1866, 118.

²²² Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objection Answered," *RH*, June 12, 1866, 9.

²²³ [Uriah Smith], "Objections to the Visions," *RH*, June 12, 1866, 16.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

1866, it was only Loughborough who, after an additional request by the *Review*'s editor (Uriah Smith), sent two articles entitled "Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions."²²⁵ Loughborough admitted that initially he was "a firm unbeliever in anything like direct manifestations of the Spirit of God." When he heard of the visions of Ellen White he supposed they were "either pretensions or mesmerism." After seeing her in vision several times, however, he was gradually convinced that her gift was of God. He gave two particular reasons for his change of attitude. The first was the physical phenomena displayed during visions. Loughborough reported that while in vision Ellen White did not breathe, her eyes were open, and "audible words were spoken without breath."²²⁶ The second reason was Ellen White's ability to foresee and know things than nobody knew about.²²⁷ "So, to us, in this whole case," he concluded, "there is a striking proof as to the source from whence these visions proceed. Works of darkness were reprov'd and brought to light by the testimony, wrongs in the church corrected; and this is the characteristic of true gifts."²²⁸

In 1868 Uriah Smith again reminded the readers of the *Review* that there had been "many remarkable fulfillments" of the visions and "striking instances of their

²²⁵ J. N. Loughborough, "Remarkable Fulfillment of the Visions," *RH*, Dec. 25, 1866, 30; idem, "Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions. No. 2," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1867, 62-63.

²²⁶ J. N. Loughborough, "Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions," *RH*, Dec. 25, 1866, 30.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*; idem, "Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions. No. 2," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1867, 62-63. For additional examples see Loughborough's book: *The Great Second Advent Movement*.

²²⁸ J. N. Loughborough, "Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions. No. 2," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1867, 63.

supernatural foresight and knowledge.” Since many of those experiences were recorded in Ellen White’s *Spiritual Gifts*, volume two, everyone interested could acquaint themselves with the stories. The supernatural, however, was not enough to prove that visions or revelations had a “divine origin.” Smith recognized that many clairvoyants had supernatural revelations, but their source was Satanic. The only sure test, therefore, was the Bible. While the main purpose of Ellen White’s supernatural revelations was to “reprove sin and correct wrong,” this was not the case with any of the clairvoyants and their supernatural revelations. “Now we have yet to learn of the first instance,” Smith wrote, “in which a mesmerized subject, ever once, much less uniformly, as in the case of the visions, has brought to light hidden iniquity, and exposed sin and wrong. This would be Satan against himself, which is not the policy he pursues.”²²⁹

By the end of the 1860s we find several detailed descriptions of Ellen White’s supernatural condition while in vision. In 1868 James White noted, first, that she was “utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her” and this was “proven by the most rigid tests.” Second, she did not breathe. “During the entire period of her continuance in vision, which has at different times ranged from fifteen minutes to three hours,” wrote White, there was “no breath, as has been repeatedly proved by pressing upon the chest, and by closing the mouth and nostrils.” Third, “immediately on entering vision” her muscles became “rigid” and her “joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them.” “At the same time her movements and gestures,” noted White, were “free and graceful” and could not be “hindered nor controlled by the strongest person.”

²²⁹ [Uriah Smith], “Remarkable Fulfillments of the Visions,” *RH*, Sept. 29, 1868, 188.

Fourth, she could not see anything for a while after coming out of vision. Although this had continued for more than twenty years, her eyesight was not “in the least impaired,” acknowledged White. He also noted that up to 1868 she had had between one and two hundred visions that had been witnessed by many people, both believers and unbelievers. Thus her paranormal state while in vision was not a secret.²³⁰

White also pointed out that Ellen White’s visionary experiences were not controlled by anyone, as the critics claimed. After all, they were unexpected to Ellen White herself. She got visions while addressing congregations, while “prostrated by sickness,” “while walking with friends,” or “when in prayer alone.”²³¹ The timing of any vision was up to God only. D. M. Canright agreed with White on the timing of the visions. “She has no control of the matter,” he wrote. “She cannot have a vision at any time she wished, nor avoid having them if she would like.”²³² Contrary to the critics, Seventh-day Adventists believed that no one could control Ellen White’s visionary manifestations.

Seventh-day Adventists continued to present supernatural evidences as proof for Ellen White’s prophetic gift throughout the 1870s. In 1873 James White, for example, made a curious personal confession, admitting that initially he had some trials concerning the visions. This was especially true during “the first ten years” of his experience, when the visions showed things “of the future history of the cause” which did not make much

²³⁰ James White, *Life Incidents*, 271-274.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² D. M. Canright, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 3,” *RH*, Feb. 4, 1868, 115.

sense to him at that time. History, however, proved the visions to be true, and now White was more than confident in their supernatural origin.²³³

In 1874, G. I. Butler gave a description of the supernatural manner in which God communicated to the prophets in Bible times. Using Num 12:6 (“Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream”), he explained how the Holy Spirit would take “complete possession of the mind, impressing upon its tablets those things which he is pleased to reveal. . . . Events passed before the mind in vision like a moving panorama,” Butler wrote. Often the things shown to the biblical prophets were “not known” to anyone else. The prophets then would come out of the vision and speak or write out the messages received from God. Butler argued that Ellen White had the same kind of experiences. She was in a supernatural physical condition while in vision and she was often given revelation of things “not known” to herself and others.²³⁴

Butler repeated the same couple of arguments in another article a month later and again affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist position that Ellen White’s gift displayed supernatural evidences. Similarly to James White’s description, Butler confirmed that Ellen White did not breathe while in vision, but her pulse remained normal. Her eyes were “wide open” and “directed upward.” She was also utterly unconscious of everything around her and had “no knowledge” of what was said or done in her presence. At times she was revealed things not known to anybody else. Butler also acknowledged that there

²³³ James White, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People*, 5.

²³⁴ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested Among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 12, 1874, 173.

were many witnesses, both believers and unbelievers, including prominent physicians who had confirmed the paranormal state of Ellen White while in vision.²³⁵

J. H. Waggoner made a slightly different point concerning the “supernatural” argument. He noted that it was a mistake to make a distinction between the gifts as “*natural*” or “*supernatural*.” For him, everyone who received the Spirit “in any manner or to any extent,” received it “by the direct power of God.” Waggoner believed that there was “no *natural* reception or operation of the Spirit of God in any case.” Thus he concluded that there was “no ‘*promise of the Spirit*’ in the Bible which does not include the gifts or manifestations of divine power.”²³⁶ Obviously to the Adventists, by its very nature Ellen White’s gift was supernatural.

The fifth specific objection that Seventh-day Adventists had to answer dealt with the comparison of Ellen White to other self-proclaimed prophets, fanatics, or spiritualizers. The critics argued that Ellen White’s source of knowledge came from Satan or resulted from mental disorder. Since there were a few who accepted this accusation, the Seventh-day Adventists had to address the issues. In March 1864, Solomon Myers gave his personal testimony. He was connected for a while with the “Messenger Party” and at first believed that Ellen White’s visions came from “the evil one” or resulted from “mental hallucination.” The false reports “left me in doubt and

²³⁵ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested Among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 9, 1874, 201-202.

²³⁶ J. H. Waggoner, “The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit: No. 2,” *RH*, Sept. 30, 1875, 97.

uncertainty,” Myers confessed. After personal investigation, however, he reconsidered his position and accepted Ellen White’s gift as genuine.²³⁷

E. B. Saunders also argued that Ellen White’s gift could not originate from Satan. He gave several arguments for his position. First, he noted that the gifts corrected errors in the church and therefore it was “absurd” to believe that Satan would influence positively the work of God. The gifts, Saunders noted, corrected even Ellen White’s doctrinal beliefs, which Satan would not do.²³⁸ Second, the gifts led people back to God and “his law.” The testimonies always exalted Jesus and made him “the only hope of salvation.” Since Jesus was the central theme of Ellen White’s visions, it was absurd to believe that they came from Satan. Third, the gifts nowhere taught “contrary to the word of God,” but led people back to the Bible and to a “more perfect consecration of themselves to God.” Satan would never do that. Saunders concluded that the testimonies could come only from a “good source,” meaning from God.²³⁹

J. N. Andrews made a similar point when he asked a series of comparison questions between Ellen White’s prophetic gift and the false prophetic claims of their time:

Has it [Ellen White’s gift] led men from the commandments of God like the spiritual gifts of the Mormons, or has it led them to keep all the commandments just as the genuine should? Has it led them to love or slight the Bible? Has it made men worldly-minded and covetous, or self-sacrificing and devoted in life and in substance to the cause of Christ? Has it led them to pride or to humility? to idleness, negligence, sloth

²³⁷ Solomon Myers, “The Cause,” *RH*, Mar. 29, 1864, 139.

²³⁸ Note that Ellen White never saw herself, as an individual Christian, being free from making wrong doctrinal conclusions.

²³⁹ E. B. Saunders, “A Few Thoughts on the Gifts,” *RH*, Mar. 13, 1866, 118.

and untidiness, or to industry, economy, frugality and neatness? Has it led either to formality or to fanaticism? Has it not with unsparing faithfulness rebuked wrongs wherever they have existed? Has it ever borne one evil fruit? Has it not borne the excellent fruits of righteousness all the way from the beginning of this work? Shall we say that Satan is its author? Shall we not rather say that it is the testimony of Jesus, the genuine spirit of prophecy?²⁴⁰

Clearly for Andrews there was a difference between the work of Ellen White and the counterfeit prophetic manifestations. The best way to judge her work, Andrews argued, was by the “fruits” it bore.

As we have seen, the “good fruits” argument was one of the most widely used arguments by Seventh-day Adventists in defense of Ellen White’s gift. They argued that the gift of prophecy united the believers and brought them nearer to the Bible and to Jesus Christ. In the period from 1863 to 1882, however, the Seventh-day Adventists used this old argument to counteract the claims that Ellen White was a self-proclaimed prophet and that her messages came from Satan. Joseph Clark expressed this line of thought when he wrote: “Of the visions we judge from their fruits; and it is all good that we have seen, to those who believe; but unmixed evil to those who reject them. There is in these works the transparency of truth, and the internal and external evidence of divine origin.”²⁴¹

On September 18, 1866, Canright published a testimony by a “good sister” sharing how the visions and the testimonies had led her to a better relationship with God. Canright also personally acknowledged that he had read the visions “many times” and had been always “stirred up to be more careful” and “more devoted” in his own life. “How can this be the work of Satan?” he asked. “Does he [Satan] teach men to be better,

²⁴⁰ J. N. Andrews, “The Testimony of Jesus,” *RH*, Mar. 3, 1868, 178.

²⁴¹ Joseph Clark, “Doubt,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 68.

to love God more, to fear for themselves, and to hate sin? . . . Now what is more absurd and contradictory than to suppose that the *work* is of God, and the *workmen* of the Devil! The *cause* of God, but the means of Satan!!”²⁴²

Similar personal testimonies continued to appear in the *Review*. After examining “all the works” of Ellen White, Sybil Whitney concluded that her gift bore more than a human authority and always brought forth positive results.²⁴³ W. H. Ball also believed that because of its positive fruits, Ellen White’s gift could not derive from Satan. “A tree is known by its fruit,” Ball wrote. “Do the testimonies when received and lived out, lead away from God and from heaven? Reject them at once. But if their tendency is to lead us farther and farther away from this dark, sinful world, and nearer to God, to Heaven, and holy angels, then let us *take heed* how we oppose them.”²⁴⁴ Mary Stratton also noted that God has placed the gifts in the church “to guide” the believers “safely through the dangers and perils of these last days.”²⁴⁵ James White and Uriah Smith also argued that Ellen White’s visions always “tend to the purest morality,” “lead us to Christ,” “lead us to the Bible,” and had brought “comfort and consolation to many hearts.”²⁴⁶ E. O. Hammond similarly observed that the visions “exalt Jesus Christ as the Son of God,”

²⁴² D. M. Canright, “A Good Testimony for the Visions,” *RH*, Sept. 18, 1866, 125.

²⁴³ Sybil Whitney, “From Sister Whitney,” *RH*, Mar. 10, 1868, 202.

²⁴⁴ W. H. Ball, “A Warning to Vision Haters,” *RH*, Mar. 23, 1869, 102.

²⁴⁵ Mary Stratton, “The Testimonies,” *RH*, June 29, 1869, 6.

²⁴⁶ [James White and Uriah Smith], “Mutual Obligation,” *RH*, June 13, 1871, 204.

“hold up the law of God as our only rule of right,” “condemn sin,” and “expose the cunning deceptions of Satan.”²⁴⁷

The Seventh-day Adventists continued to distinguish Ellen White from false prophetic manifestations when they answered objections posed by Miles Grant in 1874. Grant compared Ellen White to the Shakers and Ann Lee, and “publicly” accused her of being “influenced by the spirit of a demon.”²⁴⁸ The Seventh-day Adventists challenged Grant’s assertion and responded by comparing and contrasting Ellen White and her messages to those of Ann Lee. First, they noted that Ellen White never claimed to be Christ or compared herself to Christ as Ann Lee did. On the contrary, White led people to Jesus as the only Savior and hope for sinners. Second, Ann Lee claimed to be a “‘spiritual mother’ to the Shakers,” while Ellen White never made “any such claims in reference to S.[eventh] D.[ay] Adventists.” Third, Ann Lee claimed that God and Christ were “dual, male and female.” In his second appearance Jesus manifested himself through Ann Lee, herself, as she “became the female counterpart of Christ.” Ellen White never put forth “such disgusting and blasphemous claims,” Seventh-day Adventists argued.²⁴⁹

George Butler enlarged the Seventh-day Adventist response, contrasting Ellen White to others who claimed to be prophets in the nineteenth century. In May and June 1874, Butler wrote a series of articles entitled “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” A major portion of the material was

²⁴⁷ E. O. Hammond, “The Testimonies,” *RH*, Dec. 2, 1873, 198.

²⁴⁸ “Eld. Grant’s Injustice toward Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874, 2. See also, Miles Grant, “The Shakers,” *The World’s Crisis*, July 5, 1871, 58.

²⁴⁹ “Eld. Grant’s Injustice toward Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874, 2.

repetitive, but Butler made a valuable contribution by making a comparative study between Seventh-day Adventism and other movements that claimed prophetic guidance. Butler agreed with the critics that there had been many fanatical movements led by people who claimed supernatural powers and visions. He specifically examined the falsity of Swedenborg, Ann Lee, Joseph Smith, and spiritualists who “put forth doctrines subversive of the teaching of the Bible”²⁵⁰ and practiced things “abhorrent to true religion.”²⁵¹ Butler, however, disagreed that the presence of false manifestations should disqualify the existence of a genuine prophetic gift. As he put it: “Shall we argue that there certainly will be no genuine manifestations because we know that false ones are in existence? Does the presence of counterfeits demonstrate the absence of all genuine money? Satan has most generally wrought in the world most powerfully when the Lord has been at work.”²⁵² He then went on and argued for the validity of Ellen White’s gift as a genuine manifestation of God’s power. His conclusions expressed the general Seventh-day Adventist understanding concerning Ellen White’s gift: “We take the very rules the Scripture gives us, and they prove the visions of Mrs. White to be genuine. If we cannot accept the conclusion, we must say the Bible has made a failure in its attempt to give us

²⁵⁰ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 12, 1874, 172.

²⁵¹ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 2, 1874, 193.

²⁵² G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, May 12, 1874, 172-173.

rules to test this matter with. Let those who choose that conclusion take it. We prefer to accept that which the word of the Lord teaches to be good.”²⁵³

Like Butler, J. H. Waggoner did not deny the existence of false manifestations. He, however, cautioned people not to ascribe the “works of the Spirit of God” to Satan without examining, investigating, and prayerful consideration of their “nature and its claims.” People who ascribed every supernatural work to Satan, Waggoner claimed, were like the Pharisees during the time of Jesus, who ascribed “the works of Christ to the power of Satan” and blasphemed God Himself. He, therefore, urged people to investigate and compare all manifestations of spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy) to the “divine standard,” the Bible, and to make decisions based on that measurement.²⁵⁴

D. M. Canright also made a contrast between Ellen White and fanatical leaders. “I have frequently come in contact with fanatical persons,” he wrote, “and I have always found them to be full of pretensions, full of pride, ready to give their opinion, boastful of their holiness.” Ellen White, however, was “unassuming,” “modest,” kind-hearted,” and “noble.” Canright reported that he had heard her speak “hundreds of times” and had read “all her testimonies” but had never found anything “immoral” or un-Christian. On the contrary, her testimonies were “the most earnest appeals to obey God, to love Jesus, to believe the Scriptures, and to search them constantly.” Ellen White herself, he noted, was a careful and constant student of the Scriptures. At the end of the article Canright asked the logical question: “Would God allow a deceiver, an imposter, to stand in so prominent

²⁵³ G. I. Butler, “Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 2, 1874, 195.

²⁵⁴ J. H. Waggoner, “The Gifts and the Offices of the Holy Spirit: No. 1,” *RH*, Sept. 23, 1875, 89.

a place in his work for so long a time? If this be so, we fearlessly challenge any one to point to a single example of a similar case in all the history of God's work upon earth. Where did the Lord ever have a special work to be done for his church where a corrupt man has taken hold in that work, and stood at its head all the way through? The very idea is absurd."²⁵⁵ Interestingly, as we shall see in the next chapter, Canright would soon give up Seventh-day Adventism and become one of the bitterest anti-Ellen White advocates.

Before we move to the last couple of objections, we need to note an important footnote related to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy and its genuine manifestation. Seventh-day Adventists never claimed that the true prophetic gift was limited only to Ellen White. They believed that God had always communicated with people through prophets and visions since the separation caused by sin.

Interestingly, the *Review* would publish from time to time articles about people who, according to the Seventh-day Adventists, experienced genuine visionary manifestations.

On April 9, 1867, for example, the *Review* published a vision by Joseph Hoag, a non-Seventh-day Adventist, which many believed was "from God."²⁵⁶ A few weeks later, James White re-published the "remarkable dream" of William Miller from 1847. The dream was published initially in the *Present Truth* in 1850, but now was re-published for those "who have never seen it."²⁵⁷ Other individuals who Seventh-day Adventists

²⁵⁵ D. M. Canright, "A Plain Talk to the Murmurers: Some Facts for Those Who Are Not in Harmony with the Body," *RH*, Apr. 26, 1877, 132.

²⁵⁶ [Uriah Smith], "Joseph Hoag's Vision," *RH*, Apr. 9, 1867, 210. Joseph Hoag's vision was published in various papers according to Smith's account.

²⁵⁷ [James White], "The Remarkable Dream of Wm. Miller," *RH*, Apr. 23, 1867, 233.

believed had manifestations of the Spirit of God included Dr. Bond,²⁵⁸ a non-Seventh-day Adventist, and Nathan Bangs,²⁵⁹ a Seventh-day Adventist, all of whom had visionary experiences.

In 1875, J. H. Waggoner wrote a series of articles aimed at showing the perpetuity of spiritual gifts until the end of time. His list included examples of visionary manifestations seen from the time of the Reformation until his own time. Some of the more prominent names included John Wesley, William Kinkaid, J. B. Finley, and others.²⁶⁰ When Waggoner republished the articles in book form in 1877 he combined these examples in two rather lengthy chapters entitled: “Gifts in the Reformation” and “Gifts in the Present Century.”²⁶¹ Nevertheless, Seventh-day Adventists seemed to agree that the genuine manifestation of the gifts was less and less manifested. The reason for that, as James White saw it, was “unbelief of the professed followers of Christ in the manifestation of spiritual gifts.”²⁶² White cited Matt 13:58, “And he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief,” to prove his point. Thus he concluded:

There is an impious unbelief with many at this day, even of some who profess to take the Bible as their guide, which resembles that of those who, mockingly, said of Christ

²⁵⁸ J. H. Waggoner, “Dr. Bond’s Vision,” *RH*, June 2, 1868, 380-381; Cornell, *Miraculous Powers*, 79-81.

²⁵⁹ H. C. Miller, “Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” *RH*, Oct. 19, 1869, 134.

²⁶⁰ J. H. Waggoner, “The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit: No. 9,” *RH*, Nov. 18, 1875, 153-154; idem, “The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit: No. 10,” *RH*, Nov. 25, 1875, 161-162; idem, “The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit: No. 11,” *RH*, Dec. 2, 1875, 169-170.

²⁶¹ Waggoner, *The Spirit of God*, 91-132.

²⁶² James White, “Spirit of Prophecy,” *RH*, Jan. 22, 1880, 52.

as he hung on the cross, “Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” It is sometimes said in reply to the Bible evidence of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, “Just work a few miracles, and we will believe your doctrine.” It is not God’s plan to gratify such spirits; for should they see as powerful manifestations as were seen in the days of Christ, Paul, and Peter, they would scoffingly attribute it to the power of Satan, or some other cause besides the power of God.²⁶³

Seventh-day Adventists obviously agreed with the critics that there were false prophetic manifestations. At the same time they believed that there were genuine manifestations of the gift of prophecy. Ellen White belonged to the second group, they claimed, and her gift had a supernatural divine origin.

The sixth and the seventh objections dealt with the “gender” and the “test of fellowship” questions. The opposition continued to use these objections in their attempt to disprove Ellen White’s gift. Snook and Brinkerhoff, for example, claimed that the visions “came from the wrong sex” to be a fulfillment of the Joel 2 prophecy.²⁶⁴ Smith gave the general Seventh-day Adventist understanding, replying that according to the prophecy of Joel this gift could be given to “each division of the human race.”²⁶⁵

A few weeks later, in June 1866, Smith elaborated more thoroughly on the “gender” question and the role of the women in an editorial published in the *Review*. He was particularly interested in examining the implications of 1 Cor 14:34-35, “Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Snook and Brinkerhoff, *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God*, 2.

²⁶⁵ [Uriah Smith], “Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Church,” *RH*, June 12, 1866, 10.

anything let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” Smith’s arguments were mostly repetitive from the previous period.²⁶⁶ First, he mentioned that the Old and New Testaments have numerous examples of women prophetesses, such as Deborah (Judg 4:4-9), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20), Anna (Luke 2:36-38), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8, 9). Second, Smith argued that Paul could not speak against the prophecy in Joel 2 giving a rule which would contradict its fulfillment “on the part of the daughters and handmaids.” It was true, Smith wrote, that Paul gave directions for how women should behave in the church (1 Cor 11:5), but he never forbade them to speak in the church. Smith then concluded that in 1 Cor 14:34-35 Paul was probably trying to correct “wrongs and irregularities that existed in the Corinthian church.” Thus, indirectly, Smith did not see anything wrong with a woman having the prophetic gift. He even argued that if a woman “received any particular influence from God to enable her to teach . . . she was to obey it.”²⁶⁷

Canright, similarly to Smith, also gave scriptural confirmation of women prophetesses and noted that “it is not so rare a thing for women to prophesy as you have thought it was.”²⁶⁸ G. I. Butler likewise used the same biblical arguments to show that it was up to God “to choose his own agents” regardless of gender.²⁶⁹ J. N. Andrews made a

²⁶⁶ See for example: S. C. Welcome, “Shall Women Keep Silence in the Churches?” *RH*, Feb. 23, 1860, 109-110.

²⁶⁷ [Uriah Smith], “Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches,” *RH*, June 26, 1866. 28.

²⁶⁸ D. M. Canright, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 2,” *RH*, Jan. 28, 1868, 98.

²⁶⁹ G. I. Butler, “Vision and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 9, 1874, 202.

contextual study of 1 Cor 14:34-36 and 1 Tim 2:12, the two principle passages cited against participation of women in religious duties, and arrived at the same conclusions. Like Smith, he noted that Paul was not against participation of women per se, but against the disorderly state of things done during worship. After all, it appeared that women labored with Paul in the gospel ministry (Phil 4:3) and served as deaconesses, teachers, and prophets during his time according to Rom 16:1; Acts 18:26; Rom 16:12, and Acts 21:8-9.²⁷⁰ James White agreed with Andrews and the others that Paul was “correcting existing errors and establishing order in the church of Christ” and not necessarily forbidding women to participate in the work of God. His examples included the ones given by Canright, Butler, and Andrews.²⁷¹ Apparently, for Seventh-day Adventists Ellen White’s gender was not a sound argument to disprove her prophetic gift.

Seventh-day Adventists also briefly addressed the “test of fellowship” question. As in the previous periods, Butler noted that although they believed Ellen White’s visions to be genuine, they never made them “in any sense a test of fellowship.” Seventh-day Adventists continued to hold the view that people were “perfectly free to come to their own conclusions concerning” the visions. In fact, Butler noted that there were many Seventh-day Adventists who were initially skeptical towards the visions but who after “much investigation and careful observation” came to the conclusion that the visions were from God. Butler also urged Seventh-day Adventists not to feel embarrassed because they accepted the visions as true and genuine.²⁷² As we will see, Ellen White

²⁷⁰ J. N. Andrews, “May Women Speak in Meeting?” *RH*, Jan. 2, 1879, 4.

