

## Ellen G. White as a Writer Part I - The Use of Literary Assistants

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(Revised by Jerry Moon and Denis Fortin)

(Further reading: Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, pp. 108-123)

### I. Introduction

A. During her lifetime, Ellen White employed some 20 paid or unpaid individuals to help her in preparation of her letters and manuscripts for a mailing or publication.

1. Categories of work performed included:
  - a. Stenography: taking down oral material in shorthand.
  - b. Simple copying by hand or typewriter: up to 10 carbon copies were made of some documents.
  - c. Minor "copy editing": correcting spelling, grammar, improving sentence structure, etc.
  - d. Major editorial compilation of books: reserved for a select few of her most trusted helpers.

2. Ellen White used the term "editing" with reference to the work of some of her most trusted assistants. However, there were two important differences from the common use of that term:

a. Ellen White's helpers were to remove imperfections without changing the thought. They were absolutely forbidden to alter Ellen White's concepts or intrude any personal ideas of the assistant into the manuscript (W. C. White to G. A. Irwin, May 7, 1900; cited in Jerry Moon, *W. C. White & Ellen G. White: The Relationship Between the Prophet and Her Son* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993], p. 224; hereinafter abbreviated WCW).

b. Even Ellen White's vocabulary was not to be changed. Fannie Bolton was discharged partly because she substituted her own style and vocabulary for that of Ellen White (Letter, E. G. White to W. C. White, Oct. 21, 1892, in WCW, 222).

B. The existence of this group of assistants is very significant for quite different reasons

1. Critics have exploited Ellen White's use of literary help in 2 ways:
  - a. They have asserted (as did Canright) that **anything written by a true prophet should be absolutely perfect in first draft and need no improvement**. Implicit assumption: verbal dictation inspiration.
  - b. They have sometimes claimed that **Ellen White's helpers were the real authors of her works**. Fannie Bolton once claimed to have written *Steps to Christ*. A little time on the CD-ROM, however, will demonstrate that *Steps to Christ* *actually* began as a compilation and that much of it existed in other Ellen White writings long before Fannie Bolton joined Ellen White's staff.

c. The fact that Ellen White counseled with church leaders regarding the publication of her works is cited as evidence that she was manipulated or "influenced"--in some way controlled by those around her.

2. On the positive side, Ellen White's use of secretaries, editorial assistants, and editorial advisors, has three important implications for understanding her and interpreting her writings.

a. **She obviously did not adhere to a verbal dictation concept of inspiration.** She held that "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 thought. But the words receive the impress of the individual [human] mind" (1SM 21).

b. **Her willingness, even her insistence, that nothing be published without first receiving a critical reading from the best qualified people available, shows her humility, her good sense, and the total absence of any illusions of infallibility.** She not only formally disclaimed infallibility (1SM 37) but she lived in harmony with that disclaimer.

c. The degree of trust she placed in the virtually unknown Christians who made up her staff, as well as in denominational leaders whom she invited to read and evaluate her writings shows that while she had an unshakable conviction of her divine call, and of the authority of the divine revelations made to her, **she did not consider herself beyond the possibility of making mistakes**, or above benefitting from constructive criticism. At the same time she was secure enough in her basic self-identity to invite criticism of her work.

"I have all my publications closely examined. I desire that nothing shall appear in print without careful investigation. Of course I would not want men who have not a Christian experience, or are lacking in ability to appreciate literary merit, to be placed as judges of what is essential to come before the people, as pure provender thoroughly winnowed from the chaff. I laid out all my manuscript on Patriarchs and Prophets and on vol. IV [Great Controversy.] before the book committee for examination and criticism. I also placed these manuscripts in the hands of some of our ministers for examination. The more criticism of them the better for the work." (E. G. White W. H. Littlejohn, Aug. 3, 1894, Letter 49, 1894, cited in 10MR 12-13).

C. Before we examine the work of Ellen White's literary assistants, let us look first at Scripture and see if there is any biblical precedent for a true prophet's utilizing the services of secretarial or editorial help in writing.

## II. BIBLICAL PRECEDENTS

### A. Old Testament

1. **Jeremiah:** More than any other prophet, he speaks repeatedly of his receiving "the word of the Lord" (1:2, 4, 9, 12, 14, 17ff).

a. His secretary: a man named "Baruch" (36:4-6, 17, 18, 27, 32).

b. Necessity: "I am shut up" (20:2, 36:5)--the context suggests imprisonment.

c. Public concern over Baruch's role: "How did you do it?" (36:17).

d. Baruch's probable roles: (1) Transcription of oral dictation; (2) Possibly collected, edited, preserved materials of the book; (3) Possibly contributed from research to biographical narratives in the book (4BC 343).

e. Background of Baruch:

(1) His position as a "scribe" suggests he was well-educated.

(2) He came from a distinguished family in Judah (his brother was Zedekiah's quartermaster who went with the king into Babylonian exile).