²⁷¹ James White, “Women in the Church,” *RH*, May 29, 1879, 172.

²⁷² G. I. Butler, “Vision and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?” *RH*, June 9, 1874, 202.

would express the same opinion regarding the visions being a “test of fellowship.” But before we examine Ellen White’s self-understanding between 1863 and 1881, we will look at General Conference resolutions about Ellen White’s gift of prophecy that give the official Seventh-day Adventist position on the topic.

Responses to Objections through General Conference Resolutions

As in the previous periods, another way through which Seventh-day Adventists responded to opposition of their belief in Ellen White’s prophetic gift was through General Conference resolutions. In the period between 1863 and 1881 we find General Conference resolutions affirming the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the prophetic gift at almost every General Conference session. The resolutions affirmed three major points (understandings) of Seventh-day Adventists concerning the gift of prophecy. First, the resolutions affirmed the belief in the perpetuity of the doctrine of spiritual gifts until the second coming of Jesus. In 1867, for example, the fifth annual session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists “Resolved, That we express our continued faith in the perpetuity of Spiritual gifts [*sic*] during the gospel dispensation, and our gratitude to God that he has intimately connected the spirit of prophecy with the proclamation of the third angel’s message.”²⁷³ In 1870 the Seventh-day Adventists affirmed again the “doctrine of the perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts,” and “professed to believe that ‘the spirit of prophecy’ was manifested among us as ‘the remnant,’ (Rev. 12:17; 19:10).” They also warned people of the dangers of disregarding or neglecting the “testimonies” and

²⁷³ Uriah Smith and J. M. Aldrich, “Business Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 28, 1867, 284.

confessed their “weakness and inability to carry on this sacred work to divine acceptance, without their [Ellen White’s testimonies’] aid.”²⁷⁴ A resolution from 1873 stated that “we renew our expressions of confidence in the Bible doctrine of Spiritual Gifts, and of our appreciation, in some degree, of the kindness and mercy of God in favoring this people with the Testimonies of his Spirit to the church.”²⁷⁵ In 1879, an appeal was made to Seventh-day Adventist ministers to consider it their duty “to teach the Scriptural view of the gift of prophecy” among believers and “the relation it sustains to the work of God in which we are engaged.”²⁷⁶ The General Conference in 1881 recognized again “the manifestation of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy, as one of the distinguishing features of the work of the third angel’s message” and resolved that ministers must teach people the scriptural evidences of the perpetuity of “these gifts.”²⁷⁷

Second, the General Conference resolutions expressed the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the gift of prophecy as manifested through Ellen White in particular. From 1863 to 1881 the Adventists became open in their public affirmation of Ellen White and her prophetic role for the church. The 1869 General Conference resolution summarized the Seventh-day Adventist attitude towards Ellen White in the context of the Snook and Brinkerhoff separation from the movement. It stated:

²⁷⁴ Uriah Smith and James White, “Business Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Mar. 22, 1870, 109.

²⁷⁵ Uriah Smith and G. I. Butler, “Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Mar. 25, 1873, 116.

²⁷⁶ Uriah Smith and James White, “General Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 4, 1879, 184.

²⁷⁷ Uriah Smith and S. N. Haskell, “General Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 20, 1881, 392.

Resolved, That our faith and confidence in the Gifts of the Spirit of God, so graciously vouchsafed to us in these last days, are not only unshaken by the attacks of the opposers of the truth, but greatly strengthened and increased by the warnings we have received in times of danger, the counsels and admonitions when we have erred, and the comfort in our afflictions; as well as by the purity of their teachings, and the respect and reverence they produce for the word of God. And we earnestly recommend to all the scattered flock a more careful reading of, and more strict compliance with, the Testimonies to the Church.²⁷⁸

The ninth annual session in 1871 openly used the name of Ellen White for the first time. The resolution “*Resolved*, That we re-affirm our abiding confidence in the Testimonies of Sr. White to the church, as the teaching of the Spirit of God, and that we have each year continual and growing evidence that they are such.”²⁷⁹ In 1877 the church expressed again its “continued conviction that we are largely indebted to the gift of prophecy, as manifested through sister White, for the harmony and unity which this people enjoy.”²⁸⁰ In 1881, after the death of James White, the General Conference expressed their condolences to “sister, Ellen G. White, and the other members of her family” and resolved to

renew the expressions of our confidence in the spirit of prophecy, which has acted so prominent a part thus far in directing the efforts of our people in giving the last message of mercy to the world; and that we will earnestly pray that God in his infinite mercy may remember the humble instrument he has employed in connection with the same, and impart to her in her present enfeebled condition the strength necessary to

²⁷⁸ Uriah Smith and J. N. Andrews, “Business Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, May 25, 1869, 173.

²⁷⁹ Uriah Smith and James White, “Business Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Feb. 14, 1871, 68.

²⁸⁰ James White and A. B. Oyen, “Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Oct. 4, 1877, 105.

enable her to visit the different parts of the field, and actively participate in such general gatherings as may be held from time to time.²⁸¹

The 1881 conference also acknowledged that to neglect the gift of prophecy and its special instructions would result in a “decline of spirituality and true godliness.” Thus the session appealed to believers to pay attention to the instruction given to the church “through this agency.”²⁸²

Third, the General Conference resolutions also advised wider distribution of Ellen White’s books and testimonies. The aim was to acquaint people within and without the Seventh-day Adventist movement with Ellen White’s life and ministry and prevent the prejudice that existed against her prophetic gift. The General Conferences in 1864 and 1867, for example, recommended Ellen White’s book *An Appeal to Mothers* to parents, guardians, and youth and advised for “general circulation” of the book.²⁸³ In 1868 Seventh-day Adventists endorsed the creation of a special “Book Fund,” whose major object was the printing and circulation of Ellen White’s books and placing them “in the hands of honest inquirers.”²⁸⁴ As we have seen, the “book fund” program grew gradually and became a major avenue for distributing books penned by Ellen White. The General

²⁸¹ Uriah Smith and S. N. Haskell, “The General Conference Business Proceedings,” *RH*, Dec. 13, 1881, 376.

²⁸² Uriah Smith and S. N. Haskell, “General Conference Business Proceedings,” *RH*, Dec. 20, 1881, 392.

²⁸³ Uriah Smith and John Byington, “Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 31, 1864, 1; Uriah Smith and J. M. Aldrich, “Business Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 28, 1867, 284.

²⁸⁴ Uriah Smith and J. N. Andrews, “Business Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH*, May 26, 1868, 356.

Conference in 1869 recommended the reading of Ellen White's *Testimonies*, which contained important counsels for the end-time people of God.²⁸⁵

An important recommendation was made during the 1873 General Conference when the delegates asked the Executive Committee of the General Conference to prepare a work giving the reasons for "believing the testimonies of sister White" as being a genuine manifestation of the "Holy Spirit."²⁸⁶ Although no specific work that we can point to resulted from that motion, several apologetical works giving the Seventh-day Adventist reasons for believing in the gift of prophecy and Ellen White were published in the next few years.²⁸⁷

Seventh-day Adventists continued to support the distribution of Ellen White's works in the later years of the 1870s. During the Seventeenth General Conference Session in 1878, a recommendation was made for a "special effort" to distribute Ellen White's *Spirit of Prophecy* series and the *Testimonies* into "the hands of all our brethren." These books were to be placed "in the library of each church" and "in the hands of scattered brethren" so that everyone could read them.²⁸⁸ In a special session of the General Conference in the spring of 1879, a similar recommendation was made to each

²⁸⁵ Uriah Smith and J. N. Andrews, "Business Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *RH*, May 25, 1869, 172.

²⁸⁶ Uriah Smith and G. I. Butler, "Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S. D. A. General Conference," *RH*, Nov. 25, 1873, 190.

²⁸⁷ See M. E. Cornell, *Miraculous Powers* (1875); *RH Extra*, Apr. 14, 1874; G. I. Butler, "Visions and Prophecy: Have They Been Manifested among Seventh-day Adventists?" *RH*, May 12 to June 9, 1874; J. H. Waggoner, "The Gifts and Offices of the Holy Spirit," *RH*, Sept. 23 to Dec. 9, 1875; idem, *The Spirit of God*.

²⁸⁸ Uriah Smith and James White, "Seventeenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH*, Oct. 24, 1878, 129.

state conference to use “every proper effort” to introduce Ellen White’s writings to all of their churches “throughout the country.”²⁸⁹

At the regular session in December 1879, a special committee on the circulation of the writings of Ellen White recommended to the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association that it publish an “attractive form” of her writings that would be of interest to the secular reading public and that could be placed “in public libraries,” “reading rooms,” “shipboard[s]” and other places.²⁹⁰ The committee also recommended to the Publishing Association that it issue a booklet containing “the early life and labors” of Ellen White and her relationship to the Seventh-day Adventist movement. This new volume was to be used by “our ministers in new fields, and among those first becoming acquainted with her connection with this cause.” The committee further recommended “the publication of a small edition of her earliest writings” that were out of print. It also continued to encourage the churches to raise funds “for the purpose of increasing the circulation of these [Ellen White’s] writings” and “placing them in public libraries, reading-rooms, and other locations where they will be open to the reading public” and “the families of the very poor.”²⁹¹ In 1880 the General Conference encouraged young men and women “to engage in the work of canvassing” and the distribution of some of Ellen White’s works.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Uriah Smith and D. M. Canright, “Business Proceedings of the Fourth Special Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Apr. 24, 1879, 133.

²⁹⁰ Uriah Smith and James White, “General Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 4, 1879, 184.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² Uriah Smith and James White, “General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Oct. 21, 1880, 268.

It is obvious that the official resolutions of the Seventh-day Adventists were related to both the internal and the external critics of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism in general between 1863 and 1881. The denomination's intentional efforts to publicly promote Ellen White's writings aimed to show that they had nothing to hide concerning their understanding and belief in Ellen White as a modern-day prophetess. Their resolutions indicated that the denomination's leaders believed that once people acquainted themselves with her as a person and with her writings they would conclude in favor of her prophetic gift and would accept her as a genuine prophetess of God.

Ellen White's Self-Understanding of Her Prophetic Gift

Ellen White's self-understanding in the period from 1863 to 1881 can be seen in two realms. First, as in the previous period, she continued to see her prophetic role in the practical realm--fighting controversies and using her gift to bring unity among believers. She became personally involved in the controversies and addressed some of the critics' new arguments against her prophetic gift. Second, Ellen White gave some important theological insights on her understanding of the prophetic gift and her role within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The questions that she addressed included such issues as the relationship between her gift and the Bible, the origin of her visionary manifestations, the "human side" of receiving and relating her visions, the different types of testimonies received, and how to deal with those who could not accept her gift and visions.

The first aspect of Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic gift between 1863 and 1881 was related to practical issues. Ellen White believed that an important part of her prophetic work was to deal with controversies over the gift of prophecy and to

bring unity among Seventh-day Adventist believers. God's ideal for his people, she noted, was to be a unit that would "see eye to eye, and be of the same mind and of the same judgment." This, however, could not be accomplished "without a clear, pointed, living testimony in the church."²⁹³ It is because of this belief that she was personally involved in the internal and external crises that faced the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

When Snook and Brinkerhoff caused the first ministerial controversy related to Ellen White's gift in the mid-1860s, the Whites went to Iowa and met with them "face to face." The two ministers had divided the believers by giving a number of false reports about James and Ellen White and had prejudiced many against her prophetic work. Ellen White reported that she and her husband "labored with intense feeling to save the poor sheep who had been wounded and torn, and left bleeding by these unfaithful shepherds."²⁹⁴ She had also opportunities to personally answer questions related to her prophetic gift and let people acquaint themselves with her and her work. As was her practice, Ellen White gave the liberty to each believer to make a decision about her gift based on their personal observations. She wrote: "God's Spirit attended our labors, and all who wished to see had an opportunity to see the influence of error, and the spirit of darkness, and all are at liberty to choose and take their position with the rebellious or take their stand with those who are on the side of God and the truth, who have labored

²⁹³ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 24* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1875), 39-40.

²⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, "Our Late Experience," MS 1, 1866, CAR, AU.

earnestly, faithfully, and unselfishly in this great cause, who have endured trial, reproach, and fought with courage the battles of the Lord.”²⁹⁵

Nearly a decade later, when Miles Grant compared Ellen White to other false prophets and fanatics, she personally defended herself against such accusations. In a letter to Loughborough dated August 24, 1874, Ellen White wrote: “I hereby testify in the fear of God that the charges of Miles Grant, of Mrs. Burdick, and others published in the *Crisis* [*sic*] are not true. The statements in reference to my course in forty-four are false.”²⁹⁶ She then went on and answered some of the accusations raised by Grant. Furthermore, she rejected being compared with the many fanatical movements of her time. To the contrary, through the years part of her “unpleasant duty” as a prophetess was to fight fanaticism. “We had no part in it,” she wrote, “only to bear a testimony decidedly against it wherever we met it. This reproof borne to those who engaged in fanaticism set many against me.”²⁹⁷

The second aspect of Ellen White’s self-understanding in the period from 1863 to 1881 was the theological insights that she provided concerning her prophetic gift. First, she noted the relationship between her gift and the Bible. In agreement with the general Seventh-day Adventist understanding, she viewed the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. “God’s Word is our standard,” she penned.²⁹⁸ Again she noted that the Bible

²⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, “The Case of B. F. Snook,” MS 1, 1865, CAR, AU.

²⁹⁶ Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 27* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1876), 137.

was “sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind” and “to be understood” by those who truly wanted to understand it. However, since there were those who claimed to follow the Scriptures but were living “in direct opposition” to their teaching, God sent “plain and pointed testimonies” (a reference to her prophetic gift) to bring them back “to the word [the Bible] they have neglected to follow.”²⁹⁹ “What can I say to you, my brethren and sisters,” she wrote in 1880, “to awaken in you an interest to become Bible readers and Bible doers? What can I say to you that will arouse your moral sensibilities to take this precious volume and make the most of it in your families and in your college? . . . ‘Were there no Bible there would be no sources of instructions in duties and virtues.’ Bring the Bible into your families; make it your textbook. With your children around you, read it, explain it, teach them to be interested in it.”³⁰⁰

Interestingly, when some people tried to use her gift for guidance instead of going to the Bible, she advised:

Many come to us with the inquiry, Shall I do this? Shall I engage in this enterprise? Or, in regard to my dress, shall I wear this article or that? I tell them, You profess to be disciples of Christ. Study your Bibles. Read carefully and prayerfully the life of our dear Saviour, when he lived among men upon the earth. Imitate his life, and you will not be found straying from the narrow path. We utterly refuse to be conscience for you. If we tell you just what you must do, you will look to us to guide you, instead of going directly to Jesus for yourselves. Your experience will be founded in us. You must have an experience for yourselves, which shall be founded in God.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 18* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 148.

³⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, “The Bible and the School,” MS 4, 1880, CAR, AU. See also *idem*, *Testimony No. 19* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 72; *idem*, *Testimony No. 20* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1871), 174-176.

³⁰¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 16* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 9.

Again, writing about the importance of the diversity of the gifts and unity in the church, Ellen White noted that Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal beliefs came through “careful searching of the Scriptures and through much prayer,”³⁰² not Ellen White. Thus she affirmed the primacy of the Bible for faith and practice. The function of her gift was to bring people back to the Bible and make them realize its importance in their Christian life. In this way, Ellen White responded to many of her critics who claimed that she and the Seventh-day Adventists had another rule of faith, namely her writings.

It was in this context that she defended herself against such charges made by Miles Grant in the early 1870s. She usually did not take part in such debates, but this time she felt the need to respond and to correct people’s misconception about her role as a prophetess. In a letter to Loughborough in 1874 she wrote that the charges raised against her were false and explained some of the accusations. On the issue of the “shut door,” for example, she admitted that after the time of the Great Disappointment in 1844 she did believe for some time that “no more sinners would be converted.” “But” she wrote, “*I never had a vision that no more sinners would be converted.* And [I] am clear and free to state [that] no one has ever heard me say or has read from my pen statements which will justify them in the charges they have made against me upon this point.” She then explained her view of the shut- and open-door doctrines in the context of the heavenly sanctuary.³⁰³

³⁰² Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 24*, 164.

³⁰³ Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU. Emphasis supplied.

Ellen White, together with other leading Seventh-day Adventists, acknowledged that none of their doctrinal beliefs came through her visions. It is true that sometimes God used her gift to confirm particular doctrines (as was the case with the time of keeping the Sabbath), but it was only after they had investigated the matter in the Bible. Ellen White's gift was mainly concerned with the practical implementation of theology in the lives of the believers and not with the actual making of that theology. God used her gift to bring unity of faith by confirming biblical doctrines, pointing out sins, and helping people change their lives.

A second theological implication of Ellen White's self-understanding was her belief in the divine origin of her gift. Although she distinguished herself from the Bible and did not claim to initiate doctrines, she continued to believe that her gift had a divine origin. Like the critics, she believed that there were false visionary manifestations. However, she disagreed with them as to her being put in that category and held that her gift was a genuine display of God's power. Like other Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White held that the criteria for discerning true and false manifestations were the Bible, the life of the person who claimed the visions, and the circumstances under which they were given.³⁰⁴

When some accused her of being involved in the "fanaticism of creeping," for example, Ellen White denied it. "In regard to the charges of my introducing and engaging in the fanaticism of creeping," she wrote, "I will state in the fear of God I never crept as a religious duty and never sanctioned or gave the slightest encouragement to this voluntary

³⁰⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 13* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1867), 1-2.

humility. I ever bore the testimony God gave me that He did not require this groveling exercise of His children.” This “fruit of fanaticism,” as she called it, was not found in the Word of God but was man-made. As in the previous period, she considered part of her “unpleasant duty” to be fighting such fanatical extremes.³⁰⁵ Thus she disagreed with the critics who made her a part of a fanatical movement and she was confident in the divine origin of her gift.

Ellen White also claimed that whenever she received a message from God she only acted as the spokesperson. “Those who are reproved by the Spirit of God should not rise up against the humble instrument,” she wrote. “It is God, and not the erring mortal, that has spoken to save them from ruin.” She also noted that those who accepted her testimonies as being from God did not doubt or reject her. It was only those who did not like the reproofs who expressed doubts.³⁰⁶ A prime example of that fact was D. M. Canright. When she wrote to him a critical testimony in 1876, she noted the following:

Satan has been using you as his agent to insinuate doubts, and to reiterate insinuations and misrepresentations, which have originated in an unsanctified heart which God would have cleansed from its pollution. But you refused to be instructed; refused correction; rejected reproof and followed your own will and way. . . . This work 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 half-way work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil. You are, in arraying yourself against the servants of God, either doing a work of God, or for the devil.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, Aug. 24, 1874, Letter L-2c, CAR, AU.

³⁰⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 23* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1873), 9-10.

³⁰⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 27*, 128-130, 132.

Then Ellen White went on to express her full confidence and belief in the divine origin of her prophetic gift:

God has set me as a reprover of his people; and as he has laid upon me the heavy burden, just as surely will he make them to whom this message is given responsible for the manner in which they treat it. God will not be trifled with, and they who despise his work will receive according to their works. I have not chosen this unpleasant labor for myself. It is not a work which will bring to me the favor or praise of men. It is a work which but few will appreciate. But they who seek to make my labor doubly hard by their misrepresentations, jealous suspicions, and unbelief, thus creating prejudice in the minds of others against the testimonies God has given me, and limiting my work, have the matter to settle with God, while I shall go forward as Providence and my brethren may open the way before me. I shall do what I can in the name and strength of my Redeemer. I shall warn, and counsel, and reprove, and encourage, as the Spirit of God dictates, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. My duty is not to please myself, but to do the will of my Heavenly Father, who has given me my work.³⁰⁸

A third theological point in Ellen White's self-understanding of her gift was its human side. While Ellen White believed that her messages came from God, she never claimed to be infallible. On the contrary, she believed that God used imperfect people for His work. After all, she struggled with right and wrong in her professional and spiritual life like everyone else. When she published some problematic counsel in *Testimony No. 11* (1867), for example, she admitted that she had "yielded" her judgment to that of other people and in this she "did wrong." "I must know my own duty better than others can know it for me," she wrote, "especially on matters which God has revealed to me." She explained later that she had published the material in haste and did not take time to contemplate and comprehend the full message that God had given to her.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 132-133.

³⁰⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 12* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1867), 90-91.

Ellen White also shared from time to time her personal struggles with God and herself. In 1868, for instance, she wrote that “Bro. and Sr. White are striving for purity of life, and to bring forth unto holiness; yet they are nothing but erring mortals.”³¹⁰ In 1880 in a letter to her husband, she noted again that she was not “what I ought to be, or what Jesus would have me. I see that I must have more of the spirit of the Master. . . . We have battles to fight with ourselves.” Interestingly, she also admitted of her struggle to give reproving testimonies to people without having an accusing spirit. Thus she needed more of the “matchless love” of Jesus.³¹¹

A fourth theological point in Ellen White’s self-understanding of her gift related to the different types of testimonies and messages that she wrote. She described two types of testimonies: one “bearing a general application” for believers as a whole, and the other “personal” testimonies to specific individuals and their particular circumstances.³¹² Since many of the individual messages contained “reproofs” and “instructions” which could “apply to hundreds or thousands of others in similar condition,” it became a practice for her to republish many of the personal testimonies as general messages for all.³¹³ The republished version, however, did not bear the name of the original recipient.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 16*, 9.

³¹¹ Ellen G. White to James White, March 18, 1880, Letter W-5, CAR, AU.

³¹² Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 13*, 8, 12.

³¹³ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 14* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 2-3.

³¹⁴ See for example: Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 12*, 69; idem, *Testimony for the Church No. 19*, 73; idem, *Testimony for the Church No. 24*, 148-181.

Ellen White's decision to republish some testimonies was strengthened by a dream that she had about a grove of evergreens. Ellen White was laboring with some others among the trees and observed their condition. She noticed that some trees were fading, while others were turning yellow or were not growing. "My work," she saw in the dream, was "to explain to the workmen the different causes of the want of prosperity of all these trees. This was necessary from the fact that trees in other grounds were liable to be affected from different causes as these had been, and the knowledge of the cause of their not flourishing, and how they should be cultivated and treated, must be made known."³¹⁵

Concerning the republication of individual testimonies, a few years later she noted again that individuals "who are not singled out personally yet are as much in fault as those who are reproved, may be warned through the reproofs given to others. . . . I saw that all should search their own hearts and lives closely, to see if the mistake for which others were corrected . . . did not apply to their own cases. If so, they should feel that these reproofs were given especially for them and should make a practical application of the reproofs and counsel given, as though they were especially addressed to them."³¹⁶ Thus Ellen White believed that many of her personal testimonies had wider general application to all believers and saw the need for their republication.

Giving counsels to individuals or specific groups, however, was an emotionally painful and stressful experience. Ellen White shares an incident, for instance, in which she wrote a critical testimony to the Battle Creek church, the church that she attended.

³¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 14*, 2-3.

³¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 20*, 163-164.

She was travelling with her husband at that time. When they returned to Battle Creek, they were met with “coldness” and an “accusing spirit” because of her testimony. “I was so grieved I knew not what to say,” she wrote. “We felt so disappointed and distressed that I told two of our leading brethren that I did not feel at home, as we met.”³¹⁷ Obviously, doing her prophetic work was not an easy task and was emotionally stressful to Ellen White.

A fifth point shedding light on how Ellen White viewed her own work was related to how people responded to her testimonies and prophetic ministry. There were some who received and accepted her messages, others who acknowledged them to be right but disregarded their advice, and a third group that did not accept but rebelled against her messages.³¹⁸ It was because of the latter two groups that Ellen White would sometimes question her prophetic work and its continual effectiveness among the people after more than twenty years of prophetic ministry. In 1868, for example, she expressed her inner struggles when she wrote that “the task of so much writing seemed more than I could endure in my weary condition. A feeling of discouragement came over me, and I sank into a feeble state, and remained so several days, frequently fainting. In this state of body and mind, I called in question my duty to write so much, to so many persons, some of them very unworthy. It seemed to me that there certainly was a mistake in this matter

³¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 13*, 16.

³¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 14*, 1-2.

somewhere.”³¹⁹ After J. N. Andrews and others offered prayers for her, however, she claimed to have had a dream in which God confirmed her prophetic work.³²⁰

The dream described a person (Jesus Christ) who brought to her a web of white cloth and asked her to cut it into garments for persons of all sizes, characters, and “circumstances in life.” “I felt discouraged at the amount of work before me,” Ellen White wrote, “and stated that I had been engaged in cutting garments for others, for more than twenty years, and my labors had not been appreciated, neither did I see that my work had accomplished much good.” Then Jesus replied to her: “Cut out the garments. That is your duty. The loss is not yours, but mine. God sees not as man sees. He lays out the work that he would have done, and you do not know which will prosper, this or that. . . . Cut out the garments. Your release has not yet come.”³²¹ Thus Ellen White’s gift was re-confirmed for her personally and she continued to play a part in the Seventh-day Adventist Church during subsequent years.

But as in the previous period, Ellen White continued to give her advice concerning the Seventh-day Adventist attitude towards those who rejected her gift. She again spoke of different approaches towards those who were unacquainted with her and her work and those who knew her well but still rejected her gift. For example, in 1863, she wrote: “I have been shown that some, especially in Iowa, make the visions a rule to

³¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 15* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868), 2.

³²⁰ As seen in this dissertation, Ellen White had had similar experiences of doubt regarding her prophetic gift in the previous periods. However, after each experience she claimed that her gift was confirmed by God.

³²¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 15*, 2-3.

measure all by, and have taken a course which my husband and myself have never pursued in our labors.” She explained again that those who did not know her and were skeptical towards “anything bearing the name of visions” had to be given time and opportunity to acquaint themselves with her work and were not to be dealt with in the same way as those who had “much light and experience in the visions.” In fact, Ellen White worried that demanding people to accept her gift without giving them adequate time could bring bitter consequences. As she put it, “some have been required to endorse the visions when they could not conscientiously do so, and in this way some honest souls have been driven to take positions against the visions, and against the body, which they never would have taken, had their case been managed with discretion and mercy.”³²²

On the other hand, Ellen White suggested that those who were convinced of her gift but purposefully rejected her messages had to be “dealt faithfully with, for their influence is endangering those who lack experience.” Thus Ellen White advised the Seventh-day Adventist leadership to examine each case individually but to remember that “we are all erring mortals” and that Christ loved us “although we err.”³²³

It should be noted that Ellen White’s self-understanding did not change significantly in the period from 1863 to 1881. She continued to use her gift in the practical realm and work for unity among believers. She also developed further some of her theological understanding concerning her prophetic work and reconfirmed her divine calling as a modern prophetess of God. At the same time she was not forceful towards

³²² Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 9* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1863), 26.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

people who questioned her gift and was willing to give them time to examine her life and ministry.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the prophetic gift of Ellen White from 1863 to 1881. The Sabbatarians, who officially organized into a denomination in 1863 and became known as Seventh-day Adventists, continued to defend their stand on the validity of Ellen White's prophetic gift. Several important developments can be noted. First, between 1863 and 1881 the Seventh-day Adventists had to deal with both internal and external critics of Ellen White. On one hand, the gift of prophecy brought the first internal ministerial controversy within the newly organized denomination when two Seventh-day Adventist ministers, B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff, questioned its truthfulness. On the other hand, the denomination had to defend itself against external criticism of Ellen White's prophetic gift and its relationship to the whole theological package accepted by Seventh-day Adventism. In reality, people like William Sheldon and Miles Grant viewed the newly formed denomination as being another cult led by a false religious leader who was a self-proclaimed prophet. Thus the Seventh-day Adventist Church had to defend its image and its belief in the modern display of the gift of prophecy. Between 1863 and 1881 they not only responded to new specific objections but reaffirmed their belief in Ellen White. The doctrine of spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, became part of the first Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal statement of beliefs, published in 1872. Although the document was never officially adopted, it acknowledged the gift of prophecy as being an inseparable part of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal package and one of the denomination's identifying marks.

In addition, there were General Conference resolutions that reaffirmed the acceptance of Ellen White's gift by the new denomination. Seventh-day Adventists saw themselves as God's true followers, an end-time people who kept the commandments of God and had the gift of prophecy manifested among them. One result of the attacks on Ellen White was to more firmly establish Seventh-day Adventism's belief in her prophetic gift rather than to undermine it.

A second thing we noted in this chapter is that although many of the arguments against Ellen White's gift were repetitive from the previous period, there were some new nuances that the Seventh-day Adventists had to address in the period from 1863 to 1881. The main accusations were again related to issues dealing with the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White. Two of the main criticisms that the Seventh-day Adventists had to address were accusations that they considered Ellen White's writings equal to or above the Bible and that many of her earlier writings had been "suppressed" because of doctrinal inconsistencies with the Scriptures as the supreme authority. The Seventh-day Adventists not only denied such accusations but pointed to historical facts against such conclusions. For one thing, they noted that part of Ellen White's prophetic work was to point people back to the Scriptures as the supreme authority. The Seventh-day Adventists continued to hold to their original position that there was a distinction between the Bible and Ellen White's writings and that the two did not stand on equal ground. Moreover, they continued to defend their stand that the Bible was their only rule of faith and practice.

Concerning the "suppression" question, Seventh-day Adventists admitted that parts of Ellen White's writings were not republished, but that this was done for practical and stylistic reasons rather than avoidance of doctrinal inconsistencies, as the critics

claimed. Since Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in verbal inspiration of the Bible or Ellen White's writings, practical changes and non-republication of some of her writings did not invalidate her prophetic gift. As we will see in the next chapter, the question of "suppression" of Ellen White's writings and its relationship to prophetic inspiration would become the main point of discussion in the 1880s and the Seventh-day Adventists would address the issue further.

A third development in the years running from 1863 to 1881, in contrast to the previous period, was that Seventh-day Adventists became intentional in their public promotion of Ellen White and her writings. It seems that this new development can be explained in the context of the charges of suppression against Ellen White and the image of Seventh-day Adventists in the public arena. After all, the critics published the first books against Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism during these years, in which they pictured the new denomination as being part of the fanatical edge of Christianity. Seventh-day Adventists wanted to clarify those misconceptions. First, they sought to make Ellen White's writings available to all within and without the denomination so that people could acquaint themselves with her works firsthand and make an intelligent decision about her prophetic claim. A special fund for distribution and promotion of Ellen White's books was established and many of her books were given to public libraries. Second, the Seventh-day Adventists aimed to make clear to the public that despite their belief in Ellen White's prophetic gift they were mainstream Protestant Christians who valued the Bible as their only rule of faith. Ellen White's writings were never considered to be another Bible but had a different function. Ellen White made a personal effort in this respect as well.

A fourth development during the years from 1863 to 1881 was that Seventh-day Adventists became very intentional in explaining Ellen White's prophetic role to the believers. One of the ways of achieving that goal was through sending ministers to areas where arguments against Ellen White flourished. Their work included the education of believers regarding the biblical foundation of the gift of prophecy doctrine and answering questions that brought doubts concerning Ellen White's prophetic gift. As we noted, Ellen White also became personally involved in explaining her ministerial role for the church.

Seventh-day Adventists also used the press to address questions posed by the critics of Ellen White. Articles, pamphlets, and books were published and distributed widely for people seeking answers to questions about the validity of Ellen White's prophetic gift. These approaches seemed to pay dividends, since many new believers did not know much about Ellen White or have a clear understanding about her prophetic role for the church.

Fifth, the period extending from 1863 to 1881 witnessed Seventh-day Adventists making a special effort to distinguish Ellen White from contemporary false prophets. Again, the new church considered itself to be a Protestant denomination and not a cult based on a visionary leader, as were the Mormons or the Shakers. Ellen White, the Seventh-day Adventists argued, never claimed to have such power or authority. On the other hand, Seventh-day Adventists for the first time used the "supernatural" argument to prove the extraordinary element of Ellen White's prophetic gift. Up to that time they seemed reluctant to use such arguments since many false prophets seemed to exhibit similar paranormal displays. The Seventh-day Adventists, however, were forced to use the supernatural argument for the authenticity of Ellen White's visions because of critics

who claimed that there was nothing extraordinary about her visionary manifestations. James White, John Loughborough, D. M. Canright, and others would describe Ellen White's supernatural condition while in vision and use it as a proof for the legitimacy of her prophetic gift.

Ellen White's self-understanding did not change dramatically between 1863 and 1881. She continued to see her main role as being in the practical realm. As in the previous period, Ellen White continued to speak on the importance of unity and personally addressed controversies related to the gift of prophecy. As before, she also found it necessary to explain her role to people and to defend her prophetic gift.

Between 1863 and 1881 Ellen White also provided some additional theological insights regarding how she perceived her prophetic gift. It was important for her to explain that her messages were not to be considered equal to the Bible or viewed as having the same authority. Her desire was for her critics and people in general to understand that her gift belonged to the list of biblical spiritual gifts that God could use for specific purposes and as such it was not to be confused with the Bible. On the other hand, not claiming authority equal to the Bible, she argued, did not invalidate the divine origin of her visions. Ellen White believed she had the true gift of prophecy. During the period covered in this chapter, she also became much more personally involved in responding to certain critics concerning the validity of her gift and its role for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Another important perspective related to Ellen White's self-understanding of her gift was her humanity. She explained that being a true prophet of God, which she believed she was, did not mean being an "infallible" human being. She held that God had always worked with imperfect people and admitted to struggling with right and wrong

decisions in her prophetic ministry as well as in her spiritual life. This, however, did not invalidate her prophetic gift, she believed.

Ellen White also struggled over the question of continuing her prophetic work. Since some reacted bitterly toward her testimonies of reproof and questioned her divine revelations, she wondered if her work as a prophet was not nearly done. As we have seen, she did not question the divine origin of her prophetic gift, but simply thought that her prophetic work might be done. For Ellen White, as for any of God's prophets, having the gift of prophecy was not only a privilege but brought its own struggles and doubts. Moreover, she did not consider the gift of prophecy as a life-long gift, but something that God might use for a particular time or circumstance. Ellen White would continue to deal with similar theological questions in the later years of her life.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church would continue to deal with issues related to the gift of prophecy between 1882 and 1889. The decision to republish some of Ellen White's early writings and her testimonies in the early 1880s would bring a new wave of opposition concerning the issue of "suppression" and its relationship to divine revelation and inspiration. Seventh-day Adventists would have to examine the new questions and their meaning in relation to Ellen White and refine further their understanding of the gift of prophecy. That is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

A FURTHER REFINEMENT OF THE ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF ELLEN G. WHITE'S PROPHETIC GIFT, 1882-1889

The period from 1882 to 1889 marked a further refinement of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy of Ellen White. By 1882 Seventh-day Adventists had responded to internal and external critics who questioned their understanding and belief in Ellen White's prophetic gift. The denomination had not only affirmed but also started to promote publicly Ellen White's works and ministry. As a result, the doctrine of spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy in particular became an integral part of the Seventh-day Adventist theological package. And while the major issues and nuances related to Ellen White's prophetic gift had been discussed and examined by the beginning of the 1880s, the issue of Ellen White's inspiration needed further clarification. The new specific objections, which the critics raised against Ellen White's prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889, dealt primarily with "suppression" of her earlier writings and accusations of "plagiarism." Since some of her earlier writings were modified and edited when they were republished in the early 1880s, and Ellen White borrowed materials from other authors when writing, the critics questioned her claim of divine inspiration.

The first part of this chapter will examine views opposing Ellen White's prophetic gift. It will give a historical overview of the new objections, which came primarily through new publications. The period from 1882 to 1889 witnessed the appearance of

some of the most contentious anti-Ellen White works. In 1883 A. C. Long published the booklet *Comparison of Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications*¹ and in 1888 D. M. Canright published his initial version of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.² Canright's book in particular became the general textbook of all future critics of Seventh-day Adventism and Ellen White's prophetic gift. These books accused Ellen White of "suppression" and "plagiarism" and, as a result, claimed that her gift did not have divine origin. This chapter will not discuss the old arguments raised against Ellen White since this dissertation has already dealt with those arguments in the previous periods.

The second part of the chapter will examine the responses of Seventh-day Adventists to the new objections from 1882 to 1889. The Adventists would publish articles, special editions of *Review and Herald*, and make General Conference resolutions answering the suppression and plagiarism charges and would reaffirm their confidence in the divine inspiration of Ellen White's gift. Of particular importance were the special editions of the *Review and Herald* published in 1883 and 1887. These two issues responded to the criticisms of A. C. Long and D. M. Canright, respectively, against Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy. The last section of this chapter will examine Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic gift in the context of the new challenges of suppression, plagiarism, and questions over her inspiration.

¹ A. C. Long, *Comparison of the Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications* (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate, 1883).

² D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888). Some historians, unaware of this edition, mention the 1889 year as the first published version of Canright's book. The 1889 edition is, however, the second, enlarged edition of Canright's book. See idem, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1889).

Opposing Views of Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

The years from 1882 to 1889 marked a new wave of opposition to Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her prophetic gift. The critics questioned the nature of her claimed inspiration and charged her with “suppression” (intentional hiding) of parts of her earlier writings and “plagiarism” (borrowing material from other authors without giving due credit to the sources used). The nature of the disagreements, however, seems to have come from different views and different understandings of what biblical inspiration meant. While the critics supported a word-by-word (or verbal) view of inspiration, Seventh-day Adventists generally recognized a dynamic (or non-verbal) kind of inspiration. As in the previous period, the challenges against Ellen White's gift came from people both outside the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and inside. The Adventists had to respond to the new objections and refine their position on Ellen White's gift of prophecy in relation to the new objections of suppression, plagiarism, and the nature of her inspiration. The first part of the following section will give a brief historical overview of the opposition to Ellen White in the period from 1882 to 1889. In its second part, it will examine in more detail the specific objections of suppression and plagiarism raised against her prophetic gift.

Historical Overview of Opposition to Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

The opposition to Ellen White's prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889 came primarily from newly written publications that set off a new round of critical objections. Along with older arguments, the critics raised the issues of suppression and plagiarism and claimed that Ellen White's inspiration was not of divine origin. As a result, Seventh-day Adventists had to refine further their understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

In 1883, A. C. Long published a sixteen-page tract entitled *Comparison of Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications*. Long's work was triggered by a decision by Seventh-day Adventists to republish some of Ellen White's early visions and experiences in a new book called *Early Writings*.³ The new republished version came out in 1882 and contained materials from her 1851 *Christian Experience and Views*, 1854 *Supplement to Christian Experience and Views*, and 1858 *Spiritual Gifts*, volume one. While the book's main purpose was to silence the growing criticism against Seventh-day Adventists of intentionally hiding (or suppressing) Ellen White's earlier revelations, it brought the opposite effect.

In the preface of *Early Writings* the Adventists claimed that they did not make any changes to Ellen White's original publications. "Our opponents have been wont to make loud claims that there was a desire and an attempt to suppress these views," the publishers wrote, "because the work has been so long out of print. The presence of this book will be a sufficient refutation of the groundless charge." Apart from footnotes giving dates and additional explanations and an appendix with "two very interesting dreams," the Adventists claimed that "no changes from the original work have been made in the present edition, except the occasional employment of a new word, or a change in the construction of a sentence, to better express the idea, and no portion of the work has been omitted. No shadow of change has been made in any idea or sentiment of the original work, and the verbal changes have been made under the author's own eye, and with her full approval."⁴

³ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882). See also idem, *Early Writings* (2000).

⁴ Ibid., *Early Writings* (1882), iii-iv.

G. I. Butler, president of the General Conference, also noted concerning the publication of *Early Writings*, perhaps unintentionally, that “these were the very first of the published writings of sister White” and thus Seventh-day Adventists could not be accused of “suppression” of her writings. “They [the critics] have said many things about our ‘*suppressing*’ these writings as if we were ashamed of them,” he wrote.

They have tried to make it appear that there was something objectionable about them, that we feared would come to the light of day, and that we carefully kept them in the background. . . . They have claimed to be very anxious to obtain these writings to show up their supposed errors. They now have the opportunity. . . . These, her early writings, were brought out when she had just fairly commenced her labors in this cause. Since that time her labors have been very extensive, and she has written much. For over thirty years these writings have been eagerly read. There is harmony throughout, from first to last. There are no antagonisms, and there is nothing to be ashamed of.⁵

Long took both statements as a challenge and was determined to show how actual facts conflicted with the Adventists’ statements and confirmed the charges of suppression. He explained that he had possession of Ellen White’s earliest pre-1851 publications of her visions. After comparing those early publication with later republications, Long noted that there were fifty-nine lines that were “omitted” in the later editions. “These lines,” he wrote, “are not found in any of her works that I have seen that have been published since 1849. They are omitted in *Experience and Views* of 1851, *Spiritual Gifts* 1858, and *Early Writings of Mrs. White* 1882. This last work may be a correct reprint of ‘*Experience and Views*’ of 1851, but it certainly is not ‘*all* the early writings of Mrs. White,’ as we have clearly shown. We might go on and show more suppressions, but we have presented enough for any candid mind.”⁶

⁵ G. I. Butler, “A Book Long Desired,” *RH*, Dec. 26, 1882, 792.

⁶ Long, *Comparison of the Early Writings*, 11-12.

Long believed that Seventh-day Adventists were intentionally hiding the earliest publications of Ellen White's first visions because of theological mistakes that could be found in them. He, however, was "fortunate" to possess those early editions and was able to show the discrepancies that existed with the later reprints.⁷ The suppression charges, therefore, were valid and confirmed by simple comparison of Ellen White's writings. Long believed that Ellen White was not divinely inspired but that she was one of the many false prophets that had arisen in nineteenth-century America. Since Long's book was widely circulated and dealt with new factual challenges, the Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to Long and his supporters⁸ and refine their view on inspiration and Ellen White.

In 1884 Jacob Brinkerhoff published a sixteen-page tract entitled *The Seventh-Day Adventists and Mrs. White's Visions*.⁹ The book was published in Marion, Iowa, as a third edition and one of its purposes was to explain why Ellen White's visionary claims could not have divine origin. Although Brinkerhoff repeated many of the previously used arguments against Ellen White, similarly to Long, he challenged her inspiration because of omission of some parts of her earlier writings in later publications. Like Long, he also believed that the omissions were done intentionally because of erroneous doctrinal views

⁷ Long made references to the first three visions of Ellen White as published in *A Word to the "Little Flock"* in 1847 and *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God* broadside in 1849.

⁸ Long was joined by J. S. Green, an attorney who had left the Adventists, and Alexander McLearn, an ex-president of Battle Creek College. See Arthur White, *Ellen White: The Lonely Years: 1876-1891*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1984), 222.

⁹ Jacob Brinkerhoff, *The Seventh-day Adventists and Mrs. White's Visions*, 3d ed. (Marion, IA: Advent and Sabbath Advocate, 1884).

held previously by Seventh-day Adventists and Ellen White herself. After all, Brinkerhoff argued that these changes had “given cause to some to doubt their [Ellen White’s writings] inspiration, and to say that the publishers do not believe the visions themselves.”¹⁰

The most controversial figure, critical of Seventh-day Adventism and Ellen White’s prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889, was Dudley M. Canright.¹¹ He had been a leader and a minister within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination for more than twenty years, but in early 1887 he left the church and became one of its main opponents. Canright was converted to Seventh-day Adventism in 1859 at the age of nineteen through the preaching of James White. He was a gifted young man, and two years later entered into the ministry. In 1865 he was ordained and became one of the most able and successful leaders of the newly organized Seventh-day Adventist denomination, over the years working as a pastor, church administrator, and a General Conference committee member. Canright was also known as a gifted debater who refuted opponents of Seventh-day Adventism and defended their unique doctrines. He authored some of the best apologetic articles and books defending the theology of Seventh-day Adventists, including Ellen White’s prophetic gift.¹² Moreover, he was a personal friend of the Whites and often visited their home.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ See the two biographies of D. M. Canright: Norman F. Douty, *The Case of D. M. Canright* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964) and Carrie Johnson, *I Was Canright’s Secretary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971). While Douty agreed with Canright’s critical ideas, Johnson disagreed with him.

¹² Some examples are: D. M. Canright, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 1,” *RH*, Jan. 21, 1868, 84-85; idem, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 2,” *RH*, Jan. 28, 1868, 98-99; idem, “Conversations on Important Subjects: No. 3,” *RH*,

Despite his strengths, however, Canright seemed to struggle with instability of his temperament, difficulties in accepting criticism, intolerance of others, and doubting his faith. Although he had a close relationship with the Whites, it seems that he had also struggled to accept Ellen White's prophetic gift. During the 1870s and 1880s, for example, Canright left the Adventist ministry several times because of Ellen White's critical testimonies towards him. Each time, however, he came back, apologized, and worked with renewed vigor for the Adventist cause. In February 1887, however, he left Seventh-day Adventism for good and became one of the most critical voices against the denomination. In a letter to Ellen White dated March 18, 1887, Canright wrote that although it cost him a "terrible struggle" to leave the church, his mind was now "fully settled," and his course was "decided."¹³ After his leaving of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination Canright started working as a Baptist minister. In a few years he resigned from ministry and devoted his time to writing and criticizing Seventh-day Adventism and Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

In 1888 Canright published the first edition of his *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.¹⁴ One chapter of the book was specifically devoted to criticisms of Ellen

Feb. 4, 1868, 114-115; idem, *The Two Laws as Set Forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1876); idem, *A History of the Doctrine of the Soul, among All Races and Peoples, Ancient and Modern, Including Theologians, Philosophers, Scientists, and Untutored Aborigines, Carefully Brought Down to the Present Time*, 2d rev. ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1882); idem, "Proof of the Inspiration of the Bible," *RH*, Oct. 6, 1885, 611.

¹³ D. M. Canright to Ellen G. White, Mar. 18, 1887, CAR, AU.

¹⁴ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888).

White's prophetic gift and her role within the Seventh-day Adventist church.¹⁵ The chapter is significant since it not only summarizes all of the previously raised objections against Ellen White's gift, but also refines the old arguments based on Canright's personal knowledge of Ellen White and her ministry. Furthermore, similarly to Long and Brinkerhoff, Canright charged Ellen White's writings with suppression and intentional deception. He also raised the new charge of plagiarism, accusing Ellen White of copying other sources while claiming to receive divine revelation. Consequently, Canright denied Ellen White's claim of divine inspiration all together.

In 1889 Canright published a second and enlarged edition of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.¹⁶ By 1914 it had gone through fourteen reprints and had become the authority for all later critics of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism.¹⁷ The same year, 1889, Canright also published *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell*. This work seems to be a concise version of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* and its main purpose was to give a brief overview of the wrong system of beliefs of the Adventists. Part four of the series dealt with Ellen White's prophetic gift and summarized briefly the objections against her claims of inspiration.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 43-55. In 1919, Canright also published a book entitled *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Pub. Co., 1919), dealing exclusively with issues related to Ellen White's prophetic gift and ministry.

¹⁶ D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1889).

¹⁷ See for example: Walter Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, 90-114; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 89-169; Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie*; Maurice Barnett, *Ellen G. White and Inspiration* (Beaumont, TX: The Preceptor Co., 1983).

¹⁸ D. M. Canright, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1889), 1-7.

In February 1889, Canright engaged in a debate with William Healey, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, over Ellen White's prophetic gift. The *Healdsburg Enterprise*, a local newspaper, carried much of the eight-night debate in its columns. Although Canright repeated some of his arguments published in his book, such as the suppression charges, the changing of words in later reprints, and Ellen White's use of literary assistants, the main focus of the debate turned to the new charge of plagiarism in her writings. Not surprisingly, the Healdsburg meetings became known as the "genesis of the plagiarism charge" against Ellen White's prophetic gift.¹⁹

Canright's critical examination marked a significant point in the history of criticism of Ellen White's prophetic gift. He combined and summarized all critical objections that were used in the past (and that would be used in the future) against Ellen White's claims of having the gift of prophecy. As such, his influence has been enormous. Not surprisingly, some consider Canright to be the "father" of modern-day criticism of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism.²⁰ The Adventists, of course, were compelled to respond to the new critics and refine their understanding of Ellen White's gift and her inspiration. But before we look at their responses, we will examine the specific objections raised against Ellen White's prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889.

¹⁹ For a full context of the debate see: Ron Graybill, "D. M. Canright in Healdsburg, 1889: The Genesis of the Plagiarism Charge," *Insight*, Oct. 21, 1980, 7-10; Paul McGraw, "Born in Zion? The Margins of Fundamentalism and the Definition of Seventh-day Adventism" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2004), 62-75.

²⁰ See for example, Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire*, 45-64.

Specific Objections Raised against Ellen White's Prophetic Gift

This section will examine the new specific objections raised by the critics against Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1882 to 1889. The new questions dealt primarily with the issue of "suppression" of her earlier writings and accusations of "plagiarism." Both objections challenged Ellen White's inspiration and questioned the validity of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her gift.