(3) His high character and influence are evidence by: (a) Accusations by the party favoring flight to Egypt that Baruch had influenced Jeremiah against them; and (b) A collection of spurious writings was later issued under Baruch's own name (one, the book of Baruch, is found in the Apocrypha).

## B. New Testament

### 1. Paul

a. Employed a number of secretarial helpers:

(1) Romans: Tertius (Rom. 16:22).

(2) 1 Corinthians: Sosthenes (?) (1 Cor. 1:1, see also 16:21).

(3) 2 Timothy: Luke

(a) "These words [in 2 Timothy], dictated by Paul just prior to his death, were written by Luke for our profit and warning" (4T 353:1).

b. Necessity for using secretaries:

(1) Imprisonment (?).

(2) Bad eyesight (?)-possibly Paul's "thorn" (2 Cor. 12:7-9; Gal. 4:15).

(3) Hands suffering permanent injury from torture by persecutors (?) (2 Cor. 11:24-27; 6BC 987).

(4) It was *not*, however, because of Paul's limited facility in Greek; he did attend Gamaliel's rabbinical school in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3).

c. "How did you do it?"- We can, of course, only conjecture at this point how Paul employed his secretaries.

(1) In certain instances he may have given his helper an outline or a rough draft. If Paul wrote Hebrews, then the work of the literary assistant went beyond secretarial to actual editorial work.

(a) Evidence: rhetorical quality (as distinguished from inspired truth) varies from epistle to epistle. Stylistic differences, structural differences, etc., are seen in Paul's various epistles. (Was Heb. 11, originally a sermon of Paul's?).

(b) Such reasoning, however, in no way diminishes the quality of inspiration of these epistles/NT books.

## 2. Peter

- a. Identity of secretary: Silvanus [Silas] (1 Peter 5:12).
- b. Necessity for using secretaries:
  - (1) Imprisonment (?).
  - (2) Limited formal education in the Greek language/rhetoric (?).
    - (a) 1 Peter: written in a finely-polished style of Greek composition.
    - (b) 2 Peter: written in a very crude form of Greek, lacking in certain stylistic areas (but *not* lacking in purity of truth, clarity, accuracy).
    - (c) Possible explanation of the difference: Silvanus "polished" the first letter; the second may have been written just before Peter's martyrdom, without literary assistance.
- c. "How did you do it?" Again, we can only conjecture:
  - (1) In 1 Peter, the apostle may have written or dictated to Silvanus an overall plan or rough draft and then trusted his amanuensis to choose the vocabulary, idioms, etc.

## 3. John

- a. Identity: According to a tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, Prochorus, one of the 1<sup>st</sup> seven deacons (Acts 6:5) volunteered to share John's exile on Patmos.
- b. "How did you do it?" Possibly John saw things in vision which he then dictated to Prochorus, who then wrote them down. If so, Prochorus' role was that of a stenographer, but we can only conjecture. There appears to be no corroboration of the identity of John's helper, nor the method employed, in any inspired work.

## C. Conclusion

1. In both OT and NT there is extensive evidence that Bible writers repeatedly used the assistance of literary helpers, and probably in a number of different ways.
2. In view of this established precedent, it should be neither surprising nor yet worthy of blame, if Ellen White literary assistants.

## III. WHY ELLEN WHITE NEEDED LITERARY ASSISTANTS

### A. Ellen White's earliest writings

1. In Ellen White's second vision (late December 1844 or early January 1845), she was directed to tell others what she had seen (2SG 35).
2. In another vision in late spring or early summer 1845, she was directed for the first time to write out what she had seen (2SG 60).

3. Her first published writing was a letter written December 20, 1845 to Enoch Jacobs, an Adventist editor. At the end of the letter she emphasized "This was not written for publication; but for the encouragement of all who may see it." Jacobs, however, promptly published it in the next issue of the *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846. When Ellen saw her letter in the *Day-Star* she wrote again.

"My vision which you published in the *Day-Star* was written under a deep sense of duty, to you, not expecting you would publish it. Had I for once thought it was to be spread before the many readers of your paper, I should have been more particular and stated some things which I left out" (E. G. Harmon to Enoch Jacobs, February 15, 1846, in *Day-Star*, March 14, 1846, emphasis supplied).

4. These two letters highlight the fact that from the moment she began to write, she clearly sensed that writings intended for publication needed to receive "more particular" preparation than writings for merely private communication.

## B. Limited Formal Education

1. Because of her accident, Ellen White had less than 4 years of formal education.
2. However, she had other sources of education:
  - a. Wide reading
  - b. Extensive travel
  - c. Close association with other people who were more highly educated and gifted in other ways.
  - d. Study of Scripture, which she regarded as the true "higher education"
  - e. Approximately 2,000 dreams and visions, in which she conversed with Jesus, angels, and others. She considered this a true higher education.