The charge of "suppression" of Ellen White's writings had been evident in previous years but was developed to a new level in the years from 1882 to 1889. The critics began to utilize much more substantial (factual) information as they challenged the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift. In 1883 A. C. Long made a comparison between the earlier publications of Ellen White's first visions and their republication in the book *Early Writings* in 1882, making several observations. First, Long noted that *Early Writings* did not contain "all of her early visions," as some of the Adventist leaders thought, therefore he accused them of making "false claims . . . in support of the visions of Mrs. E. G. White."²¹ After a thorough line-by-line examination of Ellen White's first three visions only, he concluded that there were 59 lines "omitted" altogether. Furthermore, as noted earlier, those lines had not been published since 1849. Thus although *Early Writings* was a "correct reprint" of *Experience and Views* (1851), it was not a complete reprint of her truly earliest writings. He then noted that he could "go on and show more suppressions," but the evidences were compelling enough "for any

²¹ Long, *Comparison of the Early Writings*, 1.

candid mind” to agree with him.²² Long questioned the integrity of Seventh-day Adventists and challenged their unreasonable acceptance of Ellen White’s gift and prophetic inspiration.

Second, he noted that Adventists had intentionally suppressed parts of Ellen White’s earlier writings in order to cover some of her theological mistakes and doctrines that now she did not believe. Long argued that if Ellen White was divinely inspired, God would not have given her false doctrinal statements in the first place. Thus, for example, he pointed out that the suppressed parts of her first vision were related to the “shut door” question. “Mrs. White believed this doctrine and taught it in her visions,” he wrote, “but since that time she has renounced that doctrine, and consequently those portions of her visions that taught it are now suppressed and denied. This proves that her visions are fallible and hence have no higher source than her own mind.”²³

Long also questioned the omission of some lines towards the end of her first vision, which according to his interpretation, supported “the immortality of the human soul.” Since Ellen White did not believe in this doctrine anymore, he observed, “this portion of her vision had to be suppressed.” He then asked the logical question concerning Ellen White’s first vision: “If a part of this vision was from the Lord why not all of it? And what right has she or any person else to reject a part of God’s word.”²⁴

Long went on to note that the suppressed portions in the second and the third visions also dealt with doctrines that Ellen White (and Seventh-day Adventists) now

²² Ibid., 11-12.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

rejected. The omissions were related to the “shut door” question, Ellen White’s interpretation of the 666 number of Revelation, her belief in the soon return of Jesus shortly after 1849, and the fate of those who rejected her gift. Since Ellen White had changed her position on these issues, Long concluded, certain paragraphs of her early visions had to be suppressed or modified.

Third, Long noted the fact that all suppressions of Ellen White’s writings were done by her direct supervision and approval, but this was not how divine inspiration worked. If Ellen White claimed to be divinely inspired, what right had “she and others to suppress portions of God’s word?” Long questioned.²⁵ After quoting Rev 22:18-19 (“If any man shall add into these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book”), Long concluded the following:

Now if Mrs. White’s visions are the word of God, and they [Seventh-day Adventists] have taken away some of them, then their part will be taken away from the book of life, and from the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book. But if they are not the word of the Lord, then they have been adding to his word, and God will add unto them the plagues that are written in this book. So taking either horn of the dilemma, they are found under the condemnation of the Lord. They should confess their sins and forsake them, that the Lord may have mercy upon them at his coming.²⁶

We must note, however, that at the core of Long’s “suppression” charges was his understanding of biblical revelation and inspiration. Obviously, Long believed in “verbal” or “word” inspiration and rejected “thought” or “dynamic” inspiration. Thus any

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 13.

changes or alterations made to Ellen White's writings, in his view, were equal to suppressing "portions of God's word" and immediately disqualified Ellen White from being a genuine prophetess of God.²⁷

Jacob Brinkerhoff, similarly to Long, also accused Seventh-day Adventists of suppressing the earlier writings of Ellen White. After giving some of the familiar arguments against Ellen White's prophetic visions (being considered equal to the Bible, teaching incorrect doctrines, contradicting Scriptures, bringing divisions, being a result of mental illness, and comparing Ellen White to other fanatical leaders), he asked the questions:

If her visions are from heaven, why are they treated as a sectarian commodity, republished with portions of the former issue left out or suppressed? and [*sic*] the suppressed portion not always being of a personal or local nature, but views of the future, or of things of a general nature connected with the Advent people. If her testimonies are in all respects equal to the word of God, as some of them claim, why have they omitted portions in the republication? This has given cause to some to doubt their inspiration, and to say that the publishers do not believe the visions themselves. The whole subject will not bear an investigation, and stand the test.²⁸

Based on those charges and facts, Brinkerhoff believed that her inspiration "had only a human origin" and that her visions came "from her own mind."²⁹

D. M. Canright also wrote against Ellen White's inspiration based on charges of "suppression." He noted that although Ellen White claimed to be as "divinely inspired as the prophets of the Bible" and that her divine inspiration was "accepted by the whole [Seventh-day Adventist] denomination," nobody could deny the fact that many of her

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ Brinkerhoff, *The Seventh-day Adventists and Mrs. White's Visions*, 13-14.

²⁹ Ibid., 12, 14.

earlier writings were changed in later publications. “Several passages in the earlier editions of her works have been suppressed in the later editions,” Canright wrote, “because they contradict what they [Adventists] now believe. For thirty years they have writhed under this charge of suppression, yet they keep right on doing it. If they dare publish these suppressed passages, why don’t they do it? Why?”³⁰ He then provided new data related to the suppression of Ellen White’s writings. Canright compared the 1885 republication of Ellen White’s testimonies in four volumes with their earlier printings.³¹ After random comparison of only “four different pages in Vol. 1” with the original *Testimonies*, Canright found an average of “*twenty-four changes of the words on each page!*” “Her words were thrown out and other words put in and other changes made[,] in some cases so many that it was difficult to read the two together. At the same rate in the four volumes there would be 63,720 changes,” he observed.³² Obviously, for Canright, all these changes were done because of mistakes, contradictory statements, or change of beliefs found in Ellen White’s earlier writings.

In the 1889 updated edition of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, Canright further noted that the “suppressed passages” were “very damaging” to Ellen White’s inspiration.³³ In an article published in the *Healdsburg Enterprise* the same year, he again

³⁰ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 45.

³¹ Up to that time, the *Testimonies* had been published in a single booklet form. In 1885 they were published in four large volumes: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4 vols. (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press; Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1885).

³² Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 45.

³³ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1889), 140. Canright gave the popular example of the “shut door.” He quoted Ellen White’s original wording of her first

noted that the Adventists did not “dare” to publish some of the suppressed passages because of their wrong theology.³⁴ So together with Long and Brinkerhoff, Canright questioned Ellen White’s divine inspiration and the Seventh-day Adventist belief in her prophetic gift.

Interestingly, like Long and Brinkerhoff, Canright also believed that Ellen White claimed verbal inspiration. To prove his point he quoted Ellen White’s own words from *Testimony 31* (“In these letters which I write, in these testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision--the precious rays of light shining from the throne”), and interpreted them, though mistakenly, to mean that every word that she ever wrote, whether “in a private letter or newspaper article,” was directly dictated to her. He also quoted Ellen White’s claim that she was “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision as in having a vision,” to mean that the “very words” used by Ellen White in recording her visions were inspired by God.³⁵

In a lecture given in Healdsburg against Ellen White’s prophetic gift in 1889 he again noted that when Ellen White had her visions “she loses control of herself, the Lord

vision as published in 1846 and put the omitted material in brackets for the reader to see the discrepancies.

³⁴ [D.M. Canright], “Adventism Renounced by Eld. D. M. Canright,” *HE*, Feb. 20, 1889.

³⁵ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44; idem, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1889), 136-137.

takes possession of her, and when she writes the Lord dictates or inspires.”³⁶

Nevertheless, Canright was certain that Ellen White was not verbally inspired. To prove it, he offered several personal observations.

First, he noted that he had personally seen Ellen White change words or “scratch out a whole page, or a line, or a sentence and write it over differently.” “If God gave her the words, why did she scratch them out and alter them,” he asked.³⁷ In *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell* he asked the same question slightly differently but related the same message. “If God told her what to write,” Canright noted, “why did she change it? Did the Lord change his mind?”³⁸ In his Healdsburg debate he noted again that “if God would give her the words the first time she would not have to correct it [*sic*].”³⁹ Thus Canright was convinced that Ellen White did not possess verbal inspiration.

Second, Canright noted that he had personally heard James White, Ellen White’s husband, suggest at times changes in her writings which she subsequently made. “He would give her ideas, words, and whole sentences, which she would put right in. They do not deny this. Was he inspired, too?” Canright asked.⁴⁰ Third, Canright observed that Ellen White began using editors to correct and improve her writings grammatically.

³⁶ [D.M. Canright], “Adventism Renounced by Eld. D. M. Canright,” *HE*, Feb. 20, 1889.

³⁷ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44.

³⁸ Canright, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell*, 4.

³⁹ [D.M. Canright], “Adventism Renounced by Eld. D. M. Canright,” *HE*, Feb. 20, 1889.

⁴⁰ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44; *idem*, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell*, 4.

“Thousands of words, not her own,” were “put in by these other persons, some of whom were not even christians [*sic*]. Are their words inspired, too?”⁴¹

Furthermore, Canright had questions over the republication of Ellen White’s testimonies, which came out in four volumes in 1885. As noted above, he claimed that there were an average of “twenty-four changes” of words “on each page.” “Her words were thrown out and other words put in and other changes made.”⁴² That was not how divine inspiration worked, Canright asserted. Again, one must note that Canright’s position was based on a belief in “verbal” or “mechanical” inspiration, which Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventists rejected. Obviously for Canright, as for Long and Brinkerhoff, the changes discovered in Ellen White’s writings disproved her divine inspiration. Therefore, her prophetic gift was false. Canright, however, went further than Long and Brinkerhoff as he raised the plagiarism argument against Ellen White’s prophetic gift and her inspiration.

Canright used the new argument of plagiarism first in 1888 in *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*.⁴³ He accused Ellen White of copying “whole sentences, paragraphs and even pages, word for word, from other authors” without giving any “credit” or “sign of quotation.”⁴⁴ He showed pages, for instance, in which Ellen White

⁴¹ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44.

⁴² See Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 45.

⁴³ Canright again used the argument of plagiarism in the context of his belief in verbal inspiration. As we noted, he mistakenly held that Ellen White believed in “verbal inspiration” of her writings as well.

⁴⁴ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44. See also “Adventism Renounced by Eld. D. M. Canright,” *HE*, Feb. 20, 1889. D. M.

copied directly from J. H. Merle D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation* and used the information in her *Great Controversy* book published in 1888. He further noted that Ellen White compiled additional materials from other books. "Indeed, her last book, 'Great Controversy,'" Canright argued, "is nearly a compilation from Andrews's *History of the Sabbath* [*sic*], *History of the Waldenses* [*sic*] by Wylie, *Life of Miller* [*sic*] by White, *Thoughts on Revelation* [*sic*] by Smith, and other books. I have compared many pages from all these and find that she has taken from these word for word and page after page. She gives no credit to these authors but claims it all as a revelation from God! She is a literary thief."⁴⁵ Canright then gave a dictionary definition of the word "plagiarism" which meant "'a thief in literature; one who purloins another's writings and offers them to the public as his own.' Exactly what she does."⁴⁶

In the 1889 edition of *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* Canright expanded on his plagiarism argument. He again accused Ellen White of pretending that all that she wrote was revealed to her "directly from heaven" and not something that she had "heard or read or studied out." "Stubborn facts show that her claim is utterly false, and her book a deception the same as the Book of Mormon, which Smith stole from Spaulding."⁴⁷ In *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell* he wrote again: "She and her people claimed that it was revealed to her by the Lord, but facts show that she took it from others."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888), 44.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1889), 139.

⁴⁸ Canright, *Adventism Refuted in a Nutshell*, 4.

Canright repeated his “plagiarism” arguments during the Healdsburg debate with William Healey. Among other charges, Canright, perhaps carelessly, claimed that there were “seven solid pages” that Ellen White copied in her *Great Controversy* book from J. N. Andrews’ *History of the Sabbath*. Healey, of course, disagreed, and demanded an investigation of Canright’s claim. A committee of three was formed to investigate the issue. J. N. Loughborough was the only Seventh-day Adventist on the committee. While the committee did not make any statements concerning the charge of plagiarism against Ellen White and her claimed inspiration, it did conclude that she used many of Andrews’s ideas and in many instances quoted “his exact words.” While it was not “seven solid pages,” the committee believed that Ellen White “had Elder Andrews’ work before her when she wrote her visions and copied largely, both in ideas and language, from it.”⁴⁹

Significantly, we must note that the committee used volume four of *The Spirit of Prophecy* (also called the “Great Controversy”) and not the new 1888 edition of Ellen White’s *Great Controversy*. The new volume, Ronald Graybill points out, “had only come off the press in Oakland in early February, 1889,” and it was not distributed widely yet. Graybill correctly notes that “the 1888 edition would have helped the Adventist case not only because it used quotation marks more liberally but also because it acknowledged using both Adventist and non-Adventist sources.”⁵⁰

Following Canright’s “plagiarism” charges, the local pastors in Healdsburg also published an article with examples of Ellen White’s use of sources. Their article was

⁴⁹ John N. Bailhache and H. B. McBride, “The Committee Report,” *HE*, March 6, 1889.

⁵⁰ Ronald Graybill, “D. M. Canright in Healdsburg, 1889: The Genesis of the Plagiarism Charge,” *Insight*, Oct. 21, 1980, 8.

partially a response to a publication by John Loughborough who was the first to publish Ellen White's writings with those of other writers in parallel columns in arguing against Canright's view of plagiarism.⁵¹ The pastor's union in Healdsburg used Loughborough's approach of parallel columns to show that Ellen White indeed used the writings of J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith, James White, and J. H. Merle d'Aubigne when she wrote the *Great Controversy*, volume four (1884). They concluded that she borrowed both "ideas and words" from these works. Like Canright, they accused her of being a "plagiarist" and a "literary thief" who failed to give credit to the sources she used, but claimed divine inspiration instead.⁵² Obviously, the pastor's union also imposed a "verbal" or "dictational" view of inspiration on Ellen White's writings, while Seventh-day Adventists denied such a concept of inspiration. Interestingly, Canright's new argument of "plagiarism" would become one of the most circulated objections against Ellen White's prophetic claims in the post-Canright era.⁵³ The Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to the new objections and refine further their understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift in relation to her inspiration. The rest of this chapter will examine their responses.

⁵¹ Loughborough argued against Canright's claim that Ellen White borrowed "seven solid pages" from J. N. Andrews's book *History of the Sabbath*, although he acknowledged that she used some of Andrews' writings. See J. N. Loughborough, "False Charges Refuted," *HE*, Mar. 13, 1889.

⁵² [Pastors' Union], "Is Mrs. E. G. White a Plagiarist?" *HE*, Mar. 20, 1889.

⁵³ See for example: Rea, *The White Lie*, 106-108, 282-409; Burnett, *Ellen G. White and Inspiration*, 37-47.

Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Objections

Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to the objections of suppression and plagiarism and defend Ellen White's divine inspiration between 1882 and 1889. They also had to justify their decision to republish her testimonies with revised wording and explain their understanding of how inspiration worked. This section will give a brief historical overview of the Seventh-day Adventist ways of responding to the opposition. Then it will examine in more detail the Adventist answers to the specific charges against Ellen White's prophetic gift.

Historical Overview of Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Objections

Seventh-day Adventists responded to the new challenges raised by the critics from 1882 to 1889 in three major ways. First, they published special issues of the *Review and Herald*. These extra issues were important not only because they gave answers to the specific objections but also because they provided contextual information related to the new controversies over Ellen White's prophetic gift. Second, Ellen White wrote several important publications responding to the new challenges against her prophetic gift. She usually did not enter into this kind of debate, but because of the nature of the accusations she felt it necessary to respond directly. Third, the Seventh-day Adventists continued to issue General Conference declarations (resolutions) concerning Ellen White's prophetic gift. Although the resolutions did not specifically address the new questions of suppression and plagiarism, they affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist acceptance of Ellen White and her gift of prophecy.

The primary response to the new objections of the critics came through publications of special issues of the *Review and Herald*. In 1883 the Adventists published

a sixteen-page *Review and Herald Supplement*. It seemed to be a direct response to the challenges raised by A. C. Long's *Comparison of the Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications*. This was probably the most significant apologetical work related to Ellen White published by the denomination since Uriah Smith's response to Snook and Brinkerhoff in 1866. The 1883 *Supplement* contained seventeen articles. Of particular interest for this study are the first three articles, which addressed Long's charges of suppression. In the first article, "'Suppression' and 'The Shut Door,'" J. H. Waggoner noted that part of the problem was Long's view of inspiration. While he supported a verbal view of inspiration, Adventists believed in thought or dynamic inspiration. For them God inspired the thoughts of Ellen White and not the actual words. The rest of his article dealt with the "shut door" question and explained its context and meaning for Seventh-day Adventists and Ellen White.⁵⁴

G. I. Butler wrote the next two articles. The "'Early Writings' and 'Suppression'" was his personal defense against accusations made against him by Long. While Butler admitted that he had made a mistake in saying that *Early Writings* was a republication of Ellen White's earliest writings and that he had made this statement unintentionally, he also noted that he had never claimed that *Early Writings* contained "all" of Ellen White's early writings.⁵⁵ Butler also pointed out that Long's arguments were nothing new but a continuation of accusations made by critics of Ellen White such as Snook, Brinkerhoff, Carver, and others. Despite that, however, the Adventists were forced to make a special

⁵⁴ J. H. Waggoner, "'Suppression' and 'The Shut Door,'" *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 1-3.

⁵⁵ G. I. Butler, "'Early Writings' and 'Suppression,'" *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 3-4.

effort and answer Long's "suppression" arguments because of the vast circulation of his book and because there were many new Advent believers who were "troubled on some of these points."⁵⁶ In addition, Butler also noted that because of the suppression charges the leadership of the denomination had made a decision to republish all of Ellen White's testimonies.⁵⁷ The project was completed in 1885 when the testimonies appeared in four large volumes.⁵⁸

In his second article, "A Venerable Document," Butler made a textual review of *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (1847), the first joint Sabbatarian publication by the founders of the church, which contained Ellen White's first visions. Seventh-day Adventists made a decision to republish it as a response to Long's accusation that they wanted to hide (suppress) some of Ellen White's first published visions. Those who were interested, Butler noted, could now purchase the document and read the visions in their original wording.⁵⁹

The rest of the articles were mostly a historical overview of the criticisms of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy and dealt with old objections raised against Ellen White. In one of the articles Waggoner gave a history of the "Messenger Party" in the 1850s.⁶⁰ Butler also wrote an article about the history of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4 vols. (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press; Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1885).

⁵⁹ G. I. Butler, "A Venerable Document," *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 5.

⁶⁰ J. H. Waggoner, "The Advocate Extra," *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 6-7.

“Marion” movement in the 1860s.⁶¹ Other articles described the characteristics of Ellen White’s visions, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy, the types of testimonies written by Ellen White, and an explanation of her role for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.⁶² Several articles also critiqued A. McLearn and J. S. Green, two former Seventh-day Adventists, who became supporters of Long’s critical views of Ellen White and his charges of suppression.⁶³

Another important publication, a *Review and Herald Extra*, appeared in November 1887.⁶⁴ It was a response to D. M. Canright’s attacks on Seventh-day Adventists after his departure from the denomination in February 1887. The articles were written by G. I. Butler, Uriah Smith, and J. H. Waggoner. They provided the contextual and historical background of the work, ministry, and influence of Canright while part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A number of articles also examined, from the Adventist perspective, Canright’s rejection of major Adventist doctrines including Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Interestingly, in one of the articles, Seventh-day Adventists used Canright’s own earlier writings (before his leaving of the denomination) to rebuff his later criticism of Adventist beliefs.

⁶¹ G. I. Butler, “A Brief History of the ‘Marion’ Movement,” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 7.

⁶² See, for example, G. I. Butler, “The Visions: How They Are Held among S. D. Adventists,” 11-12; [idem], “Characteristics of the Visions,” 12-13; [idem], “Testimonies, Public and Private,” 13; W. H. Littlejohn, “Seventh-day Adventists and the Testimony of Jesus Christ,” 13-16; all found in *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883,

⁶³ G. I. Butler, “The New Recruits,” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 5-6.

⁶⁴ “Reply to Eld. Canright’s Attacks on S. D. Adventists,” *RH Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887.

The *Extra* contained several articles replying specifically to Canright's criticisms of Ellen White and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her gift. None of the articles, however, touched on the questions of "suppression" or "plagiarism." In "Mrs. White and Her Work," Uriah Smith examined some of Canright's arguments that dealt with old objections, such as Ellen White's writings being equal to or above the Bible, her visions resulting from a mental state of mind, Ellen White being compared to other false prophets of her time, and a list of mistakes found in her writings. Using somewhat repetitive arguments, Smith answered the objections and defended Ellen White's gift. He also argued that her inspiration was the same as the inspiration of the Bible prophets.⁶⁵

In another article, G. I. Butler examined Canright's personal relationship to the White family. After his departure from the denomination, Canright had accused James White of being a "tyrant," "quarrelsome," and an "ill-tempered" leader and Ellen White of being a self-deceived prophetess whose visions came from "hallucinations of her own mind." Butler noted that Canright's rejection of her was rather personal than theological in character.⁶⁶

Butler published another article that dealt with Ellen White's statement of the "shut door." Although it was an old argument, the leaders considered it important to explain the issue one more time since it had been one of the most recurring objections "to cast an unfavorable impression" upon Ellen White's gift and question her inspiration.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Uriah Smith, "Mrs. White and Her Work," *RH Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887, 10-11.

⁶⁶ G. I. Butler, "Eld. Canright's Treatment of Eld. and Mrs. White," *RH Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887, 12.

⁶⁷ G. I. Butler, "The Shut Door," *RH Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887, 14-15.

Uriah Smith also published a short piece called “Personal” in which he shared some of his personal attitudes towards Ellen White’s vision. Smith’s article came as a response to Canright’s accusation against him as being “troubled over the question of the visions” but not admitting it. Smith responded by saying that although he had “occasional periods of trial” he never came to a point of rejecting Ellen White’s visions as not being “the operation of the Spirit of God.”⁶⁸

On February 21, 1888, the denomination published a second *Review and Herald Extra* related to the Canright controversy.⁶⁹ The new edition came after a request by Canright to the *Review* editors to correct certain “wrong statements” which he claimed the Adventists had made about him. Most of the facts that Canright questioned were personal in character and dealt with the publication and distribution of certain articles written against Ellen White or the denomination and questions over his ordination as a Baptist minister. Butler and Smith responded to Canright’s complaints and denied giving “false statements” against him. The short four-page *Extra*, however, did not deal with the specific charges of “suppression” or “plagiarism.” The two *Review and Herald Extras* were reprinted in 1888 in a booklet entitled *Replies to Elder Canright’s Attacks on Seventh-day Adventists*. It also included some extra material written by J. H. Waggoner on the Sabbath question.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Uriah Smith, “Personal,” *RH, Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887, 15.

⁶⁹ “Elder Canright’s Reply to Extra No. 1, and Our Rejoinder,” *RH Extra*, No. 2, Feb. 21, 1888.

⁷⁰ *Replies to Elder Canright’s Attacks on Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888). The *Replies* were republished again in 1895.

In addition to special issues of the *Review*, the Seventh-day Adventists continued to publish individual articles defending the gift of prophecy. While most of the arguments were repetitive, they continued to publish such articles as evidence that Ellen White's gift was genuine and that it always bore positive results.⁷¹ There were, however, several articles that aimed to answer the specific objections of the critics.

In 1884, Butler published a series of articles on "inspiration."⁷² While they were not directly related to Ellen White's gift, his arguments played an important part in the discussion on the meaning of inspiration among Seventh-day Adventists. Intriguingly, although Butler argued against "verbal inspiration" of the Scriptures, he also introduced the idea of "degrees and mode of inspiration" and suggested a hierarchy within the biblical canon.⁷³ Ellen White, however, disagreed with Butler's belief in the "degrees of inspiration" and was critical of his theory.⁷⁴

⁷¹ See, for example, R. F. Cottrell, "The Testimonies," *RH*, Feb. 13, 1883, 106; W. H. Littlejohn, "The Chicago Times and the Sermon on Spiritual Gifts," *RH*, Jan. 1, 1884, 10; D. T. Bourdeau, "The Council at Bale, Suisse," *RH*, Nov. 10, 1885, 700; G. I. Butler, "A Miracle Called For," *RH*, Oct. 18, 1887, 649.

⁷² G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration.[—No. 1]," *RH*, Jan. 8, 1884, 24; idem, "Inspiration.[—No. 2]," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1884, 41; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 3," *RH*, Jan. 22, 1884, 57-58; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 4," *RH*, Jan. 29, 1884, 73-74; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 5," *RH*, Feb. 5, 1884, 89-90; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 6," *RH*, Apr. 15, 1884, 249-250; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 7," *RH*, Apr. 22, 1884, 265-267; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 8," *RH*, May 6, 1884, 296-297; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 9," *RH*, May 27, 1884, 344-346; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 10," *RH*, June 3, 1884, 361-362.