"With the light communicated through the study of His word, with the special knowledge given of individual cases among His people under all circumstances and in every phase of experience, can I now be in the same ignorance, the same mental uncertainty and spiritual blindness, as at the beginning of this experience? Will my brethren say that Sister White has been so dull a scholar that her judgment in this direction is no better than before she entered Christ's school, to be trained and disciplined for a special work? Am I no more intelligent in regard to the duties and perils of God's people than are those before whom these things have never been presented? I would not dishonor my Maker by admitting that all this light, all the display of His mighty power in my work and experience, has been valueless, that it has not educated my judgment or better fitted me for His work" (5T 686).

3. However, her limited formal education did leave her with one group of limitations regarding literary skill: she was never strong in the technical aspects such as spelling and punctuation. Through the "life education" factors listed above, she developed into a very articulate speaker, but spoken English doesn't require spelling and punctuation skills. Likewise as a writer, she could be eloquently articulate in her expressions, but without skill in spelling and punctuation and similar technical matters.

## C. Limitations from the circumstances in which she wrote

1. After receiving a vision or dream, Ellen White usually wrote very rapidly, anxious to get it all down on paper while it was fresh in her mind.

2. Much of her first draft composition possesses a unique "stream of consciousness" aspect, the result of much haste in writing.
3. Limitations from working while weary or burdened with anxiety. Her deep concern and involvement with people and their problems often weighed her down.
4. Limitations from attempting to portray difficult material. Her personal diary entries for Jan. 10 and 11, 1873, and letter 67, 1874, show her anxiety, frustrations, and feelings of personal inadequacy (3SM 90).

#### **D. Effective Time Management**

1. Ellen White juggled the roles of wife, mother, speaker, writer, and counselor to many people. In order to keep up with all her obligations, she hired cooks, housekeepers, and nannies for her children, so why not secretaries?
2. The volume of her correspondence alone would often have been more than a full-time job had she done her own typing. In addition, she was involved in producing books, articles, and sermons.
3. A large part of editorial skill is mastery of the technical aspects of written language. It is a far greater gift to create concepts and ideas than to correct spelling and grammar. Ellen White was not incapable of editing her own writing (as one can see by the frequent interlineation of further comments in her typed letters and manuscripts). But she was not trained for that role, and she had more important things to do. So she hired others to perform those functions.

### **IV. CATEGORIES OF LITERARY HELPERS**

#### **A. Family Members**

##### **1. Husband, James White** (mid-1840s to late 1870s)

- a. He was educated as a schoolteacher, although like his wife, the bulk of his real education was "life education."
- b. Helped with the *Spiritual Gifts*, Vols. I-IV series (1858-64).
- c. Ellen White wrote out her thoughts during the daytime (while James was engaged in pastoral/evangelistic responsibilities). At night they would sit together by candlelight at the table. James White would particularly: correct grammatical errors and eliminate needless/excessive repetition (1SM 50).
- d. Ellen White did not regard his judgment as "infallible," nor his words "inspired;" "but I have ever believed him better qualified for this work than any other one of our preachers because of his long experience, and because I have long seen he was especially called and adapted to the work . . ." by the Lord (1T 612, 613).

##### **2. Niece, Mary Clough** (1876, 1877)

- a. Daughter of Ellen's eldest sister, Caroline Clough; father a Methodist clergyman.
- b. Only non SDA known to have been so employed.

c. Ellen White had a twofold ulterior motivation in so employing her niece: (1) She hoped for Mary's conversion to the remnant church, and (2) through Mary, she hoped to reach her sister Caroline, for the SDA message.

### 3. Daughter-in-law, Mary Kelsey White (1874-1890).

a. First wife of W. C. White (April 20, 1857 - June 18, 1890). Died of tuberculosis contracted in Basel, Switzerland while she, W. C. White, and Ellen White were in Europe, 1885-87 (WCW, 22, 89).

b. Willie and Mary met in Battle Creek where Mary was a French major at BCC and a typesetter and proofreader at the Review and Herald.

c. When the Whites went to California in 1875 to found the Signs of the Times and the Pacific Press, Mary went along as a press worker. In 1876 she was elected treasurer of the Press, appointed managing editor of the Signs and married to W. C. White. J. H. Kellogg had been Willie's rival for her hand, and never fully forgave Willie for taking her to Europe where she caught the tuberculosis that she died of.

d. Mary wrote a number of editorials and articles for the Signs during 1875-76 (WCW, 22-25). As a member of Ellen White's staff, she helped prepare for the printer Testimonies vols. 1-5, as well as other projects. (See Moon, WCW, 22-25, 119-129.)

### 4. Son, James Edson White (1895-1896)

a. Edson's great contribution to the cause was his evangelistic work among African-Americans in the Southern USA from 1894 to 1909. (See Ron Graybill, *Mission to Black America*.)

(1) He wrote a Gospel Primer which served the dual purpose of a basic reading textbook and an introduction to the gospel.

(2) His riverboat Morning Star included living quarters, staterooms for other workers, chapel, library, photographic darkroom, kitchen, and a printshop, where he printed.

(3) Christ Our Saviour (158 pp.)-selected chapters from Ellen White's "Life of Christ" manuscript which would be published in 1898 as Desire of Ages. For Christ Our Saviour, Edson rewrote the DA chapters in basic English suitable for beginning readers.

b. In 1900, Marion Davis reworked Edson's 158-page work to 182 pages, and it was republished as The Story of Jesus, a children's book still in print.

c. Ellen White not only supplied Edson with advance drafts of the chapters of the "Life of Christ" manuscript, but strongly encouraged his project of rewriting them in simplified English.

"Edson, you are at liberty to select from my writings the matter that is needed for the proposed simple tracts and booklets for the southern field . . . You will know how simple to make the truth so as to be understood and what portions to select . . . All that can be done should be done for the southern field."  
(Letter 86, 1895, in PM 209).

## 5. Son, William C. White

- a. Third of James and Ellen's 4 sons; younger of the 2 surviving sons.
- b. Of all the White family, Willie White was the most like his mother in temperament, viewpoints, lifestyle, and agreement with her on all major issues. She came to trust him implicitly (WCW, 58-59, 66).
- c. Ellen White began involving him in secretarial and perhaps editorial responsibilities when he was 19 (WCW, 63).
- d. After the death of his father, W. C. White became his mother's most trusted confidant.
- e. By 1881, when he was 27, he was acting as general supervisor of Ellen White's editorial staff (WCW, 112-113). He went with her to Europe and to Australia. She appointed him as the one primarily responsible for the custody of her writings after her death, and he headed the White Estate from 1915 till his own death in 1937 (See WCW, 451-456).

(More information on W. C. White's work as his mother's literary assistant is given in the lecture: "W. C. White's Role in the Editorial Process".)

## B. In-House Salaried Staff

1. At any given time, Ellen White would have between 6 and 12 employees working in her publishing enterprise.

a. They would come, work for a period of time, then leave, and their places would then be taken by other newcomers.

(1) Yet, significantly, Ellen White's literary style remained consistently unique through the years, though there was a normal, gradual evolution in her style over her lifetime.

(2) But this consistency in style is one of the evidences that Ellen White (and not her literary helpers) indeed was the author of the books which bore her name.

b. Their salaries were paid from the customary publishers' royalties paid to Ellen White for her book manuscripts.

2. Some have wondered why so many helpers were needed at one time:

a. Many (if not most) served in typist/copyist positions, in that era long before computers and photocopy machines were available.

b. Also, in those days Ellen White was responsible for many responsibilities now assumed by publishers and their respective staffs:

(1) Copy reading.

(2) Proofreading.



(3) Reference checking

(4) Commissioning of illustrative art work.

c. Ellen White was even responsible for providing the publishers with the metal plates used in the printing process of the day.

d. Consequently, her royalties from book sales were substantially larger than those paid to authors today, because her expenses were correspondingly much greater.

3. Identity of some of her helpers:

a. **Marian Davis** [1847-1904]; employed 25 years [1879-1904], and one of the longest serving.

(1) Ellen White called her "my chief worker" and "my bookmaker." "Her work is of a different order altogether" (3SM 91).

(a) She directed the "Life of Christ" (*Desire of Ages*) project as chief assistant.

(b) She also did major work in compiling *Ministry of Healing* and *Education*.

(2) Marian Davis's role in the preparation of Ellen White's books was multi-faceted.

(a) Planning: The object and plan of the volume: (1) Who the book would serve: its audience; (2) How much space to devote to each subject; (3) The best relationship between topics.

(b) Gathering: Preparation of 30 "scrapbooks": from books (half-dozen bound volumes, chiefly), unpublished manuscripts, letters/correspondence, sermon transcripts, and diaries/journal entries.

(c) Arranging the materials in rough topical categories or everything on a given subject.

(d) Minor Word Substitution.

(e) Deletions: of needless or repetitive words.

(f) Conferring and checking back with EGW about suggestions as to additional lessons to be brought out in a given chapter, or for additional amplification/clarification felt to be needed, or suggestion of "bridging" material to close "gaps" in narrative.

(g) No Original Writing.

(h) EGW's evaluation of her work:

She gathers materials from my diaries, from my letters, and from the articles published in the papers. . . . She has been with me for twenty-five years, and has constantly been

gaining increasing ability for the work of classifying and grouping my writings (E. G. White to Brother and Sister [J.A.] Burden, January 6, 1903). She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if, when she finds it, she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it. The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do (E. G. White to G. A. Irwin, April 23, 1900).

Marian, my helper, faithful and true as the compass to the pole in her work, is dying. . . . I am leaving tomorrow for Battle Creek, yet my soul is drawn to the dying girl who has served me for the last 25 years. We have stood side by side in the work, and in perfect harmony in that work. And when she would be gathering up the precious jots and titles that had come in papers and books and present it to me, "now," she would say, "there is something wanted. I cannot supply it." I would look it over, and in one moment I could trace the line right out. We worked together, just worked together in perfect harmony all the time. She is dying. And it is devotion to the work. She takes the intensity of it as though it were a reality, and we both have entered into it with an intensity to have every paragraph that shall stand in its right place, and show its right work (Ms 95, Oct. 25, 1904; cited in 3SM 93).