⁷³ G. I. B[utler], "Inspiration.[—No. 1]," *RH*, Jan. 15, 1884, 41; idem, "Inspiration.—No. 8," *RH*, May 6, 1884, 20. For a more detailed discussion on the history of inspiration within Seventh-day Adventism see: Alberto R. Timm, "History of Inspiration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1844-1994)," Unpublished paper, CAR, AU, 1995.

⁷⁴ Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, Letter, U-22-1889, CAR, AU.

In 1888, Uriah Smith also published an article tackling the issue of inspiration entitled “Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?” Smith believed that although there were cases when biblical authors were given the actual words, scriptural evidence supported thought and not dictational or verbal inspiration. Thus he argued that God revealed the ideas to the prophets but they expressed those ideas in their own words. This inspirational process was valid for Ellen White and her writings as well. Therefore, making grammatical corrections or using historical references did not nullify the prophetic nature of her messages.⁷⁵

Another significant article responding to the specific objection of plagiarism was written by J. N. Loughborough in March 1889. The “False Charges Refuted” was published in the *Healdsburg Enterprise* and was a response to Canright’s specific accusation that Ellen White copied “seven solid pages” from J. N. Andrews’s book *History of the Sabbath*. As noted earlier, Canright was heard to make this specific claim during his Healdsburg debate with W. M. Healey in February 1889.⁷⁶ Although he denied making such a statement, or that if he had made it, it was a “slip of the tongue,” Loughborough felt it necessary to refute the charge.⁷⁷ In what he called his “minority

⁷⁵ Uriah Smith, “Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?” *RH*, Mar. 13, 1888, 168-169. As we will see later in the chapter, Smith, similarly to Butler, started to make a distinction between the inspiration of Ellen White’s testimonies and her visions. He believed that while Ellen White’s visions were inspired, her testimonies were not. Smith’s conclusion, however, seemed to be a personal reaction against reproving testimonies that she had sent to him earlier. See Uriah Smith to D. M. Canright, Aug. 7, 1883, CAR, AU.

⁷⁶ See p. 279.

⁷⁷ J. N. Loughborough, “False Charges Refuted,” *HE*, Mar. 13, 1889.

report,”⁷⁸ he published Ellen White’s *Great Controversy* and J. N. Andrews *History of the Sabbath* in two parallel columns and noted that except for “historical quotations” she did not borrow ideas or reasoning from Andrews’s book. Although one may question the accuracy of Loughborough’s reasoning, he became the first one to compare Ellen White’s writings in parallel columns with those of another writer. Based on his comparison, Loughborough argued that Canright’s plagiarism charges against Ellen White were not factually substantiated. Furthermore, he accused Canright of being a plagiarist himself. At the end of the article Loughborough lined up in parallel columns from Canright’s *Bible from Heaven* and a book by Moses Hull bearing the same title, and noted Canright’s slavish use of Hull’s work.⁷⁹

Seventh-day Adventists also republished a number of important works written by Ellen White in the period from 1882 to 1889. It was these republications that brought a new wave of opposition to her prophetic gift and the denominational understanding of her inspiration. In 1882 the Adventists republished Ellen White’s 1851 *Experience and Views* and 1854 *Supplement to Experience and Views* booklets. The new edition appeared under the titles *Early Writings*⁸⁰ and *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Mrs. E. G. White*.⁸¹ The main purpose of *Early Writings* was to introduce Ellen White and her

⁷⁸ As we have noted, Loughborough was one of the three committee members who were chosen to investigate Canright’s plagiarism charges against Ellen White during the Healdsburg debate. Since he did not agree entirely with the report of the other two members, H. B. McBride and John N. Bailhache, he published his own “minority report.”

⁷⁹ J. N. Loughborough, “False Charges Refuted,” *HE*, Mar. 13, 1889.

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882).

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Mrs. E. G. White*, 2d ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald; Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1882).

prophetic gift to new believers. It also came as a response to critics who claimed that Seventh-day Adventists intentionally suppressed her earlier writings because of doctrinal inconsistencies. Apart from minor grammatical and editorial changes, done under the direct supervision of Ellen White, the original material was preserved. The new edition also included footnotes and an appendix.⁸² Despite its original intent, however, *Early Writings* brought a new wave of opposition against Ellen White's prophetic gift and criticism of suppression of her earlier writings.

Another important event was the republication of Ellen White's *Testimonies* in four large volumes in 1885.⁸³ At the 1883 General Conference a decision was taken to have the testimonies republished in a new and convenient form since most of them were out of print. The Adventists also decided to make some editorial and stylistic changes since many of the testimonies were written under "unfavorable circumstances" or in "haste." Since the republished *Testimonies* contained corrections of faulty grammar and clarifications of certain statements, they were an important indication of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the revelation-inspiration process at a time when critics questioned and scrutinized Ellen White's prophetic gift and divine inspiration.⁸⁴

Another important publication by Ellen White was the new and enlarged edition of the *Great Controversy* that came out in 1888.⁸⁵ Of particular importance was the

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882), iii-iv.

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4 vols. (1885).

⁸⁴ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 741.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888).

introduction of the book where Ellen White gave some important principles of how she understood her prophetic gift and explained what she believed to be the meaning of true biblical inspiration.⁸⁶ Another important publication was her *Testimony 33* published in 1889.⁸⁷ A section of the testimony entitled “The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies” compiled earlier statements that Ellen White had made concerning her prophetic gift. It aimed to clarify what the nature of her gift and the role of her writings were in the context of controversies related to her inspiration during the 1880s.⁸⁸

She also published a large number of articles in the period from 1882 to 1889.⁸⁹ While most of them were pastoral or devotional in character, there were several important articles that responded specifically to her critics during the 1880s. The articles “Our Present Position,” published on August 28, 1883, and “Notes on Travel,” published on October 16, 1883, were responses to A. C. Long’s criticisms of her gift. While the material did not address the specific objection of suppression, the two articles became Ellen White’s personal appeal to believers not to doubt the truthfulness of her gift of prophecy.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, *a-h*.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 182-219. Part of Ellen White’s intention was also to deny the Butler-Smith belief in the “degrees-of-inspiration” theory. For further explanation, see George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle over Righteousness by Faith* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1989), 85-95.

⁸⁹ Almost every issue of the *Review and Herald* and *Signs of the Times*, the two main Adventist periodicals, carried articles written by Ellen White during this period.

⁹⁰ Ellen G. White, “Our Present Position,” *RH*, Aug. 28, 1883, 545-546; *idem*, “Notes on Travel,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1883, 641-642.

Her direct response to Long's specific objection of suppression was a sixteen-page manuscript entitled "Suppression and the Shut Door." First she gave a brief background of how *Early Writings* was published and why they used the 1851 copy of her *Experience and Views*. She then responded to each suppression charge individually and explained the background and the rationale behind it. Her answers included explanations of suppression related to the "shut door" question, immortality of the soul, the seal of God, the meaning of the Sabbath, the time of the Second Coming, and others.⁹¹

Another way of responding to critics of the gift of prophecy in the years from 1882 to 1889 was through publication of General Conference resolutions. As in the previous periods, the resolutions did not answer specific objections but affirmed the Adventists' acceptance of Ellen White's prophetic gift and her divine inspiration.

One of the most significant resolutions came up during the 1883 General Conference. As already noted, it recommended the republication of Ellen White's testimonies and threw light on Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the nature of the inspiration of Ellen White.⁹² Other resolutions recommended the translation of Ellen White's books into foreign languages and their distribution to the growing number of

⁹¹ Ellen G. White, "Suppression and the Shut Door," MS 4, 1883, CAR, AU. The full text of the manuscript with a different title, "An Explanation of Early Statements," can be found in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 3 vols. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1958, 1980), 1:59-73.

⁹² G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 741-742.

Seventh-day Adventists outside of North America.⁹³ Several resolutions also endorsed the preparation of compilations from Ellen White's *Testimonies* on a variety of topics.⁹⁴ Another important resolution in 1889 recommended the translation and circulation of Ellen White's revised edition of the *Great Controversy* book.⁹⁵

Clearly, the General Conference resolutions continued to demonstrate the denomination's affirmation of Ellen White's prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889. The leadership was also adamant to support the wide distribution of her writings worldwide because of their belief in the validity of her prophetic guidance. But before we examine the resolutions in more detail, we will look at the Seventh-day Adventist answers to the new specific objections of suppression and plagiarism and their defense of Ellen White's inspiration.

Seventh-day Adventist Responses to Specific Objections

In the period from 1882 to 1889 Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to the new specific objections of suppression and plagiarism against Ellen White's gift and refine further their understanding of the doctrine of the gift of prophecy and the meaning of inspiration. The first issue that they had to address was the suppression of Ellen

⁹³ For examples, see G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference," *RH*, Dec. 26, 1882, 787; idem, "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 20, 1883, 733; "International Tract Society Proceedings," *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1889, 142.

⁹⁴ See G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 30, 1886, 744; [idem], "Thirteenth Day's Proceedings," *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 28, 1887, 3.

⁹⁵ "International Tract Society Proceedings. Sixth Meeting," *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1889, 142.

White's early writings in later publications. For the critics the omissions invalidated Ellen White's prophetic gift and were a sign of false prophetic claims. The Adventists disagreed and justified the rationale behind all changes. They presented several practical (logical) and theological (biblical) arguments to explain the omission of parts of her earlier writings in later publications.

A first practical observation concerning the suppression charges was the scarcity and unavailability of Ellen White's earlier writings. In the 1883 *Review and Herald Supplement*, both J. H. Waggoner and G. I. Butler noted that at the time of preparing *Early Writings* they did not have access to all of the earliest publications of Ellen White's visions. In contrast to Long's charges that Adventists were purposefully hiding her earlier writing, they used the 1851 edition of her *Experience and Views* because of its availability. Thus Waggoner acknowledged that Ellen White's "early visions were printed in whole or in part" or "in slips or sheets" but the "number printed was small." Moreover, he noted that "those interested were few, and not many copies were needed. But no effort was ever made to withhold them from any readers, or to withdraw them from their possessors. They were scattered as far as readers could be found, or their numbers would go, and no effort was made to restrict their circulation." Once the Seventh-day Adventist movement grew larger, those early issues were exhausted and were not republished for many years. Waggoner, however, logically argued that "the fact that a publication, or any part of it, is not *republished* is no evidence of intention to suppress it, as long as no effort is made to recover or to check the circulation and use of the copies issued." "All this talk about 'all her early visions,' and 'suppression,'" he continued, "is evidently to give plausibility to his [Long's] professed reasoning, and his conclusion as to the object of neglecting to republish them or parts of them. But neither

his reasoning nor his conclusion is in accordance with the truth in the matter.”⁹⁶ Thus the critic’s charges of suppression were based on wrong interpretation and untrue facts.

Butler expressed the same idea as Waggoner in the article “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression.’” After admitting that he had made a slightly inaccurate statement in saying that *Early Writings* contained “the very first of the published writings of Sister White,” he acknowledged that he personally had not seen any of the earlier published editions of Ellen White’s visions prior to her 1851 *Experience and Views*. After Long’s accusations and after consulting with J. N. Andrews, however, Butler discovered that he and some others “were mistaken.”⁹⁷ He also noted that he had only recently read for the first time a copy of *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847), which contained the first two earliest visions of Ellen White, and was the first joint publication by the denomination’s founders. Interestingly, he even had difficulties in finding a copy of the 1851 *Experience and Views*. “In a very few years after these works were published, they went out of print; that is, the edition was all sold out,” Butler wrote. “Back before 1860, when I had become interested in these questions, I could not obtain a copy [of *Experience and Views*] till I accidentally found one in a chamber among some old books. I have kept it and prized it highly ever since. Many others wished to obtain them, but could not find them.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ J. N. Waggoner, “‘Suppression’ and the ‘Shut Door,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 1.

⁹⁷ G. I. Butler, “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 3-4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Although he admitted that some of the earliest published visions of Ellen White were “condensed” in later publications, the main ideas of the messages were retained.⁹⁹

Uriah Smith also wrote that he had not seen a copy of *A Word to the “Little Flock”* since the early 1850s when he was in Rochester. For that reason Smith also acknowledged that he did not know that the 1851 edition of *Experience and Views* did not contain “the full text of the early visions.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the Adventists argued that the suppression charges were groundless and that nobody had tried to hide the earlier publications of Ellen White. The reality was that those early publications were of small quantity, out of print, and difficult to find.

A second practical response against the suppression objection was the Seventh-day Adventist decision to republish the earliest Ellen White visions. Because of Long’s specific charges, the denominational leadership decided to republish Ellen White’s visions as they appeared originally in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847). The purpose was to show that there was nothing to hide in the visions of Ellen White. Butler, who advertised the republication, wrote somewhat humorously that now believers and all others interested were able to get a free copy and “see what terrible things” the original visions contained.¹⁰¹ Butler also went on to write a separate article about *A Word to the “Little Flock.”* Its main purpose was to give a short history and general background of the first joint Sabbatarian publication and to introduce its content to new believers and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Uriah Smith to D. M. Canright, Mar. 22, 1883, CAR, AU.

¹⁰¹ G. I. Butler, “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 4.

those who knew little of Ellen White's earliest visions. Butler made it clear that the main "substance" of her first two visions, as found in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* did not change and that their main message, with very "few omissions," was retained in *Experience and Views* (1851) and in *Early Writings* (1882). Thus the critics' objection of suppression was unsubstantiated by facts. "When these facts are understood," Butler concluded, "with all their attendant circumstances, these early visions become a strong evidence that God has ever been the source from which they have proceeded."¹⁰²

Interestingly, in his article "'Suppression' and 'The Shut Door'" J. H. Waggoner noted that he could not give a sufficient answer as to why certain parts of the visions published in *A Word to the "Little Flock"* were omitted in later publications.

I can see no object in their being omitted. And he who had sole charge of the publishing work for "the little flock" at that time is not living, so that if any reason existed, it will never be known. It is always right and just to inquire into a person's motives for an action before we condemn him. . . . If anybody could show that there was any wrong intention, any evil motive, in omitting these lines, we would readily unite with those who condemned the action. We regret that it was done; but we see no possible reason for imputing wrong intention to the one who did it. Certainly Eld. Long has not given the true reason, and this I am able to show.¹⁰³

A third practical response of Seventh-day Adventists against the "suppression" charges was related to Long's presupposition that *Early Writings* contained "all" of Ellen White's earlier writings. The Adventists argued that they had never made such a claim. Butler wrote: "We want the reader distinctly to notice that we *did not* claim that Early Writings [*sic*] contained 'all her early visions,' as Mr. Long tries to make us say. This we

¹⁰² G. I. Butler, "A Venerable Document," *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 5.

¹⁰³ J. H. Waggoner, "'Suppression' and 'The Shut Door,'" *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 2. The Waggoner reference in the quote is to James White who published *A Word to the "Little Flock."*

have never said. We did suppose, however, at the time, that ‘Experience and Views,’ and the ‘supplement’ to the same, contained her earliest ‘published writings,’ but were mistaken. There is quite a difference between this and what Mr. Long undertakes to make me say, that the book in question contains ‘all her early writings.’”¹⁰⁴

Waggoner, like Butler, also made the point that it was neither practical nor reasonable for someone to come to such a conclusion. He made an interesting point in noting that Ellen White never attempted to publish all of her visions. In the book-series *Spiritual Gifts*, for example, she gave an account of her early labors and spoke of a large number of visions that she received. However, Waggoner noted, not all of those visions were “incorporated” in her writings. As he put it, “a number of them were barely referred to, or particular points may have been dwelt upon in relating her experience and labors, but they were not comprised in what were termed her ‘Early Writings.’”¹⁰⁵ Seventh-day Adventists argued that they had never claimed to publish “all” of Ellen White’s writings at any time and that Long’s charges of suppression related to the publication of *Early Writings* (1882) seemed to be pointless.

The Adventists also offered several theological (biblical) concerns against the charges of suppression. First, they made clear that they never “suppressed” or “omitted” parts of Ellen White’s writings because of theological inconsistencies or a desire to hide previously believed doctrines. “Perhaps there never was a more unjust charge made than this,” Butler wrote, “that we have ‘suppressed’ the visions, because there were some

¹⁰⁴ G. I. Butler, “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 4.

¹⁰⁵ J. H. Waggoner, “‘Suppression’ and ‘The Shut Door,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 1.

portions of them of which we were ashamed.”¹⁰⁶ Responding directly to Long’s charges, he noted again that “there is nothing in any of these passages which he [Long] quotes, that we should have any desire to conceal, or that is difficult to explain.” In fact, Butler argued that there were “far more difficult” passages in the writings of Ellen White that were “published by the thousand.” Yet the Adventists had not suppressed those writings.¹⁰⁷ He then gave an important guiding principle as to why certain parts of Ellen White’s early writings were omitted in some of her later publications. He wrote:

We are free to admit that during the history of this cause there have been instances, more or less numerous, where omissions have been made in republishing some of Mrs. White’s visions, but never from such motives as have been attributed to us; for there were none of these omitted passages which contained a single sentiment we were ashamed of, or that taught a doctrine which was contrary to our belief as a people, or a sentiment that was immoral. But in those visions which had been published *it was thought some passages were personal, or related to matters, which at the time of their publication were important, but had now become unimportant because of an entire change of circumstances, or for some similar reason. Hence it was not thought these were of sufficient importance to demand their republication, and some omissions were made.*¹⁰⁸

Obviously, for Butler, the principle behind a particular “omission” was its relevancy and circumstances and not theology.

Butler also made another interesting observation to prove that Seventh-day Adventists had never attempted to omit parts of Ellen White’s writings because of theological inconsistencies. As he put it,

¹⁰⁶ G. I. Butler, “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

Mr. Long thinks he has found “fifty-nine lines” which we have “suppressed.” From a rough estimate, we judge there are at least 150,000 lines extant of her [Ellen White’s] different published works. Surely, according to his own statement, it is but a very small proportion of her writings we were ashamed of, -- fifty-nine lines out of 150,000. But now nearly all of these fifty-nine lines are published, and accessible, and all who want them are invited to obtain them. And if there are any of the works he speaks of, as the one entitled “The Sealing,” which we have not published, it is solely because we do not possess a copy to print from. If he will send it to us, we will publish that if it is genuine. What becomes, then, as last, of this wonderful cry of “suppression,” about which these people have been making so much fuss for nearly twenty years? It has dwindled down to a point too small to be seen with the naked eye. It was always utterly false, and now the facts have demonstrated it too clearly to be misunderstood.¹⁰⁹

Like Butler, Waggoner also argued that Seventh-day Adventists did not suppress Ellen White’s earlier writings in order to hide theological difficulties. In his “‘Suppression’ and ‘The Shut Door’” Waggoner answered some of the specific doctrinal questions related to the suppression charges against Ellen White’s writings. A part of his article attempted to answer the “shut door” suppression objection and Long’s specific reference to Ellen White’s 1849 vision related to her “shut door” statement.¹¹⁰ Similarly to previous Seventh-day Adventist explanations, Waggoner argued that the meaning of her “shut door” description had a particular context and did not teach an unbiblical doctrine. He admitted that the Sabbatarian group, including Ellen White, “*for a short time*” after the 1844 disappointment did believe that “‘the world’ had received its last warning” and that salvation of people was not possible anymore after that time. But “this idea was soon renounced” and rejected.¹¹¹ In 1849 when the vision in question was given

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁰ See: Long, *Comparison of the Early Writings*, 4.

¹¹¹ J. H. Waggoner, “‘Suppression’ and ‘The Shut Door,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 1, 3.

and Ellen White wrote her “shut door” statements, Waggoner explained, it was in the context of spiritualism and false reformation and was not a reference to the salvation of people in general. By that time Ellen White “did not believe that the ‘door of mercy’ was closed in 1844 against those who were not in the advent movement. Her teachings and her labors in 1849, when this vision was given, [sic] are a standing disproof of their assertion,” he wrote.¹¹² Thus he argued that the context of the vision determined the meaning of the “shut door” and the critics’ interpretation of it was wrong.¹¹³

Another question that Waggoner answered was Long’s accusation that part of Ellen White’s first vision was suppressed because of her initial belief in the “immortality of the soul.” Waggoner argued that Long’s conclusion was wrong based on two reasons. One, by the beginning of the 1840s, Ellen White had rejected the immortality of the soul doctrine. Waggoner noted that they had “the testimonies of those who were intimately acquainted with her at that time, that she did not believe in the immortality of the soul.” The second reason was the context of the passage. It is obvious that the vision described the resurrection of God’s faithful people (like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Daniel) and their being taken up “into the city of God.” The omitted lines were “a part of the description of things seen in the city” of God in heaven. Waggoner explained and argued that those lines had nothing to do with a belief in immortality. “Any candid person who

¹¹² Ibid., 3. Ellen White gave a similar explanation concerning the “shut door” objections. See: Ellen G. White, “Suppression and the Shut Door,” MS 4, 1883, CAR, AU.

¹¹³ In a letter to J. N. Loughborough in 1874 Ellen White explained that she initially believed that no more sinners would be converted after the Great Disappointment in October 1844. She was apparently corrected on the topic on March 24, 1849, when she had her open- and shut-door vision. See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:74; and idem, *Early Writings* (2000), 42-45, 86.

will read them in their connection must agree with us that there is no reason apparent for their omission, for they teach nothing inconsistent with the rest of the vision, nor with the Scriptures. There is nothing in them to which an opponent can object, unless they are misrepresented, as Eld[er] Long misrepresents them.”¹¹⁴ The omission of those lines had nothing to do with the hiding of a doctrinal inconsistency or with a previous belief of Ellen White in the immortality of the soul.

In 1887 Seventh-day Adventists published another article dealing with the “shut door” question. It was a response to the criticism of D. M. Canright related to Ellen White’s understanding of the shut door. The Adventists explained that Ellen White’s work for sinners through the years was a powerful refutation of Canright’s “shut door” objection. Moreover, Canright simply had followed the rest of the critics in taking out of context the meaning of the “shut door” phrase and trying to disprove Ellen White’s prophetic gift by an old argument.¹¹⁵ Thus Seventh-day Adventists claimed that the omissions of some of Ellen White’s early writings in later publications were not done because of theological changes or previously held beliefs. The objectors, they claimed, had usually taken things out of context and misrepresented the true meaning of the omitted texts.

A second theological observation against the suppression charges was the Adventist explanation of their understanding of divine inspiration and its relationship to Ellen White’s gift of prophecy. Contrary to the critics, the Seventh-day Adventists

¹¹⁴ J. H. Waggoner, “‘Suppression’ and ‘The Shut Door,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 2.

¹¹⁵ G. I. B[utler], “‘The Shut Door,’” *RH Extra*, Nov. 22, 1887, 14-15.

believed in thought and not verbal inspiration. In the introduction to the book *Early Writings* published in 1882, for example, they noted that “no changes from the original work have been made in the present edition, except the occasional employment of a new word, or a change in the construction of a sentence, to better express the idea, and no portion of the work has been omitted.” They also noted that the “verbal changes” did not alter “any idea or sentiment of the original work” and were done under the supervision and “full approval” of Ellen White herself.¹¹⁶ For Seventh-day Adventists it was the message and not the words that were inspired. As we will see later in the chapter, Ellen White would develop this idea in her own writings and explain her belief in thought inspiration in relation to her gift of prophecy.

The formal decision of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in November of 1883 to republish all of Ellen White’s testimonies also revealed the denomination’s acceptance of thought inspiration. As noted below,¹¹⁷ the records of the meeting not only present a resolution on thought versus verbal inspiration, but indicate that practice when they pointed out that the *Testimonies* were to be republished with some verbal changes in order to “remove” the “imperfections” as far as possible “without in any measure changing the thought” or the meaning of the messages.¹¹⁸ Thus for Seventh-day Adventists, making certain grammatical or clarification changes in the writings of Ellen White did not invalidate her prophetic gift and divine inspiration. In

¹¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882), iv.

¹¹⁷ See pp. 310-311.

¹¹⁸ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 741.

fact, Butler noted that part of the reason why they wanted to republish the *Testimonies* was because they believed that they contained “precious light from the Lord” and “most profitable instruction” for believers.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the objections of suppression of the critics were based on a wrong view of inspiration.

J. H. Waggoner also expanded the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophetic inspiration in some of his answers against the suppression charges by the critics. He noted that it was up to the judgment of Ellen White to determine the publication of a vision or to omit part of it. Waggoner gave biblical examples to support his point. When king Jehoiakim burned the prophetic scrolls, for instance, the prophet Jeremiah renewed his message to the king and “added besides unto them many like words” (Jer 36:32). Since Jeremiah did not put those words “in the book of his prophecy,” maybe we could accuse him of “suppression,” Waggoner logically observed.¹²⁰ Another example related to the apostle Paul in the New Testament. “Paul said he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God to the brethren at Ephesus; but when he wrote to them, he wrote but a small part of the counsel of God.” “Was his failure,” Waggoner asked, not to write or publish “all the wonderful things which he received by ‘visions and revelations,’ evidence that he intended to ‘suppress’ a part of that which the Lord revealed to him?”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ G. I. Butler, “‘Early Writings’ and ‘Suppression,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 5.

¹²⁰ J. H. Waggoner, ‘Suppression’ and ‘The Shut Door,’” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* (See Acts 20:27.)

Butler also observed that there were added scriptural and “parenthetical” references to the first visions of Ellen White published in *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (1847). In his article, “A Venerable Document,” he explained that these references were not part of the original visions and were added later “by the publishers, and not by Sister White herself.”¹²² Again, in 1884 Butler noted that a belief in a “verbal inspiration” was absurd. He argued, for example, that there were varieties of writing styles that are found in the biblical canon. “There are as many evidences of individuality in their productions as in other writers. Every writer has a style peculiarly his own. . . . Had the Spirit of God fixed all their words and forms of expression, evidently this variety would not have been seen.”¹²³ Butler also noted that “if God had bestowed a verbal inspiration upon the prophets in the original Hebrew or Greek in which the Scriptures were written, it could not be retained in the translations which have come to us.” He then explained:

The Bible was nearly all written in two languages [Hebrew and Greek]. It is now translated into hundreds of other tongues. . . . We know these translations cannot be inspired in such a sense as a verbal inspiration would require, for they differ in their form of expression. They agree in nearly all essentials, yet there is a variety of forms of expression in every different translation. Had God given a verbal inspiration in the original, not one in a hundred or a thousand would ever have had the benefit of it. Foreseeing all this, and designing, no doubt, that his word should be translated into all these tongues, we cannot suppose that he would have given a verbal inspiration to the very few which he knew could never be transferred through translators to the many who should read it. If a verbal inspiration was necessary for the few, he would have supplied it to the many. In that case, he would have given the Bible in each tongue, and not have made it necessary that it should be translated at all.¹²⁴

¹²² G. I. Butler, “A Venerable Document,” *RH Supplement*, Aug. 14, 1883, 5.

¹²³ G. I. B[utler], “Inspiration.—No. 8,” *RH*, May 6, 1884, 297.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1888, Uriah Smith expressed the same belief when he wrote that in most cases God revealed to his prophets certain ideas (messages). Those ideas, of course, could be expressed in different ways. He noted that “if the Holy Spirit should give a person words to write, he would be obliged to use those very words, without change; 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.” After giving examples from the Old and the New Testaments, he alluded to the fact that making certain changes in Ellen White’s earlier writings in order to improve their style or her use of historical facts from other writings did not disprove her divine inspiration.¹²⁵ Likewise, G. W. Morse stated in the *Review* that “by the inspiration of the Scriptures is not meant the inspiration of the words and phrases, but the general purpose and use of the same.”¹²⁶ Thus Seventh-day Adventists argued against the charges of suppression and noted that certain changes or omissions of Ellen White’s visionary messages did not invalidate her prophetic gift, nor did it disqualify her from receiving true and genuine visions from God. The critic’s objections, they believed, were based on false reasoning and an unbiblical view of inspiration.

Another specific issue that the Seventh-day Adventists had to respond to in the years from 1882 to 1889 was the plagiarism charge. This was a new objection that D. M. Canright, a former Seventh-day Adventist leader, raised against Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Canright noted that since she borrowed writings from other books and presented

¹²⁵ Uriah Smith, “Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?” *RH*, Mar. 13, 1888, 168. Emphasis supplied.

¹²⁶ G. W. Morse, “Scripture Questions,” *RH*, Mar. 6, 1888, 155.

them as her divine revelations, she was a false prophetess and her gift was not genuine. “Her plagiarisms prove her deception and upset the whole Advent Church,” Canright claimed.¹²⁷ Adventists had to answer this new objection in the light of their understanding of the gift of prophecy. As with the suppression issue, the plagiarism charge was related to the nature of Ellen White’s inspiration.

Intriguingly, Seventh-day Adventists did not respond to the plagiarism charge immediately. The reason may be that they either did not know how to respond and needed time to examine the facts or they did not perceive what the critics were calling “plagiarism” to be an effective argument against the nature of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. Loughborough seemed to be the only one who directly responded to Canright’s charge of plagiarism. His article, “False Charges Refuted,” appeared immediately after the Healdsburg debate between Canright and W. M. Healey in February 1889. As noted already, Loughborough answered a particular accusation made by Canright who claimed that Ellen White took “seven solid pages” from J. N. Andrews’s *History of the Sabbath* and used them in her *Great Controversy* edition of 1884. Loughborough’s article was a reply to this specific charge and defended Ellen White’s use of other sources.¹²⁸ He laid out several arguments.

As noted above, he was the first to compare Ellen White’s writings with another author in parallel columns. He published side-by-side Ellen White’s *Great Controversy* book with that of J. N. Andrews’s *History of the Sabbath* so that people could see and evaluate the actual borrowing of Ellen White from Andrews’s work. Thus Loughborough

¹²⁷ D. M. Canright, “Elder Canright’s Plagiarism,” *HE*, [Mar. 20, 1889].

¹²⁸ J. N. Loughborough, “False Charges Refuted,” *HE*, [Mar. 13, 1889].

aimed to refute Canright's charge that she had borrowed "seven solid pages," although he acknowledged that she made some use of Andrews's material. "The reader" can see, Loughborough wrote, "that the charge made by Mr. Canright that Mrs. White had copied from Elder Andrews 'word for word' 'whole pages,' falls to the ground," he concluded.¹²⁹

Second, Loughborough argued that what Ellen White borrowed from Andrews was historical facts or data and not necessarily ideas. Because they both were writing on the same historical events, they might well have said nearly the same thing, he believed. "As I before stated," Loughborough wrote, "the words are not the same, and the points to which both books refer are historical statements and if each party told the truth in the case there must of necessity be similarity in the facts stated."¹³⁰ He then went on to explain why he dissented from the report of the three-member committee, of which he was a part that had examined Ellen White's writings and charged her with plagiarism. He differed with the other two members "on the ground that what they were trying to show up as plagiarism in Mrs. White's writings was a statement of matters of fact, and not in any sense a copying of ideas or reasoning."¹³¹

To defend his argument further, he noted that if Ellen White's use of Andrews's material constituted plagiarism, then we could charge with plagiarism the prophets and the apostles in the Bible. Loughborough gave as examples the parallel passages of Isa 2

¹²⁹ Ibid. Canright, as noted, denied to have had made such a claim before Loughborough wrote the article. See pp. 289-290.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

and Mic 4, Matt 17:1-5 and Mark 9:2-7, and “2 Peter 2, compared with the book of Jude.” What Ellen White had done, Loughborough argued, was what Bible writers and prophets had done long before her. But simple borrowing of facts or historical events was not plagiarism, according to his reasoning.¹³²

Loughborough’s third argument related to the plagiarism charge was linked to Canright’s own use of sources. Exploiting his arguments, Loughborough accused Canright of being a plagiarist himself. Using parallel columns, he compared two pages from Canright’s book *The Bible From Heaven* published in 1878 with those of Moses Hull’s book with the same title published in 1863. Loughborough’s verdict was that Canright borrowed quite slavishly from Hull’s writings using his “exact words, paragraphs and arguments.” “The above shows that this man who is so free to charge others with plagiarism,” Loughborough wrote, “has here in this one instance, copied a whole page with scarcely any alterations and for which he gives no sort of credit.” If Ellen White was a plagiarist, Canright was a plagiarist himself.¹³³

We must note here that copying from other authors seemed to be a common practice among religious writers during the nineteenth century. This might well have been the reason why Seventh-day Adventists were not disturbed by Ellen White’s borrowing of materials from other authors even after Canright’s challenge. The question of nineteenth-century plagiarism, however, remains still open for discussion and investigation.¹³⁴ Plagiarism, however, gradually became one of the most used arguments

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Several twentieth-century studies indicate that the sharing of materials by authors was not defined as plagiarism for much of the nineteenth century, even though

against Ellen White’s prophetic gift and the Seventh-day Adventist acceptance of her prophetic authority. Despite the challenges, however, Adventism continued to recognize the doctrine of the gift of prophecy as part of their theological system. They also continued to affirm the church’s official acceptance of Ellen White’s gift through General Conference resolutions. This is what the next part of this chapter will discuss.

Responses to Objections through General Conference Resolutions

As in the previous periods, Seventh-day Adventists issued several important General Conference resolutions concerning the gift of prophecy in the period from 1882 to 1889. As noted earlier, the resolutions did not respond to particular objections related to Ellen White, but offered the official Seventh-day Adventist position concerning her gift of prophecy and aimed to strengthen the confidence in her prophetic inspiration. They are several major points that we can note.

First, the General Conference resolutions publicized the official Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophetic inspiration in relation to Ellen White’s prophetic writings. As we have noted, one of the 1883 General Conference decisions was to republish all of Ellen White’s *Testimonies* “in four volumes” since most of them were out of print. The resolution also recommended that since many of the original testimonies

that attitude was beginning to shift in its later years. See Vincent L. Ramik, *The Ramik Report: Memorandum of Law, Literary Property Rights, 1790-1915* (Washington, DC: Diller, Ramik & Wight, 1981); “There Simply Is No Case,” *Adventist Review*, Sept. 17, 1981, 4-6; Jerry Moon, “Who Owns the Truth? Another Look at the Plagiarism Debate,” in “*Ellen White and Current Issues*” *Symposium*, vol. 1, Apr. 4, 2005, CAR, AU, 41-66. F. D. Nichol, *Ellen White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951), 403-428.

were written “under the most unfavorable circumstances” or in “haste” there were grammatical “imperfections” that needed to be corrected. Thus it stated:

Whereas, Many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection of the writings, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected; and--

Whereas, We believe the light given by God to his servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed; Therefore--

Resolved, That in the re-publication of these volumes such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought; and, further--

Resolved, That this body appoint a committee of five to take charge of the re-publication of these volumes according to the above preambles and resolutions.¹³⁵

The committee included W. C. White, Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, and G. I. Butler.¹³⁶ Although there were some Seventh-day Adventists who expressed fear that changes of the *Testimonies* would undermine confidence in their divine inspiration and give recognition to the critics, the 1883 General Conference resolution affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist belief in thought inspiration.¹³⁷ As noted earlier, the four volumes of the republished *Testimonies* appeared in 1885 and were widely circulated. Every believer was urged to read and “induce others to read them,

¹³⁵ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 27, 1883, 741.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 742.

¹³⁷ For further study on the revision and republication of Ellen White’s *Testimonies*, see: Jerry A. Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship between the Prophet and Her Son*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 19 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), 122-129.

confident that the instruction and wise counsel contained therein will commend them to all classes, and will prove beneficial to all.”¹³⁸

Second, the resolutions continued to promote works by or about Ellen White and her prophetic gift. The aim was to introduce new believers to her work and to establish their confidence in the gift of prophecy doctrine amidst serious critical objections. The General Conference in 1883 noted that the opposition to the Seventh-day Adventist belief in the gift of prophecy of Ellen White during the 1880s had “created a great interest” “on the subject of spiritual gifts” and that they had to prepare “suitable works” to meet the new challenges.¹³⁹ A General Conference resolution recommended, therefore, that “this Conference select a suitable person, or persons, to prepare a work setting forth such facts for the use of our own people and the information of the public in general.”¹⁴⁰

Following the recommendation, the General Conference voted “that a tract of suitable size be published, containing the most pointed arguments on the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, and some of the clearest evidences of personal experience, referring to the larger work for more complete evidence.” It also voted “that the matter of the preparation of the books to be issued on the subject of spiritual gifts, be referred to the General Conference Committee,” and that they “secure such assistance as they may deem best.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Dec. 1, 1885, 745.

¹³⁹ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 20, 1883, 732.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 733.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

In the following years, General Conference resolutions continued to promote publications from the writings of Ellen White. The General Conference session in 1886, for example, recommended the preparation of “a manual” composed of extracts from Ellen White’s *Testimonies* on a variety of subjects, such as presenting the truth to others, personal consecration, manner of life, habits of study, and ministerial and missionary work.¹⁴² A year later, in 1887, the General Conference session asked Ellen White to prepare a “small pamphlet” composed of selections from her writings “on the subject of health and temperance.”¹⁴³ In 1889, the General Conference recommended Ellen White’s revised edition of her *Great Controversy* and urged people to benefit from its reading. It also recommended the circulation of the new *Testimony No. 33* among believers since it contained important instructions for personal spiritual growth.¹⁴⁴ Obviously, Seventh-day Adventists considered the publication of works by or about Ellen White an important part of teaching and building people’s confidence in the doctrine of the gift of prophecy and Ellen White’s gift in particular.

A third way through which General Conference resolutions affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist acceptance of Ellen White’s gift of prophecy was by recommending the publication of her writings in foreign languages. Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church had started to gradually grow outside of the United States, the denomination needed to

¹⁴² G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 30, 1886, 744.

¹⁴³ [G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith], “Thirteenth Day's Proceedings,” *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 28, 1887, 3.

¹⁴⁴ “International Tract Society Proceedings, Sixth Meeting,” *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1889, 142.

introduce Ellen White to those believers and prevent prejudice against her prophetic gift. In 1882 a General Conference resolution stated that it was “the sense of this Conference, that a book containing selections from the writings of sister [*sic*] White be published in the Danish-Norwegian language.”¹⁴⁵ It was to contain “a sketch” of the life of Ellen White and “various” other extracts from her writings. The 1883 General Conference reported that the book was “well received among the Scandinavian people” and met “a want long felt.”¹⁴⁶ Because of the good reception, the General Conference recommended further to publish Ellen White’s *Life of Christ* “in the Danish-Norwegian language” and also to start publishing her writings “in the French, German and Swedish languages.”¹⁴⁷

The translation of Ellen White’s works continued throughout the rest of the period from 1882 to 1889. The General Conference in 1889, for example, noted that her 1884 *Great Controversy*, volume four, had “already been translated into the Danish language” and was “in press in Christiania, Norway” to be published and distributed soon. It also noted that Ellen White’s revised edition of the 1888 *Great Controversy* was soon to be translated and published in the “Danish language” as well.¹⁴⁸ Thus Seventh-day Adventists made a special effort to promote Ellen White’s writings and prophetic gift in foreign languages among non-English-speaking believers.

¹⁴⁵ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference,” *RH*, Dec. 26, 1882, 787.

¹⁴⁶ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 20, 1883, 733.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ “International Tract Society Proceedings. Sixth Meeting,” *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1889, 142.

A fourth way through which General Conference resolutions acknowledged the Seventh-day Adventists' confidence in Ellen White was through continuing appreciation of the benefits of having her prophetic gift in their midst. Such affirmative resolutions appeared almost every year in the period from 1882 to 1889. A resolution published in 1882, for instance,

Resolved, That we express our unabated confidence in the Testimonies which have been so graciously given to this people, which have guided our ways and corrected our errors, from the rise of the third angel's message to the present time.¹⁴⁹

The twenty-third annual session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in 1884 expressed its desire for Ellen White to visit Europe and share "the benefits of her labors" and her "precious light and instruction" with the believers there.¹⁵⁰

Ellen White accepted the challenge and worked in Europe from 1885 through 1887.¹⁵¹

During the same 1884 Conference, G. I. Butler also reported that Ellen White's

¹⁴⁹ G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference," *RH*, Dec. 26, 1882, 787.

¹⁵⁰ G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, "General Conference Proceedings," *RH*, Nov. 11, 1884, 713.

¹⁵¹ For a personal historical account of Ellen White's work in Europe see: Ellen G. White, "Notes on Travel," in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists: With Reports of the European Missionary Councils of 1883, 1884, and 1885, and a Narrative by Mrs. E. G. White of Her Visit and Labors in These Missions* (Basle, Switzerland: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 159-249. See also D. A. Delafield, *Ellen G. White in Europe, 1885-1887: Prepared from Ellen G. White Papers and European Historical Sources* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, [1975]); idem, *The Productive Years in Europe, 1885-1887: A Picture of Ellen G. White, the Many-Sided Prophet* ([Washington, DC]: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987); *Ellen G. White and Europe: Symposium Papers* (Bracknell, England: Ellen G. White Research Center, Newbold College, 1987).

instructions had brought “a spirit of love and union” and had encouraged the Adventists in their work for God and the Seventh-day Adventist cause.¹⁵²

Another resolution expressing Seventh-day Adventist appreciation of having Ellen White’s gift of prophecy was published during the 1886 General Conference session. It stated:

Resolved, That we feel our indebtedness and express our thanks to God for the faithful warnings and reproofs which he is in mercy giving us by his Spirit, and that we will show our appreciation of these testimonies by humbling our hearts before him, and putting away sin from us, that the work of God be not hindered.¹⁵³

Other similar resolutions affirming the benefits of Ellen White’s prophetic gift for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination continued to appear.¹⁵⁴ As in the previous periods, the General Conference resolutions during the years from 1882 to 1889 aimed to strengthen the confidence of believers in Ellen White and her prophetic gift. In the midst of new critical questions against the validity of her gift and accusations that Seventh-day Adventists wanted to hide certain portions of her writings, the denomination wanted to introduce Ellen White to new believers and show that her gift had a divine origin. They were adamant to republish all of her earlier writings as proof that they had nothing to hide or worry about. Moreover, they started publishing Ellen White’s writings in foreign languages. Thus the official General Conference resolutions affirmed the Seventh-day

¹⁵² G. I. Butler, “The General Conference,” *RH*, Nov. 25, 1884, 745.

¹⁵³ G. I. Butler and Uriah Smith, “General Conference Proceedings,” *RH*, Nov. 30, 1886, 744.

¹⁵⁴ See for example, “American Health and Temperance Association,” *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 1, 1888, 3; “General Conference Proceedings. Thirteenth Meeting,” *GC Daily Bulletin*, Nov. 1, 1889, 129.

Adventists' confidence that Ellen White's gift was a true manifestation of the biblical gift of prophecy and that they were privileged to have it in their midst.

Ellen White's Self-Understanding of Her Prophetic Gift

Ellen White's self-understanding in the period from 1882 to 1889 continued to be seen in the practical and theological realms. In the practical realm she continued to use her gift to bring unity, to fight controversies, and to counsel people to live better spiritual lives. Far more important for this study, however, was her self-understanding in terms of theology. There were three general issues related to Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic gift in the period from 1882 and 1889. First, she continued to hold that her gift was genuine. But, in contrast to the previous period she was very "vocal" in expressing her conviction that her calling was from God and therefore her inspiration was divine. Second, Ellen White addressed specific objections and answered critical questions raised against her prophetic gift by the critics. And third, she gave theological insights regarding how she perceived divine inspiration in relation to her prophetic gift.

The first theological application of Ellen White's self-understanding of her prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889 related to her strong belief in the authenticity of her prophetic gift and its divine inspiration. The reasons she raised this issue were apparently the many critical voices during these years against her prophetic gift and the nature of the accusations against her visions and testimonies. While the critics aimed to show that she was a false prophet, Ellen White claimed to possess the true biblical gift of prophecy. In an 1882 letter to her son W. C. White, she noted that her gift was a part of the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). She wrote:

As for myself I expect much worse things than this, for the dragon is wroth [with] the remnant who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. These

things must come and we must in Christ meet them and without great astonishment we must submit to be misunderstood and our work misjudged and the message God sends to His people be contradicted, misconstrued, and misinterpreted just as Satan designs it shall be, that the words of reproof and warning shall fall upon ears that will not hear and hearts that will not receive, and understanding that will not be comprehended. All this I have had set before me distinctly.¹⁵⁵

Again in 1882, she wrote a special testimony to the Battle Creek Church concerning some internal problems and noted that she was “careful not to express” her own opinion but the testimony that “God has given [to her] . . . to prevent this state of things.”¹⁵⁶ In *Testimony 31* she expressed the same idea, noticing that her work was “the Lord’s message of light to his people.”¹⁵⁷

When some questioned the messages of her testimonies as being influenced by her husband or that they were “merely the opinion of Sr. White,” she strongly disagreed and defended their divine inspiration. She wrote:

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? . . . As Christ’s ambassador, I would say to you, Be careful what position you take. This is God’s work, and you must render to him an account for the manner in which you treat his message.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ellen G. White to W. C. White, Dec. 18, 1882, Letter W-24, CAR, AU.

¹⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 20.

¹⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 31* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1882), 65.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-63.

On another occasion in 1883, when Uriah Smith seemed to be affected by the new critical objections against her inspiration, she wrote an affirmative letter to him in support of her prophetic calling. “I have spoken to the erring the words God has given me,” she wrote. “Of course I could not compel them to hear. Those who had the benefit of Christ’s labors were just as enraged against Him as the enemies are against me. I have done only my duty. I have spoken because compelled to speak. They have not rejected me but Him who sent me--Him who has given me my work.”¹⁵⁹ To further reemphasize her point she also noted to Smith how God had “connected the testimonies” with the work of the Seventh-day Adventist movement “from its very rise.” “Tear them from the work and you tear the faith of God’s people to pieces,” she wrote.¹⁶⁰ Ellen White also acknowledged that despite opposition she had not changed the “character” and the “manner” of her labor because of her certainty that her work was from God. “Brethren and sisters,” she wrote, “have no fears that I shall become disheartened by the cruel attacks of my enemies. . . . Leave Sister White in the hands of God. If the work in which she is engaged be of God, it will prosper; otherwise it will come to naught.”¹⁶¹

When Canright left the denomination in 1887 and started speaking critically of Ellen White’s prophetic gift, she responded to him and asserted that her messages were from God. In a personal letter written to Canright in April 1887, she noted that his rebellion was not against her personally but against the “message” that God had sent to him “through his humble instrument.” “It was Christ that you injured, and not me,” she

¹⁵⁹ Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, July 31, 1883, Letter S-3, CAR, AU.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Ellen G. White, “Our Present Position,” *RH*, Aug. 23, 1883, 545.

explained. “Make all straight between your soul and God, and all will be straight between you and me.”¹⁶²

In another letter to a certain “brother Burke” written in 1888 Ellen White upheld again her belief that her messages came from God. “Because you do not see and understand yourself,” Ellen White wrote, “the Lord has graciously presented the matter before you. Will you reject the light of the message of God to you and say it is hearsay? Dare you do this?” she asked. “You know better.”¹⁶³ The same year she penned again that it was “sad to see my brethren cherishing doubts and talking doubts in regard to the light God has been pleased to give them.”¹⁶⁴

Despite all the difficulties and objections, Ellen White was firm that she would continue to do her work as a prophetess because she was convinced of her divine calling. In 1883, for example, she wrote in the *Review* that the attacks against her would not “turn” her away “from the path of duty.” “The work committed to me forty years ago,” she penned, “I must carry forward as long as life shall last. I will not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Unpleasant as it may be, I must warn, reprove, rebuke, as God bids me, whether the carnal heart will accept or reject the words of warning.”¹⁶⁵

In *Testimony 33*, published in 1889, she noted again that God had given her “a marked, solemn experience in connection with his work; and you may be assured that so long as my life is spared, I shall not cease to lift a warning voice as I am impressed by the

¹⁶² Ellen G. White to D. M. Canright, Apr. 20, 1887, Letter C-22, CAR, AU.

¹⁶³ Ellen White to Brother Burke, Apr. 5, 1888, Letter B-28, CAR, AU.

¹⁶⁴ Ellen G. White to Brother Rice, Apr. 30, 1888, R-16, CAR, AU.

¹⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, “Notes on Travel,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1883, 642.

Spirit of God, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. . . . The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me.”¹⁶⁶ Thus Ellen White demonstrated consistent assurance between 1882 and 1889 that her prophetic gift and messages had a divine origin.

A second aspect of Ellen White’s self-understanding in the period from 1882 to 1889 was revealed through her involvement in answering some of the specific objections raised by the critics against her gift of prophecy and divine inspiration. As we have already noted, she rarely engaged in answering her objectors. However, the charges raised by Long, Canright, and others were significant enough to prompt the need for her to respond. Similar to other Adventists, Ellen White believed that the majority of the critical objections neglected either the context or the purpose of her prophetic gift and therefore came to wrong interpretations.

In 1883 Ellen White personally responded to the suppression charges of A. C. Long. She first published two articles in the *Review* encouraging believers not to give up their trust in her prophetic ministry in the midst of Long’s attacks. In “Our Present Position,” published on August 28, 1883, she assured believers not to be “disturbed by the efforts of those who so earnestly seek to arouse distrust and suspicion of Sister White.”¹⁶⁷ Two months later she gave similar advice when she wrote that “the most extravagant, inconsistent reports in regard to my position, my work, and my writings, will be put in circulation. But those who have had an experience in this message, and have become acquainted with the character of my work, will not be affected by those things,

¹⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, 219.