(2) For biography see: Eileen M. Lantry, *Miss Marian's Gold* (PPPA, 1981); SDA Encyclopedia [1996] 10:444.

b. Other workers (during Ellen White's lifetime) included:

(1) **Adelia Patten**, who later married I. D. Van Horn, an evangelist, entered the White home in 1861 to help care for the boys and assist Ellen White in preparing her writings for publication. Patten edited the Youth's Instructor (1864-1867) and served as editor of and contributor to the 1864 composite work Appeal to the Youth. She wrote the biographical sketch of the life and death of Henry White that preceded an edited compilation of Ellen White's letter to her sons.

(2) Miss E. J. Burnham.

(3) Miss Sara Peck [1868-1968].

(4) Miss Maggie Hare.

(5) Dores E. Robinson [1879-1957].

(6) Miss Minnie Hawkins.

(7) "Sister Tenney" (wife[?] of George C. Tenney [1847-1921]).

(8) Mrs. W. F. Caldwell.

(9) Charles C. Crisler [1877-1936].

(10) Miss Frances ("Fannie") E. Bolton [1859-1926] (see Ron Graybill, *The Fannie Bolton Story: A Collection of Source Documents*, White Estate, April, 1982.)

After leaving Ellen White's employ, Bolton made claims that she had largely authored some of the writings that went out over Ellen White's signature. Specifically, she claimed that a letter of reproof to A. R. Henry of Battle Creek had been outlined by Ellen White for Fannie to compose entirely. The allegations have since been refuted, but at the time they sounded plausible to some who were unfamiliar with Ellen White's writings.

These allegations led W. C. White to write a letter to G. A. Irwin in which he made some pointed comments about the methods of Ellen White's editorial staff (W. C. White to G. A. Irwin, May 7, 1900). The following are some excerpts from this letter.

"As many matters are revealed to her in a very short space of time, and as these matters are sometimes similar, and sometimes different; so she writes them out, sometimes many pages on one subject, and sometimes dealing with many subjects in a few pages. In her eager haste to transfer to the written page the thought[s] that have been pictured to her mind, she does not stop to study grammatical [sic], or rhetorical forms, but writes out the facts as clearly as she can, and as fully as possible."

"Sometimes, when mother's mind is rested, and free, the thoughts are presented in language that is not only clear and strong, but beautiful and correct; and at times when she is weary and oppressed with heavy burdens of anxiety, or when the subject is difficult to portray, there are repetitions, and ungram[m]atical sentences.

"Mother's copyists are entrusted with the work of correcting gram[m]atical errors, of eliminating unnecessary repetition, and of grouping paragraphs and sections in their best order. If a passage is not fully understood, the copyist asks [Ellen White to explain] its full meaning and proper connection. When corrected and plainly copied with the typewriter or the pen, the manuscripts are all carefully examined by mother, and corrected, wherever correction is required, and then copied again, if the corrections are numerous. This is done with many manuscripts, not only because corrections are made in the work of the copyist, but because mother sees a way to express the thought a little more clearly, or more fully.

"Often mother writes out a matter the second time, because she feels that it is very difficult to put in writing the scene, or events, as they are presented to her."

"Mother's workers of experience, such as sisters Davis, Burnham, Bolton, Peck, and Hare, who are very familiar with her writings, are authorized to take a sentence, paragraph, or section, from one manuscript where the thought was clearly and fully expressed, and incorporate it with another manuscript, where the same thought was expressed but not so clearly. But none of mother's workers are authorized to add to the manuscripts by introducing thoughts of their own. They are instructed that it is [only] the words and thoughts that mother has written, or spoken, that are to be used."

"Those who have been entrusted with the preparation of these manuscript[s], have been persons who feared the Lord, and who sought him [sic] daily for wisdom and guidance, and they have shared much of His blessing, and the guidance of His Holy Spirit in understanding the precious truths that they were handling. I, myself, have felt the same blessing, and heavenly enlightenment in answer to prayer for wisdom to understand the spiritual truths in these writings, that I have in studying the Bible. This was a sweet fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit as a teacher and guide, in understanding the word. And in answer to prayer, my memory has been refreshed as to where to find very precious statements amongst mother's writings, that brought in connection with the manuscript at hand, would make a useful article.

"However thankful the copyist may be for this quickening of the mind and memory, it would seem to me to be wholly out of place for us to call this 'inspiration,' for it is not in

any sense the same gift as that by which the truths are revealed to mother.

"It is right here that S[iste]r Bolton is in great danger of being deceived and of leading others astray. The blessing of a clear mind, and an active memory, she has called an inspiration, and the unwise use of the term has led those who know less of the work . . . to come to wrong conclusions about what she has done."

### C. Professional Colleagues Acting as Consultants

"In the early days of this cause, if some of the leading brethren were present when messages from the Lord were given, we would consult with them as to the best manner of bringing the instruction before the people. Sometimes it was decided that certain portions would better not be read before a congregation. Sometimes those whose course was reprov'd would request that the matters pointing out their wrongs and dangers should be read before others, that they, too, might be benefited" (1SM 51).