¹⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, “Our Present Position,” *RH*, Aug. 28, 1883, 545.

unless they themselves backslide from God, and become corrupted by the spirit of the world.”¹⁶⁸ Ellen White also explained that “for forty years, Satan has made the most determined efforts to cut off this testimony from the church,” but it continued “from year to year to warn the erring, to unmask the deceiver, to encourage the desponding.” “My trust is in God,” she concluded. “I have learned not to be surprised at opposition in any form or from almost any source.”¹⁶⁹

Ellen White’s direct response to Long’s objections of suppression was a sixteen-page document entitled “Suppression and the Shut Door.”¹⁷⁰ At the beginning of the document she gave a brief account of how *Early Writings* was published. Like other Seventh-day Adventist responders, she explained that the reason why they used the 1851 edition of her *Experience and Views* for the *Early Writings* edition was the unavailability of earlier publications of her visionary experiences that Long referred to. Because of her extensive travelling, she noted that she had “lost all trace” of her “first published works.” “When it was decided to publish ‘Early Writings’ at Oakland, last fall,” she wrote, “we were obliged to send to Michigan to borrow a copy of ‘Experience and Views.’ And in doing this we supposed that we had obtained an exact copy of the earliest visions as first published.” Obviously, even Ellen White did not possess a copy of her 1851 book nor did she have copies of her pre-1851 visionary publications. Not surprisingly, she would

¹⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, “Notes on Travel,” *RH*, Oct. 16, 1883, 642.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, “Suppression and the Shut Door,” MS 4, 1883, CAR, AU. See also, *idem*, *Selected Messages*, 1:59-73.

appeal to those who had such copies to send them to her “without delay” so that she could make a personal copy for herself.¹⁷¹

Despite using a later publication, however, Ellen White was absolutely convinced that there was nothing that she wanted to hide or was ashamed of from her earlier writings. Against Long’s conclusion she stated: “So far from desiring to withhold anything that I have ever published, I would feel great satisfaction in giving to the public every line of my writings that has ever been printed.”¹⁷² At the same time, she also made clear that she was “not responsible for all that has been printed” as coming from her in those early years. Evidently, there were people who compiled some of her writings without her approval and distorted her messages. One such person was Eli Curtis, who, Ellen White reported, “took articles that came from my pen, and wholly transformed and distorted them, picking out a sentence here and there, without giving the connection, and then after inserting his own ideas, he attached my name to them as if they came direct from me.” Although Ellen White forbade him to “misconstrue” her messages, he continued “to publish what he pleased.” “Some of these sheets may still be in existence,” she warned, “and may be brought forward as coming from me, but *I am not responsible for them.*” Ellen White, however, did acknowledge that *Early Writings* “did pass under” her “eye.” Nevertheless, since she did not possess earlier publications of her visions than her 1851 *Experience and Views*, she claimed that she was “not responsible for the omissions” which were “said to exist.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ellen G. White, “Suppression and the Shut Door,” MS 4, 1883, CAR, AU.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

After giving this background information of how *Early Writings* appeared, Ellen White went on to answer Long's specific objections of suppression. The first question was related to her "shut door" reference found in her first vision. Ellen White acknowledged that she did believe for a while after the disappointment in 1844 that "the door of mercy was . . . forever closed to the world."¹⁷⁴ She, however, went on and pointed out that it was her visions that eventually "corrected" hers and the Sabbatarians' "shut door" error and enabled them "to see the true position."¹⁷⁵ "I am still a believer in the shut door theory, but not in the sense in which we at first employed the term or in which it is employed by my opponents," she wrote.¹⁷⁶

Ellen White also argued against Long's interpretation that some lines of her first vision were suppressed because they supported a belief in the immortality of the soul. She explained that she had already accepted the doctrine of "non-immortality of the soul" in 1844 and never changed her position after that. The passage questioned by Long, Ellen White noted, described the resurrection scene after the second coming of Jesus and had nothing to do with the "immortality of the soul" belief. Based on the context, she again noted that Long's conclusions were "unreasonable" and untrue. In fact, she argued that if Long's accusations of suppression were true, the Adventists would have to "suppress" other similar descriptions from her writings.¹⁷⁷ Thus, she explained, the suppression had nothing to do with her change of theology or belief in the immortality of the soul.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ See the earlier discussion of this topic on pp. 301-302.

¹⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, "Suppression and the Shut Door," MS 4, 1883, CAR, AU; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:63.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

In a similar manner Ellen White went on to answer the rest of Long's charges related to her views on the seal of God, renouncing the Sabbath, and the time of the Second Coming. Her conclusion was that Long was either misquoting or misrepresenting her writings by reading them out of context. Looking at the context, however, would explain his suppression objections. Thus Ellen White personally responded to Long and defended the validity of her prophetic gift. She also hoped to help the many honest believers who might have had been misled by such false arguments.

She also responded to the criticisms of D. M. Canright after his rejection of Seventh-day Adventism. She noted that his rejection of her gift and the doctrines held by Seventh-day Adventists was based not on theological reasons, but on other reasons. Being somewhat personal friends, Ellen White wrote many letters prior to 1887 trying to convince Canright not to give up his Advent faith and urging him to remain a part of the denomination. However, after Canright's final departure in February 1887, she questioned his doctrinal honesty, making an interesting point in noting that for most of his life he had defended the doctrines accepted by Adventists, including the gift of prophecy. After his parting from Adventism, however, he repudiated and condemned these same doctrines. Thus she posed a logical question to Canright in a letter she wrote to him on April 20, 1887: "Which is the genuine work?" she asked. "Which is the false? Can we trust to your judgment, can we rely upon your interpretations of the Scriptures? We should not. We would be in danger of being misled. You cannot now feel, nor at any future period of time, that your feet are standing on solid rock."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Ellen G. White to D. M. Canright, Apr. 20, 1887, Letter C-22, CAR, AU.

For Ellen White, Canright had left the “Bible truth” and had decided to take “the side of the great first rebel.” In terms of his rejection of her prophetic gift, Ellen White noted that it was based on personal rather than theological grounds. Canright had rejected her testimonies, she asserted, because of personal messages that Ellen White sent to him with strong rebukes and appeals to change.¹⁷⁹

Interestingly, when Canright wrote against her prophetic gift in his *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, Ellen White did not respond to his arguments directly. We must note, however, that most of Canright’s arguments, with the exception of the plagiarism charge, were repetitive from the previous periods. On the other hand, in 1889 she did republish some of her most significant statements related to her own self-understanding of her prophetic gift. Part of *Testimony 33* contained “extracts” from what she had written “during the last forty years” concerning the importance of her prophetic gift and the nature of her work.¹⁸⁰ It seems that Ellen White wanted to set forth in that controversial climate some general principles concerning her prophetic role and introduce believers to the right understanding of it.

After giving a brief description of her first visions and her struggle to accept the prophetic call, she explained what was the main object of her gift. She noted that the testimonies were given to warn and reprove of sin, encourage believers to live true Christian lives, and bring them closer to Jesus. Another important function of her gift was

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, 182-224; See also: idem, *Testimonies*, 9 vols. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:655-696. The material in *Testimony 33* provides footnotes related to the original publications of Ellen White’s earlier statements.

to bring people back to the Bible. Ellen White continued to be firm in her position that her writings were not to take the place of the Bible or to be “an addition to the word of God.” She had always been critical of those who tried to equate her writings with the Bible. “The word of God,” she noted, “is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind, and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it. But notwithstanding all this, some who profess to make the word of God their study, are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the word that they have neglected to follow.”¹⁸¹ In fact, she believed that if people had “made God’s word” their study and followed its teaching, they “would not have needed the Testimonies.”¹⁸²

A major part of the material covered Ellen White’s concern with the treatment of her testimonies. She, for example, warned about the “wrong use of the Testimonies.” Some of her most important advice included warnings not to use her writings to prove doctrinal beliefs but to go to the Bible, warnings against taking some of her stronger statements to extremes, and against imposing a belief in her gift on those who did not have sufficient knowledge of her and her ministry, and so on.¹⁸³ She also expressed concern for those who “professed faith” in her prophetic gift but continued to doubt or

¹⁸¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, 191.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

disregard her testimonies. Such an attitude, she believed, would cause them to “drift away from Bible truth.”¹⁸⁴

Perhaps having Canright in mind, she wrote: “Many who have backslidden from the truth, assign as a reason for their course that they do not have faith in the Testimonies. . . . The question to be settled with them is, Shall I deny myself and receive as of God the Testimonies which reprove my sins, or shall I reject the Testimonies because they reprove my sins?”¹⁸⁵ Thus it seems that Ellen White’s comprehensive summary of her understanding of her gift was a direct response to her critics in the 1880s, including D. M. Canright and his rejection of Adventism. It is also significant to note that Ellen White did not change her position concerning her understanding of her prophetic gift and its role within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination through the years.

A third theological point related to Ellen White’s self-understanding of her prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889 was her explanation related to biblical inspiration. Since the charges of suppression and plagiarism raised questions about her inspiration, she had to explain how she understood the inspirational process to work, and relate that to her prophetic gift.

Ellen White considered inspiration to be dynamic and not verbal or dictational in nature. As we have noted, in 1882 she approved the republication of her earlier visions in the book *Early Writings* with some “verbal changes” from the original work.¹⁸⁶ She was also behind the decision made by the General Conference in 1883 to revise and reprint

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 202.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882), iv.

her *Testimonies* in a new four-volume format.¹⁸⁷ When some Adventists objected to the revisions, probably because of fear of criticism of her inspiration, she wrote a letter to Uriah Smith, the chair of the revision committee, on February 19, 1884, and expressed her dissatisfaction with the delay. She explained why the revisions were needed. Since her desire had been to publish the messages that God gave to her without any “delay” there were many imperfections that needed to be improved and corrected. As she explained,

I was shown that I should present before the people in the best manner possible the light received; then as I received greater light, and as I used the talent God had given me, I should have increased ability to use in writing and in speaking. I was to improve everything, as far as possible bringing it to perfection, that it might be accepted by intelligent minds.

As far as possible every defect should be removed from all our publications. As the truth should unfold and become widespread, every care should be exercised to perfect the works published. . . .

Now brother Smith, I have been making a careful, critical examination of the work that has been done on the *Testimonies*, and I see a few things that I think should be corrected in the matter brought before you and others at the General Conference [November, 1883]. But as I examine the matter more carefully I see less and less that is objectionable. Where the language used is not the best, I want it made correct and grammatical, as I believe it should be in every case where it can be without destroying the sense. This work is delayed, which does not please me. . . .

My mind has been exercised upon the question of the *Testimonies* that have been revised. We have looked them over more critically. I cannot see the matter as my brethren see it. I think the changes will improve the book. If our enemies handle it, let them do so. . . .

I think that anything that shall go forth will be criticized, twisted, turned, and boggled, but we are to go forward with a clear conscience, doing what we can and leaving the result with God. We must not be long in delaying the work.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ See p. 312, n. 135.

¹⁸⁸ Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, Feb. 19, 1884, Letter S-11-1884, CAR, AU; *idem*, *Selected Messages*, 3:96-98.

Clearly, Ellen White did not believe in word or verbal inspiration and therefore she did not see a problem with the revision of her *Testimonies*.

In addressing ministers in 1885 she again noted that “God impressed the mind” of his messenger “with ideas” to meet those who needed help.¹⁸⁹ In 1886 she stated again that “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.”¹⁹⁰

A case in point is a letter that Ellen White wrote to G. I. Butler, the General Conference president, concerning administrative problems in Battle Creek College in 1886. It revealed again her rejection of word inspiration. After the letter was typed, Ellen White read it and made several additional notes and remarks, added new sentences, and changed words to improve her ideas.¹⁹¹ The same kind of correction is seen in many of her letters and manuscripts, thus confirming that she believed in thought rather than verbal inspiration.¹⁹²

Ellen White’s most comprehensive and public treatment of the nature of divine inspiration in the period from 1882 to 1889, however, is found in the preface of the 1888

¹⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 32* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1885), 7.

¹⁹⁰ Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” MS 24, 1886, CAR, AU; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

¹⁹¹ Ellen G. White to G. I. Butler, Mar. 1, 1886, Letter B-34a, CAR, AU.

¹⁹² See, for example, Ellen G. White to Dear Brethren, Aug. 5, 1888, Letter B-20, CAR, AU; Ellen G. White to Elders Madison and Howard Miller, July 23, 1889, Letter M-4, CAR, AU; Ellen G. White, “Preparation for Christ’s Coming,” MS 4, 1889, CAR, AU.

edition of *Great Controversy*, manuscript 24 (“Objections to the Bible”) written in 1886,¹⁹³ manuscript 16 (“The Guide Book”) written in 1888,¹⁹⁴ and part of her *Testimony for the Church No. 33* published in 1889.¹⁹⁵ In these works she expressed her belief in thought inspiration and gave several important arguments to confirm that position. First, she pointed out that the author of the Bible was God Himself. “The Holy Scriptures,” she wrote, “are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will.”¹⁹⁶ Talking to those who tried to “improve” the Bible she wrote: “God committed the preparation of *His divinely inspired Word* to finite man. This Word arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guide-book to the inhabitants of a fallen world; bequeathed to them, that by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven. . . . I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.”¹⁹⁷ In *Testimonies 33* she talked about the “mysteries of the Bible” as a proof of its divine inspiration and noted that “the word of God” represented the “character of its divine Author.” Although there were mysteries that men could not completely comprehend, she believed that “God has given us in the Scriptures sufficient

¹⁹³ Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” MS 24, 1886, CAR, AU. The material is also published in idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:19-21.

¹⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, “The Guide Book,” MS 16, 1888, CAR, AU. The material also is published in idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:15-18, under the title “The Inspiration of the Word of God.”

¹⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, CAR, AU. The material also can be found in idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:654-711.

¹⁹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), c.

¹⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, “The Guide Book,” MS 16, 1888; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:16-17. Emphasis supplied.

evidence of their divine character, and we are not to doubt his word because we cannot understand all the mysteries of his providence.”¹⁹⁸ Thus Ellen White was confident in the divine authorship of the Bible.

Second, she noted that although the Bible pointed “to God as its author,” it was written by “human hands” and therefore represented a “union of the divine and the human.” Citing 2 Tim 3:16, as biblical proof, Ellen White wrote that

the truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. 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. . . . The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, *presents a union of the divine and the human.*”¹⁹⁹

Writing on the same topic in her “Objections to the Bible,” she confirmed again that “the Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw a fitting opportunity to impress man at sundry times and divers places. Men wrote as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost. . . . The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”²⁰⁰ Again she noted that

the Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in

¹⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, 227.

¹⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), c. Emphasis supplied.

²⁰⁰ Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” MS 24, 1886; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:19-20, 21.

logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.²⁰¹

Third, Ellen White noted that "thought" inspiration was also confirmed by the different styles that one finds in the Scriptures. "Written in different ages," she penned, "by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subject unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another." Despite the differences in emphasis, however, Ellen White believed that there was "underlying harmony" in the Bible.²⁰²

Fourth, Ellen White realized that God's truths were expressed through the imperfection of human language. The Scriptures were not given "to us in grand superhuman language," and "everything that is human is imperfect," she noted.²⁰³ Thus she accounted for the "possibility" of some mistakes that might have occurred in the copying or in the translating of the biblical account. Such mistakes, however, were not to cause people to "stumble" or reject the Scriptures. "Some look to us gravely and say," she wrote,

"Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the

²⁰¹ Ellen G. White, "Objections to the Bible," MS 24, 1886; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

²⁰² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), d.

²⁰³ Ellen G. White, "Objections to the Bible," MS 24, 1886; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness.²⁰⁴

While Satan was the one who prompted critical objections towards God's revelations, Ellen White believed that the practical purpose of the Bible--bringing people to salvation was clear enough for everyone to understand. "Men of humble acquirements, possessing but limited capabilities and opportunities to become conversant in the Scriptures," she noted, "find in the living oracles comfort, guidance, counsel and the plan of salvation as clear as a sunbeam. No one need be lost for want of knowledge, unless he is willfully blind. We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes."²⁰⁵

The fact of human imperfections, however, did not lessen the importance of God's Word and its inspiration. "God has been pleased to communicate his truth to the world by human agencies," Ellen White wrote, "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 none the less [*sic*], from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language; yet it is the testimony of God."²⁰⁶ Thus Ellen White recognized the imperfection of the human element while at the same time affirmed the divine inspiration of the Bible in support of her belief in thought inspiration.

²⁰⁴ Ellen G. White, "The Guide Book," MS 16, 1888; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:16.

²⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, "The Guide Book," MS 16, 1888; idem, *Selected Messages*, 1:18.

²⁰⁶ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), d.

Fifth, Ellen White noted that not all revelations were necessarily recorded in the Bible. Alluding clearly to her prophetic gift, she wrote:

In harmony with the Word of God, his Spirit was to continue its work throughout the entire period of the gospel dispensation. During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the sacred canon. The Bible itself related how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.²⁰⁷

Ellen White, of course, believed that her prophetic gift was part of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit that continued to be manifested after the close of the canon.

Giving some of the already established arguments, she reinforced her point that not all revelations were recorded in the Bible. “The fact that God has revealed his will to men through his Word,” she noted, “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.”²⁰⁸ In 1889 she wrote again that “the reproofs, the cautions, the corrections of the Lord, have been given to his church in all ages of the world.”²⁰⁹ Of course, Ellen White made a distinction between true and false prophetic manifestations. While she believed that true prophetic manifestations were inspired by the same “Spirit of God that inspired the Bible” and therefore did not contradict its teachings, false manifestations contradicted the Word of

²⁰⁷ Ibid., e.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., d.

²⁰⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church No. 33*, 217.

God, “the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”²¹⁰ Obviously she believed that her gift was part of the genuine prophetic manifestations and that her inspiration was divine.

Ellen White’s understanding of thought inspiration was further seen in her explanation on her use of sources. In the preface to the 1888 edition of the *Great Controversy* she noted that “through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages.” Building upon that illumination, she wrote the story of the battle between God and Satan through the ages of human history. Based on her belief in “thought inspiration,” in the process of writing, she selected and grouped together historical events from the history of the Christian church, used materials from other published works related to the topic, and sometimes “quoted” other authors to describe the main idea of the book--the great controversy “between truth and error.”²¹¹ Here is a direct description of her thinking concerning the use of other sources:

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. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. 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 except in a few instances no specific credit has been given, since they are not quoted for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of

²¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), e.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, g.

those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has occasionally been made of their published works.²¹²

Ellen White, clearly, acknowledged that she borrowed materials from others, but she did not see it necessary to cite them as authority. What was important for her was not the actual words but the idea that she wanted to develop. Ellen White's discussion on the use of sources not only affirmed her belief in "thought" inspiration but also answered indirectly Canright's charge of plagiarism. The preface of the 1888 *Great Controversy* can be seen as Ellen White's indirect response to her critics who claimed that her gift was false and charged her with suppression and plagiarism. Contrary to her critics, Ellen White claimed that her gift was biblical and her inspiration was divine. The charges of suppression and plagiarism were based on a wrong view of "verbal" or "word" inspiration, which Ellen White rejected.

During the years from 1882 to 1889, Ellen White also had to respond and clarify another nuance related to her understanding of divine inspiration--the issue of degrees of inspiration. As we have seen, the idea was introduced within Seventh-day Adventism by Uriah Smith, the editor of the *Review and Herald*, and G. I. Butler, the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In the early 1880s Ellen White had written a few critical testimonies to Uriah Smith concerning some unwise decisions related to Battle Creek College. Not enthused by her reproofs, however, Smith developed the notion that not all of her writings were equally inspired. By 1883, he believed that her visions were inspired but her testimonies were not and that the difference between the two could be determined by her use of "I saw."²¹³

²¹² Ibid., h.

²¹³ Uriah Smith to [D. M.] Canright, Mar. 22, 1883, CAR, AU.

A year later, as noted earlier, Butler tried to “harmonize . . . quarrels about the trustworthiness of Ellen White’s testimonies.”²¹⁴ In his ten-part series on “Inspiration” he argued that there was a “hierarchy” of inspiration within the biblical canon. He assumed that the different forms of revelation led to different degrees of inspiration.²¹⁵ He went so far as to conclude that there were even some parts of the Bible that he “could hardly call inspired.”²¹⁶

Ellen White disagreed with both Smith and Butler, and in the process clarified further her self-understanding of her prophetic inspiration. Related to Smith’s notion of making a distinction between her “visions” and her “testimonies,” she wrote to her son W. C. White that if Smith’s statements were true “God had never spoken by me.” Thus she bluntly stated that his conclusions were “false.”²¹⁷ She also rejected Butler’s conclusions related to a “hierarchy” of inspiration. In a letter to R. A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, written in 1889, she claimed that it was shown to her that “the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the Review [*sic*], neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college.” She disagreed with the concept that “some things in the Scriptures were inspired and others were not.” As she put it, “when men venture to criticize the word of God they venture on sacred, holy ground and had better fear and tremble and hide their

²¹⁴ Timm, “History of Inspiration,” 12. See p. 287.

²¹⁵ G. I. B[utler], “Inspiration.—[No. 1],” *RH*, Jan. 8, 1884, 24.

²¹⁶ G. I. B[utler], “Inspiration.—No. 10,” *RH*, June 3, 1884, 361.

²¹⁷ Ellen G. White to W. C. White, Dec. 18, 1882, Letter W-24, CAR, AU.

wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word[,] selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired.”²¹⁸

Ellen White claimed that the same was true in regard to her testimonies. They had been “treated in the same way; but God is not in this,” she wrote.²¹⁹ In a letter to “brother Rice” in 1888 she noted again that “this is one of Satan’s hooks, to hang your doubts upon to deceive your soul and the souls of others who will dare to draw the line in this matter and say this portion which pleases me is from God, but that portion which points out and condemns my course of conduct is from Sister White alone, and bears not the holy signet. You have in this way virtually rejected the whole of the messages, which God in His tender, pitying love has sent to you to save you from moral ruin.”²²⁰ Thus Ellen White clearly rejected the notion of “degrees of inspiration” and claimed that making such distinctions was unwise.

In the section “Unwanted Distinction,” published as part of *Testimony 33*, Ellen White responded further to the Butler/Smith view of degrees of inspiration as she made an important distinction between the concepts of revelation and inspiration. Thus she noted that although not everything that she wrote was necessarily a revelation from God, it was divinely inspired.

Some have taken the position that the warnings, cautions, and reproofs given by the Lord through his servant, unless they come through special vision for each individual case, should have no more weight than counsels and warnings from other sources. In some cases it has been represented that in giving a testimony for churches or

²¹⁸ Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, Letter U-22, CAR, AU.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ellen G. White to Brother Rice, Apr. 30, 1888, Letter R-16, CAR, AU.

individuals, I have been influenced to write as I did by letters received from members of the church. There have been those who claimed that testimonies purporting to be given by the Spirit of God were merely the expression of my own judgment, based upon information gathered from human sources. This statement is utterly false. If, however, in response to some question, statement, or appeal from churches or individuals, a testimony is written presenting the light which God has given concerning them, the fact that it has been called forth in this manner in no wise detracts from its validity or importance.²²¹

To prove the validity of her argument she used the example of Apostle Paul. She noted how Paul wrote his first epistle to the believers in Corinth as a result of private letters that had been sent, warning him of the problems facing the Corinthian church. Ellen White noted,

Paul was an inspired apostle, yet the Lord did not reveal to him at all times just the condition of his people. Those who were interested in the prosperity of the church, and saw evils creeping in, presented the matter before him, and from the light which he had previously received, he was prepared to judge of the true character of these developments. Because the Lord had not given him a new revelation for that special time, those who were really seeking light did not cast his message aside as only a common letter. No, indeed. The Lord had shown him the difficulties and dangers[,] which would arise in the churches, that when they should develop, he might know just how to treat them.²²²

The same was true concerning her testimonies and therefore people like Butler and Smith had been wrong to make a distinction between what was inspired and what was not inspired. She even claimed to have had a dream in which God rebuked those who reasoned that only those of ““Sister White’s testimonies”” that were received through a direct vision were inspired, and rejected the rest of her messages as simply “her

²²¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimony to the Church No. 33*, 211.

²²² *Ibid.*, 212.

words.”²²³ As far as she was concerned, all of her counsel was inspired even though not all of it came through special revelation.