1. Some read manuscripts and made suggestions on how to explain complex theological ideas in simplified form; rearranged ideas, did minor rewording:

- a. J. H. Waggoner [1820-89].
- b. J. N. Loughborough [1832-1924].
- c. H. Camden Lacey [1871-1950].
- d. Edwin R. Palmer [1869-1931].

2. Some read manuscripts on health-related subjects-not to determine their veracity, but, rather, to see if they could rephrase matters in ways more acceptable with contemporary medical professionals as well as educated laymen:

- a. J. H. Kellogg, see preface to *Christian Temperance & Bible Hygiene* (1890).

Kellogg explained in the preface that the book was "a compilation, and in some sense an abstract, of the various writings of Mrs. White upon this subject," with the addition of several articles by James White. "The work of compilation has been done under the supervision of Mrs. White, by a committee appointed by her for the purpose, and the manuscript has been carefully examined by her" (*Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, iv).

- b. Dr. David Paulson [1868-1916] helped with *Ministry of Healing*, ca. 1905.

3. Some did assigned research on specific topics:

- a. W. W. Prescott [1855-1944]: Education

(1) Commissioned to provide substitute *historical* quotations for the 1911 edition of the *Great Controversy* to replace similar quotations in the 1888 (and earlier) editions now out-of-print.

(2) He also presumed to submit a list of suggested changes for *theological* "errors" which he presumed to find in earlier editions of GC.

(3) Ellen White accepted all of his historical suggestions, and rejected all of his theological suggestion!

See Gilbert M. Valentine, "W. W. Prescott; SDA Educator" (Ph.D. dissertation, AU, 1982); portion reproduced in *The Shaping of Adventism* (AU Press, 1992); Arthur L. White shelf document, "The Prescott Letter to W. C. White (April 6, 1915): A Statement," June 15, 1981.

## V. ROLE OF LITERARY HELPERS

### A. Literary Staff/General Assistants

#### 1. Clerical:

- a. Represented about 75% of the total work in the office.
- b. Consisted of:
  - (1) Typing of first handwritten draft for EGW to hand-edit.
  - (2) Typing of subsequent draft.
  - (3) Typing multiple copies of correspondence to meet various needs.

#### 2. Book-Editing Basic-Tasks Performed:

- a. Correction of grammatical errors.
- b. Elimination of unnecessary repetition.
- c. Internal transpositions: grouping sentences/paragraphs/sections in best arrangement order.
- d. Clarification of expressed ideas: if EGW believed to have been vague, her wording clarified/improved.
- e. External transpositions (limited to senior workers of long experience): transposition of sentences/paragraphs/sections from one manuscript to another, when an identical thought might be more perspicuously stated.
- f. Preparation of the book index.

#### 3. Prohibitions to the Staff; They were forbidden to-

- a. *Change the meaning* of anything EGW had originally written.
- b. *Add any new* ideas/thoughts originating with the staff.

(1) On April 23, 1900, Marian Davis wrote to GC President G. A. Irwin, denying categorically that literary helpers had written the EGW books.

(2) On August 9, 1897 Marian Davis wrote W. C. White concerning the impossibility of an editor writing the original text.

## VI. WAS ELLEN WHITE THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOKS WHICH BORE HER NAME?

1. A recurring theme among critics of EGW is the suggestion that she is not the *real* author of the books which bear her name.

a. Various "reasons" have been offered to support this conjecture (and that is exactly what the charge is—unsupported allegation):

(1) In her earlier years: her limited education allegedly precluded the possibility of writing the sophisticated works attributed to her (which church leaders were supposed to have ghost-written).

(2) In her latter years: senility is said to have set in, and she was alleged to be totally incapable of phrasing an intelligent sentence because of the infirmities of advancing age.

b. Interestingly, the critics have failed to bring forward hard, coercive evidence to back up these ingenious speculations (and, of course, the burden of proof rests with the critic).

2. An examination of the objective data (internal and external) suggests the total fallacy of this line of reasoning.

### A. The Internal Evidence

**1. Literary Style:** A careful rhetorical analysis of stylistic elements in the corpus of the EGW writings (which covered six decades) points to the obvious conclusion that these are all the literary productions of one and the same author.

a. There is, over the years, a recognizable evolution in literary style (as there is with any writer of literature):

(1) Sentence structure—and length—in the earliest writings tend to be simple, with much use of compound-complex sentences.

(2) Vocabulary tends toward the simplest, most basic words.

(3) Paragraphs tend, generally, to be inordinantly long. (*Early Writings* is a classic example of these manifestations.)

b. In later years, unsurprisingly, a maturity in development of style is observed:

(1) Sentence and paragraph length varies from page to page.

(2) Vocabulary is more sophisticated.

(3) And there is an aesthetic beauty in much of the prose not often witnessed in the earliest writing.

c. There is an evolution of style: but it is an evolution in the style of one writer, not an evidence of multiple-authorship, as some critics aver.

(1) Some of EGW's literary helpers stayed for long tenures: Marian Davis worked for her 25 years.

(2) But perhaps the more common experience was a fairly short tenure; helpers came and went, while EGW continued to labor with her pen. If her helpers were the "real" authors of those works, then there should be marked--even abrupt--changes in the established literary style over the decades. But an examination of those writings does not support the assertion of the critics; and the evidence forces the conclusion that we deal with works of a single author.

3. We note in passing that these arguments have much in common with those raised against the authorship of various Biblical books.

a. Evangelical scholars reject these groundless assumptions and assertions for the same reasons that we reject allegations against EGW's authorship of the books which bear her name.

## 2. Method of Writing:

a. The first practical typewriter was marketed in 1874; 11 years later (in 1885, when EGW was 58), she purchased these machines for her office staff--she was a progressive who wanted the latest, most up-to-date equipment for her helpers.

b. That EGW herself, however, never learned to operate a typewriter is fortunate for researchers today, because the first draft of all her manuscripts was written in longhand--indisputable evidence, today, that she was, indeed, the author!

(1) She, therefore, perhaps tended to need more literary helpers than might otherwise have been the case.

(2) and the task of many of her helpers was simply to reduce to typewritten form the handwritten ("autograph") manuscript so that the editing process might be advanced.

c. And there is an evolution not only in literary style, but also in EGW's handwriting.

(1) The late Arthur L. White, Secretary of the White Estate for nearly a half-century, was so familiar with the original manuscripts that he would often astound visitors to the vault by asking them to select one at random, then hold a hand over the date, and allow him to guess the date of origin. (He seldom missed by more than a year or two!)

## B. The External Evidence

1. **The Testimony of Ellen White Herself:** Mrs. White claimed to be the author of her books:

a. In a letter to Dr. David Paulson, June 14, 1906, she referred to *The Great Controversy*.

(1) This book first appeared in print in 1884 under the title, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4.

(2) In 1888, it came out under the more familiar present title.

(3) And in 1911, under the careful (and very direct) supervision of its author, GC was revised into its present form.

b. Twice in one paragraph of this letter she refers to "my introduction," and "my statement" which was contained within that introduction:

"In my introduction to *The Great Controversy* you have no doubt read my statement regarding the Ten Commandments and the Bible, which should have helped you to a correct understanding of the matter under consideration (1SM 24, 25).

c. And in a 1900 letter to GC President G. A. Irwin (1897-1901) from Australia, EGW referred to the literary production of DA, with particular reference to the role of Marian Davis, in these words:

"The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my pouring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do." (Letter 61a, April 23, 1900; cited in 3SM 91)

## 2. The Testimony of Marian Davis:

In a letter to W. C. White, Aug. 9, 1987, Marian Davis, chief project co-ordinator of the "life of Christ" (DA) Project team, referred to a letter received from C. H. Jones, long-time manager and president of the Pacific Press, who had been "hounding" her to get the DA manuscript in to him immediately, as he had an exceedingly tight production schedule at that publishing house and wanted to fit this book into it. Note, especially, the trenchant concluding sentence, which must forever dispel any ideas of Marian's authorship of DA:

"I received notice from C. H. Jones that it was planned to publish "Desire of Ages" in the spring of '98, and in order to do this, all the copy must be in the hands of the printers as early as September, '97.

From what I learned of the artist's work, I cannot believe that the printers will be ready for the manuscript by September. They have now 25 chapters, as finally revised. Twenty-five more we're prepared to send, but a few changes will have to be made in them, as I finish the later chapters. For this I am holding them. . . .

Sister White is constantly harassed with the thought that the manuscript should be sent to the printers at once. I wish it were possible to relieve her mind, for the anxiety makes it hard for her to write and for me to work. . . . Sister White seems inclined to write, and I have no doubt she will bring out many precious things. I hope it will be possible to get them in the book. There is one thing, however, that not even the most competent editor could do, that is prepare the manuscript before it is written (cited in *Sourcebook*, pp. H-6/33, 34).

3. Internal and external evidence attests to the authorship of EGW's books by the author whose name appears thereon.

## VII. ELLE WHITE AS AUTHOR: HER ROLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF *The Desire of Ages*



## A. Sources of Information/Data

1. Prophetic dream/visions, from God; especially "Great Controversy" vision of March 14, 1858.
2. The Bible.
3. Non-inspired literary works:
  - a. Reference books:
    - (1) "Harmonies of the Gospel."
    - (2) "Bible histories."
    - (3) Bible dictionaries.
  - b. Biographies of Christ.
  - c. General devotional literature.