During the period from 1882 to 1889 Ellen White reaffirmed her belief in her prophetic gift and she continued to claim that her gift was genuine and biblical. In the face of strong critical objections of suppression and plagiarism she defended the divine inspiration of her prophetic gift. She also personally responded to critics and answered questions that seemed to undermine her prophetic authority. She noted that the objectors’ conclusions were based mostly on false assumptions or misrepresentations of her writings. Ellen White also addressed the issue of biblical inspiration and clarified its meaning in relation to her gift of prophecy. In contrast to her critics, she believed in thought inspiration and rejected the view of word or mechanical inspiration. She also claimed to possess the same divine inspiration as biblical authors even though she did not claim to be part of the canon of Scripture.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 has examined the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift from 1882 to 1889. This period was critical in the refinement of the Seventh-day Adventist position on Ellen White’s prophetic inspiration. There are several conclusions that can be noted. First, this period marked the appearance of some of the most influential critical works written against her prophetic gift. A. C. Long’s *Comparison of Early Writings of Mrs. White with Later Publications* (1883) was a forceful examination of “suppression” charges related to the questioning of

²²³ Ibid., 215.

Ellen White's inspiration and the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her prophetic gift. His conclusions claimed that some parts of Ellen White's earlier writings were omitted in later publications because of changed theology. Long's suppression arguments prompted Seventh-day Adventists to clarify their position on inspiration and its meaning in relation to Ellen White's writings. D. M. Canright's *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (1888) summarized all of the previously raised objections against Ellen White's prophetic gift. Canright, however, reinforced the critical objections against her by introducing a new charge of plagiarism in her writings. Canright's work became the main "textbook" of all future critics of Ellen White's prophetic gift and Seventh-day Adventism in general.

A second development that can be noted in the period from 1882 to 1889 is the significant impact on Seventh-day Adventism that the arguments of "suppression" and "plagiarism" had in relation to the Adventist understanding of Ellen White's inspiration. The expansion of the charge of suppression and the introduction of the charge of plagiarism brought a new wave of doubt and questions over Ellen White's inspiration, affecting even the thinking of some Seventh-day Adventist leaders such as Uriah Smith, a long-term editor of the *Review and Herald* magazine, and G. I. Butler, a General Conference president of Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White had to disagree and correct some of their positions on the meaning of inspiration.

The Adventists responded primarily to the specific objections by issuing special editions of the *Review and Herald* in 1883 and 1887. They used two types of arguments--theological and practical. The theological arguments, on the one hand, were mostly repetitive from the previous periods and explained again Ellen White's writings in relation to the "shut door" question, the time of the Second Coming, the relationship between her writings with the Bible, and other theological issues. They also noted that the

critics were taking her writings out of context. Ellen White also accused her objectors of not paying attention to the context and thus misinterpreting her writings.

The practical arguments, on the other hand, became significant, since they provided the background to the critical objections and explained the charges of suppression and plagiarism through practical observations. The Adventists noted that the omissions of parts of Ellen White's earliest materials had nothing to do with theology but with the availability of her pre-1851 publications. Interestingly, the Adventist leadership did not possess copies of Ellen White's earliest published visions. What is more surprising is that Ellen White had not kept such copies either.

Seventh-day Adventists also wrote extensively on the context and background of Canright's controversial leaving of the denomination. They noted that his critical writings against the denomination were based on personal animosity rather than theological concerns. His attacks on Ellen White and her prophetic gift were again more personal than theological in nature. In relation to his charges of plagiarism, it seems that Seventh-day Adventists were not exceedingly troubled by the fact that she copied materials from other authors without giving proper credit. That seemed to have been a common practice among nineteenth-century writers. Moreover, the Adventist belief in "thought" inspiration did not prohibit the use of historical or other sources. We do not find Seventh-day Adventists, with the exception of J. N. Loughborough, responding to the charge of plagiarism. However, the charges of suppression and plagiarism would eventually become two of the most used arguments against Ellen White's prophetic gift and the denomination's acceptance of her prophetic claims.

A third development that can be seen in the period from 1882 to 1889 is the further refinement of Adventism's understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift in

relation to her inspiration. The understanding of biblical inspiration was the critical issue behind the objections of “suppression” and “plagiarism.” While the critics based their arguments on “dictational” or “word” inspiration, Seventh-day Adventists, including Ellen White, based their answers on a “thought” or “dynamic” view of inspiration. The critics claimed that if she was divinely inspired, neither the church nor Ellen White could change or omit any of her earlier writings in later publications. Adventists, on the other hand, responded that God inspired the thoughts and not the actual words of prophets. Consequently, making changes for grammatical or stylistic reasons and omitting parts of Ellen White’s earlier publications did not invalidate her divine inspiration and her gift of prophecy. While the critics claimed that Ellen White was a false prophet, Adventists noted that the critics’ assumption was based on faulty views of inspiration.

Ellen White’s self-understanding of her prophetic gift in the period from 1882 to 1889 did not see any dramatic changes. There were, however, several important emphases that can be noted. First, she became much more involved than in previous periods in defending her prophetic gift. The reason for that seemed to be the nature of the accusations and their impact upon believers. She wrote extensively confirming that her gift was genuine and that it bore divine authority. She also responded personally to critics and to their objections related to her inspiration. When Long accused Seventh-day Adventists of suppressing part of her earlier writings, she took time to answer each of his accusations and defended her inspiration. She also explained that most of Long’s theological conclusions were based on misrepresentation or the taking of her writings out of context. Like other Adventists, Ellen White also explained how the book *Early Writings* was published and why it did not contain her earliest published visionary publications.

Ellen White also gave her side of the Canright controversy, describing his relationship to her family and his attitude towards her testimonies. Having been a personal friend of Canright, she appealed to him not to give up his faith in Seventh-day Adventism. She did not, however, specifically confront the issues he raised since she believed that his animosity towards Seventh-day Adventism and herself was based on personal rather than theological reasons. She also questioned his doctrinal honesty and noted that for most of his life he had defended Adventism's doctrinal beliefs (including her gift of prophecy), but now opposed those same doctrines.

Although Ellen White did not respond directly to Canright's critical observations concerning her prophetic gift, which for the most part were repetitive from earlier years, in 1889 she republished many of her most essential statements concerning her self-understanding of her prophetic gift that had been published during the first forty years of her work. She noted the relationship between her writings and the Bible, the purpose and the use of her testimonies, the attitude of people towards her gift, and other such issues. It appears that Ellen White's compilation of writings concerning her self-understanding of her gift was aimed at clarifying questions that had been raised by the critics and, more positively, to clarify her role as a modern-day prophetess within Seventh-day Adventism.

A second important perspective in Ellen White's self-understanding in the period from 1882 to 1889 was her explanation of divine inspiration and its working. According to Ellen White, true biblical inspiration was based on "thought" rather than "verbal" or "word" inspiration. She believed that the inspirational process was dynamic and combined both divine and human elements. While God inspired the thoughts of His messengers, He did not dictate the actual words. Based on her view of inspiration, therefore, the making of grammatical or stylistic changes in her writings did not

invalidate their divine inspiration, nor did changes in the use of historical material. What was important was the message itself and not the actual words or illustrations used to relate that message.

The same principle was true for the usage of historical and other writings. It seems that because of her view of inspiration, she did not see a problem in using information from other sources. Although she was charged with “plagiarism,” borrowing from other authors was a common practice among religious writers during the nineteenth century. Interestingly, however, after Canright’s charge of plagiarism, Ellen White started giving credit to authors that she used. A good example of that was in her 1888 edition of the *Great Controversy*, in which she also penned a justification for her use of sources and her neglect of the use of quotation marks.

Ellen White also clarified further her view on inspiration when she responded to some nuances of inspiration promoted by some Adventist leaders. For example, she disagreed with Smith and Butler and their view of “degrees of inspiration.” She noted that such a view was unbiblical and that Butler and Smith’s position came as a result of their unwillingness to accept criticism directed to them through her testimonies. This had led them to conclude that God did not inspire all of her writings. In that context, Ellen White also addressed the difference between revelation and inspiration. She noted the principle that not everything that is inspired comes through a vision or divine revelation. All of her testimonies, she held, were inspired writings. She used the biblical example of Paul to confirm her position and thus viewed Butler and Smith’s “degrees of inspiration” theory as unbiblical. Ellen White’s insights are still valuable and thought provoking since the Seventh-day Adventist denomination continues to wrestle with issues concerning her authority and inspiration.

Adventism's understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift was refined and confirmed in the years from 1882 to 1889. The questions of suppression and plagiarism demanded that the denomination examine and refine its understanding of divine inspiration and its relationship to her prophetic ministry. By the end of 1889 Seventh-day Adventism had wrestled with a long series of questions concerning the gift of prophecy doctrine and its meaning and its relationship to Ellen White's prophetic role. Criticisms since that time have largely been reinventions of issues raised between the early 1850s and 1889.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

General Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine and analyze the stages of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1844 to 1889. Four developmental stages were discovered. Chapter 1 examined the period from 1844 to 1850 and set forth the milieu in which the Sabbatarian movement arose. It also provided the initial reaction of the Sabbatarian group toward the visionary claims of Ellen Harmon (White). Nineteenth-century American Christianity was favorable towards charismatic and visionary manifestations and viewed them as signs of God and His power. At the same time, the Millerite movement was skeptical toward such manifestations and considered them false.

The Sabbatarian group, which emerged from the Millerites after the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, was forced to examine and take its own position concerning charismatic and visionary manifestations since Ellen Harmon, one of their founders, claimed to have visions. Although not all Sabbatarians accepted her claims initially, they gradually concluded that she possessed the genuine gift of prophecy.

The first defenders of Ellen White's gift were James White, Joseph Bates, and Otis Nichols. Their initial arguments sought to establish the biblical basis for her gift and to distinguish her from the many "false prophets" prevalent during that time. They came

to several significant conclusions. First, based on Joel 2, Acts 2, and Isa 8:20, they argued that the gift of prophecy was a biblically sound doctrine and that God had always communicated with people through prophets. Second, they noted that the gift of prophecy was to be displayed in the “last days” before the second coming of Jesus. James White even saw it as one of the “signs” of the end-time. Third, they noted the positive influence of Ellen White’s prophetic visions among the disappointed believers. Her gift, the Sabbatharians argued, helped people not to give up on God, to stay united, and to avoid fanatical teachings. Ellen White also saw her initial role in the practical realm in bringing unity among believers and fighting fanatical extremes. Fourth, they claimed that the very existence of false prophetic manifestations proved the reality of the true and genuine prophetic gift. Her prophetic gift, therefore, was initially understood in this first stage to be more of a practical help and a sign rather than an actual doctrine in itself.

Chapter 2 covered the period from 1851 to 1862 when Sabbatharians had to respond to objections against Ellen White’s gift that came from within their own group. The first offshoots, the “Messenger Party” and the “Age to Come” movement, began to publish a periodical, the *Messenger of Truth*, against Ellen White and accused the Sabbatharians of having another rule of faith--the visions. They also argued that Joel 2 was fulfilled at the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2) and that the prophetic gift stopped with the end of the apostolic age. Furthermore, the critics believed that the “spirit of prophecy” in Rev 12:17 referred to the spirit of Christ and not to the gift of prophecy in particular. They also claimed that Ellen White’s visions brought divisions and confusion, that the Sabbatharians made them a test of fellowship, and that she was from the wrong sex to claim prophetic manifestations.

The Sabbatarians responded to the new objections mainly through the pages of the *Review and Herald*. They rejected first the notion that they had another rule of faith and pointed out the distinction between the Bible and Ellen White. Since the Bible was their only rule of faith and it described the existence of the prophetic gift as one of the gifts of the Spirit, they were bound to accept it. Second, they pointed out the perpetuity of the gifts until the second coming of Jesus. In addition to Joel 2 and Acts 2, they also began to use such passages as Acts 9 and 10, 1 Cor 12, and others to support their position for the modern display of the prophetic gift. Third, they claimed that the gift of prophecy was a necessary characteristic or an “identifying mark” of God’s remnant people as they made a connection between Rev 12:17 and 19:10. Fourth, they continued to stress the positive influence of the gift of prophecy among believers, particularly when the objectors tried to disunite the Sabbatarians. Fifth, they noted that Ellen White’s gift was not considered to be a “test” of fellowship and that according to the Bible the gift of prophecy was given to women as well as to men. Thus the period from 1851 to 1862 established some of the most common arguments that the Seventh-day Adventists would use in defense of their belief of the prophetic gift of Ellen White in subsequent years. The Sabbatarians not only established the biblical foundation for the prophetic gift but also confirmed their conviction that they were God’s remnant people in the “last days” because they had the gift of prophecy in their midst. The paradox, however, was that they did not promote Ellen White publicly.

Chapter 3 examined the period from 1863 to 1881. During this stage Seventh-day Adventists continued to deal with controversies over their understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. The criticisms came from both people inside and outside of the new denomination. B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff became the first Seventh-day

Adventist ministers to leave the church over issues related to Ellen White's prophetic gift. In 1866 they also published the first book, *The Visions of E. G. White Not of God*, questioning the validity of her prophetic claims. The denomination had to respond also to outside critics. Non-Seventh-day Adventists like William Sheldon, Miles Grant, and others viewed the new denomination as being a cult led by a false religious prophetess. Although most of the critical arguments were repetitive from previous years, there were several new nuances that Seventh-day Adventists had to address.

The main issue concerned the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's writings. The critics claimed that the Adventists considered her writings equal or more authoritative than the Bible and thus made them an addition to the Scriptures. They also believed that many of her theological positions contradicted the Bible and its doctrines. As a result, they argued that portions of her writings were suppressed or modified upon republication. In addition, the critics noted that there was nothing extraordinary about her gift and that she did not reveal anything new.

Seventh-day Adventists responded to the new challenges and broadened their arguments for Ellen White's gift. First, they reaffirmed their position that the Bible was their only rule of faith and that Ellen White's writings were never considered to be equal to or above the Scriptures. In fact, a major purpose of her prophetic work was to bring people back to the Bible. Second, they noted that all of their doctrines came from an examination of the Scriptures and not from Ellen White or her visions. Third, they noted that the omission of some of her writings was done for stylistic or circumstantial reasons and not because of theological concerns. (The suppression argument would be developed further between 1882 and 1889.) Fourth, as a response to the critics, Seventh-day Adventists began to publicly promote and distribute her writings inside and outside of

their denomination. A special fund for mass publishing and distribution of her books was established and many of her works were given to public libraries. The aim was to show that Seventh-day Adventists had nothing to hide and to introduce the public to her writings. Fifth, the critics also forced Seventh-day Adventists to use the “supernatural argument” as proof that Ellen White possessed the genuine prophetic gift. James White, J. N. Loughborough, D. M. Canright, and others gave personal accounts of her supernatural condition while in vision and some remarkable fulfillments of her messages.

The 1863-1881 period, therefore, affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist acceptance of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. In 1872 the gift of prophecy became part of the first published statement of beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Although the document was not officially adopted, it showed that her prophetic gift was an integral part of the doctrinal package of the denomination. This period also clarified some of the more detailed nuances related to the relationship of Ellen White’s gift to the Bible and sought to introduce her and her writings to the public.

Chapter 4 covered the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift from 1882 to 1889. During this stage the Adventists refined their understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift in relation to the doctrine of inspiration. The two main issues were the suppression and plagiarism charges that ultimately questioned the inspiration of Ellen White. The objections appeared after a decision by the denomination to republish her earlier writings and testimonies. In 1882 A. C. Long published *Comparison of Early Writings of Mrs. White and Later Publications* and accused the Adventists of suppressing parts of her earliest writings in order to hide inconsistencies of her theology. In 1889 D. M. Canright published the second and enlarged edition of his *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* and summarized all of the

previously raised objections against Ellen White's prophetic gift. He also raised the new objection of plagiarism, which he utilized to question her inspiration.

Seventh-day Adventists responded to the new challenges through special *Review and Herald* issues. They denied Long's charge of suppression and noted that they did not publish Ellen White's earliest editions of her writings because they did not possess them. Interestingly, even Ellen White did not have a personal copy of her earliest publications. The Seventh-day Adventists, however, claimed that they were willing to get copies and publish them in their entirety. Concerning the changes in her writings, the Adventists noted that they were grammatical and stylistic in nature and did not change the intended meaning. Since Seventh-day Adventists believed in "thought" inspiration, they argued that making grammatical or stylistic changes or omitting some parts of her writings did not invalidate Ellen White's prophetic gift.

Their view of "thought" inspiration was also an indirect response to the plagiarism charge raised by Canright. They did not see a problem with Ellen White using other authors to express or support a certain line of thought. Also during these years, Ellen White herself provided some of her most valuable insights concerning her understanding of revelation and inspiration.

By the end of 1889 all of the major arguments for and against the prophetic gift of Ellen White were in place. Subsequent arguments for or against her gift were simply a repetition or modification of the old argumentations.

General Conclusions

Based on the stages of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1844 to 1889, six general conclusions can be established. First, the Adventist development of an understanding of the doctrine

of the gift of prophecy grew in a particular religious context that in general was friendly to prophetic and other charismatic manifestations and viewed them as acceptable forms of genuine Christian experience. The Second Great Awakening, the camp meeting gatherings, the Methodist and holiness revivals, and the appearance of radical religious groups led by visionary leaders played a significant role for the general acceptance of such charismatic displays. Ellen White's prophetic claim, therefore, was in harmony with the spirit of the time which provided a spirit of openness toward it on the part of those who would become Sabbatarian Adventists.

A second conclusion is that the Sabbatarian Adventists were forced from the beginning of their movement to justify their acceptance of Ellen White's prophetic gift because Millerism, from which the Sabbatarianism arose, did not accept visionary manifestations and considered them as fanatical and false. While the Sabbatarians agreed with the Millerites that there were instances of false prophetic claims, they also believed that the Bible allowed for the true display of the gift of prophecy in the last days before the second coming of Jesus. Ellen White's gift, they believed, was a part of the true manifestation of the biblical gifts of the spirit.

A third general conclusion that can be established from this study is that the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift was extemporaneous rather than systematic. In other words, their defensive arguments were developed as a reaction to specific critical objections rather than through systematic study on the topic. During each period of that process, as we saw above in the summary, they enlarged and affirmed their understanding of Ellen White's gift. Thus the sophistication of their theology on the topic expanded and deepened at each stage of their

thinking on the topic. By the end of 1889 the denomination had a well-developed theological platform for the justification of their belief in Ellen White's prophetic gift.

A fourth general conclusion is that the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy between 1844 and 1889 helped the denomination to establish important theological principles and put the doctrine of spiritual gifts into a perspective within their overall theology. First, the discussion helped Seventh-day Adventists to understand the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's gift of prophecy. As we have noted, while the gift of prophecy was a part of the biblical description of the gifts of the Spirit for the church, it was never considered to be equal to the Bible in authority. Rather, a major role of Ellen White's gift was to bring people back to the Bible and its teachings.

A second and related principle was that Ellen White's gift was never a source for Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. The Bible alone, Adventists affirmed in each developmental period, was their only rule of faith and practice.

A third principle is that Seventh-day Adventists came to view the gift of prophecy as having end-time significance. Based on Rev 12:17 and 19:10, they claimed that Ellen White's prophetic gift was a distinguishing characteristic of God's true followers at the end of time, and began to view themselves as His last-day remnant.

A fourth Seventh-day Adventist principle connected to Ellen White's gift of prophecy was the movement's deepening understanding of revelation and inspiration. The development of the doctrine of the gift of prophecy helped Seventh-day Adventists in their understanding of both topics. Ellen White herself provided some of the denomination's most insightful statements on revelation and inspiration, especially during the 1880s.

Another important theological issue related to Ellen White's gift is that of its being a "test of fellowship." The Seventh-day Adventist understanding on the topic experienced slight changes and modifications. A belief in Ellen White was not considered a test of fellowship. However, a belief in the biblical doctrine of spiritual gifts was eventually considered to be a test. Some also began to view Ellen White's gift as a test but only for those who accepted her visions as divine. The denomination, however, was willing to show patience and tolerance towards individuals who were sincerely searching to find out the truth about Ellen White's prophetic claims.

The above theological principles establishing the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift in relation to the rest of the denomination's theology may serve as helpful guidelines for the denomination as it continues to deal with issues related to Ellen White and her prophetic role for the church today.

A fifth general conclusion of this study relates to Seventh-day Adventism's official affirmation of its belief in the gift of prophecy. While the denomination experienced different crises related to the gift of prophecy in each period, it always affirmed its official acceptance and affirmation of Ellen White through General Conference resolutions. These official statements generally did not attempt to answer questions raised by critics but only affirmed the general Seventh-day Adventist attitude and acceptance of Ellen White as having the true and genuine prophetic gift. The resolutions also dealt with decisions of the denomination concerning publications about or by Ellen White, their translations, and their distribution worldwide. The aim was to acquaint people with her life and ministry and moderate the prejudice that existed against her prophetic gift and Seventh-day Adventism in general.

A sixth general conclusion relates to Ellen White's self-understanding. In general, her self-understanding did not differ from that of Seventh-day Adventism but rather enhanced the denomination's understanding of her prophetic gift. Thus she affirmed the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the relationship between the Bible and her writings, the fact that her visions were not a source of Adventist beliefs, the conviction that her messages were of divine origin, and guidelines for dealing with those who were skeptical towards her gift.

On the other hand, Ellen White enhanced (or clarified) certain points related to the understanding of her prophetic gift. She, for example, rejected Butler and Smith's theory of "degrees of inspiration" and noted that making a distinction between supposed "degrees of inspiration" of her writings was unbiblical. She also helped the denomination to deepen its understanding on the difference between revelation and inspiration. At times, she also revealed some personal matters related to her prophetic ministry, such as her spiritual struggles, difficulties in bearing her prophetic duties, and problems in dealing with people's attitudes toward her testimonies. Thus Ellen White's self-understanding not only affirmed but enhanced the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of her prophetic gift.

In closing, it should be noted that questions over the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift have continued to appear since 1889. Most of the questions, however, have been recurring and repetitive. Meanwhile, Adventists have continued to answer the objections, also utilizing repetitive arguments that find their source in the periods leading up to 1889. In spite of the ongoing controversies over Ellen White's gift, Seventh-day Adventism has continued to defend its understanding and

belief in her prophetic gift and her inspiration. The doctrine of the gift of prophecy, therefore, continues to be a major part of Adventism's theological system.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on this research, several recommendations for future study can be made. First, the development of Seventh-day Adventist understanding can be traced after 1889 since there continued to be critics of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism from within and without the denomination. Although one will find that the major arguments for and against her gift have remained generally the same, a historical study of the critics and the Seventh-day Adventist reaction to them after 1889 may give a fuller historical picture of the development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the gift of prophecy and Ellen White's prophetic role within the denomination. It will be particularly interesting to see if modern critics have influenced, modified, or changed the approach of Adventism concerning their defense of Ellen White's gift of prophecy.

Second, the question of Ellen White's inspiration needs further study. One possibility is a detailed study of Ellen White's own statements on revelation and inspiration. Such a study could be used to establish principles for a Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the topic. A second study could examine the general development of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of revelation and inspiration, which was initially prompted by controversies over the gift of prophecy.

Another interesting study might examine the question of Ellen White's prophetic gift as being a "test of fellowship" for belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The present study only touched on the issue. However, a detailed historical analysis might throw light on how the denomination can deal with the

complexity of this question since the gift of prophecy is still an essential part of the theological package of Seventh-day Adventism and one of its distinguishing marks.

Such studies can help the denomination in its attempt to find a more balanced and informed approach toward the complex and often controversial subject of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

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Note on Archives, Letters, and Manuscript Collections

Most of the sources used in this study were from published documents. However, two archival collections were also used. This note contains the description of the holdings of those two collections and a listing of unpublished theses, dissertations, and research papers. The published primary and secondary materials will be listed together in a regular way after that.

**Center for Adventist Research
James White Library,
Andrews University,
Berrien Springs, Michigan**

The Center for Adventist Research combines Adventist Heritage Collections and Ellen G. White materials. It contains a vast range of Adventist-related research papers, dissertations, correspondences, and numerous manuscript collections. The main sources used for this study were Ellen White's letter files and her unpublished manuscripts written between 1844 and 1889.

Other documents used in the Center include C. R. Gorgas's broadside "In Honor of the King of Kings," Ellen White's broadsides: *A Vision* (1847) and *To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God* (1849), Joshua V. Himes's correspondence with William Miller between 1837 and 1847, the file containing Otis Nichol's letter to William Miller, dated April 20, 1846 (005171), and Uriah Smith's correspondence with D. M. Canright between 1880 and 1883 (DF-233-b).

**Ellen G. White Estate, Main Office
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,
Silver Spring, Maryland**

The materials in the main office of the Ellen G. White Estate overlap largely the holdings of the Center for Adventist Research that were needed for this study. The main difference is that the main office holds the original letters and manuscripts of Ellen White while the Center for Adventist Research possesses mostly copies. In addition, the main office also has a collection of James White's correspondences and the "Life Sketches" manuscript of Ellen G. White that was used for her autobiographical publications. It also holds clippings of the *Healdsburg Enterprise* from the 1889 report of Canright's lectures in Healdsburg, California, against Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventism after his departure from the denomination.

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