## B. Writing Task

1. Evolution of book Format:
  - a. 1858: *Spiritual Gifts* Book One: of the 219 pp., 50+ devoted to the life of Christ.
  - b. 1876, 1877: *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Books II and III: 640 pp. On the life of Christ.
  - c. 1890s: three books emerge:
    - (1) DA (1898): 835 pp.: basic biography of Jesus.
    - (2) MB (1896): 152 pp.: major commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.
    - (3) COL (1900): 421 pp.: major commentary on Christ's parables.
  - d. Thus: 50+pp. became 640+ pp. became 1,408 pp. in three books.
2. "Ingredients" brought together in the compilation process:
  - a. Incidental references to Christ in Ellen White correspondence with the field.
  - b. Periodical articles on Christ's life/teachings.
  - c. Book chapters.
  - d. Transcripts of sermons Ellen White preached.
3. Revising/Developing Tasks:
  - a. Review of topical collections of thematic material.
  - b. Corrections, as needed.
  - c. Additional writing: basically "insertions" and "add-ons."
    - (1) Amplification.

- (2) Clarification.
  - (3) Expansion.
  - (4) "Bridging" materials, to plus existing "gaps" in narrative.
4. Authority/Command: EGW assumed full responsibility/supervision.
- a. Suggestions for revisions from literary helpers were examined re suggestions for editing of original EGW manuscripts.
    - (1) Some suggestions were accepted, and adopted.
    - (2) Others were rejected, equally forthrightly.
      - (a) EGW was in total charge of the project, from first to last.
  - b. Final approval of the final edition of the manuscript before it was sent to the publishers.
  - c. Choice of book title, from suggestions made by the publisher:
    - (1) "The Desire of All Nations" (Haggai 2:7) finally became *The Desire of Ages*.
5. Subsequent revision for later editions of the book.

## VIII. THE 1888 and 1911 REVISIONS OF *The Great Controversy*

### A. English Edition

1. The book we know today as *The Great Controversy* was initially published in 1884 as *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. IV.
  - a. In 1888, and again in 1911, Ellen White initiated and personally supervised significant major revisions of the 1884 edition.
2. The nature of the changes undertaken:
  - a. Time references updated: "1800 years" since Christ came are now adjusted to read "1900 years."
  - b. Historical quotations cited in the 1884/1888 editions from books no longer in print were replaced with similar statements from other contemporary historical accounts.
  - c. Some references to Roman Catholics were adjusted to avoid pejorative connotations (popish" became "papal," etc.).
  - d. Approximately three pages of text were removed from the chapter entitled "Snares of Satan" because the matter, originally intended for SDA eyes, would not be appropriate to a broader, non SDA audience:
    - (1) Some of the deleted matter (which subsequently appeared in TM) might unnecessarily offend some Roman Catholic readers.
    - (2) Ellen White defended the deletion citing the precedent of Christ:

There are matters in the *Testimonies* that are written, not for the world at large, but for the believing children of God, and it is not appropriate to make instruction, warning, reproof or counsel of this character public to the world. The world's Redeemer . . . presented some matters of instruction, not to the world, but to His disciples alone. While He had communications designed for the multitudes that thronged His steps, He also had some special light and instruction to impart to His followers which He did not impart to the great congregation, as it would neither be understood nor appreciated by them. . . . The Lord Jesus thought it necessary to make many things clear to His disciples which He did not open to the multitudes. . . (TM 34, 35).

For a more complete statement on the situation, see ALW's monograph, "The 1911 Edition of The Great Controversy."

## B. Spanish Edition

1. The Spanish edition of *The Great Controversy* was based upon a translation by Eduardo Francisco Forga made about 1907 or 1908.

a. A prior translation, made by two Presbyterian clergy and another non SDA scholar, was deemed unacceptable in South America because it had an "American Spanish" flavor, and was held to be poorly executed.

b. Forga, a new convert with exceptional linguistic ability and literary talent, made the new Spanish translation of GC, which was published in 1913 (and reflected the changes effected by EGW herself in the 1911 English edition).

(1) Earlier, Forga had been banished from his native Peru for opposing the Roman Catholic hierarchy there.

(2) He later married into the White family (his wife, Margaret Lacey, was a sister May Lacey White, wife of W. C. White).

2. Forga's Spanish translation differed from its English from its English counterpart in two respects:

a. At Forga's instance (and with EGW's approval) it contained an additional chapter on the Spanish Reformation ("The Awakening in Spain"), written by Clarence C. Crisler (one of EGW's secretaries) and H. H. Hall, and translated by Forga.

(1) It appears as Chapter 13 in the Spanish GC. (The names of the authors ["compilers"] of this chapter (Crisler and Hall) are clearly footnoted as well as a note saying the author approved of this chapter being added to the GC.)

b. Unfortunately Forga's translation of passages dealing with the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy were phrased much more stridently than they appear in the English version; and the highly-pejorative manner of Forga's expressions would later create unfortunate new problems in South America.

(1) Elbio Pereyra (a Washington, DC-based Uruguayan associate secretary in the White Estate in the 1980s) characterized Forga's stance as "a strongly anti-Catholic position" in his monograph: "Eduardo Francisco Forga: The Forgotten Pioneer From the "Neglected continent" (White Estate, Nov., 1987, pp. 16, 25; White Estate Document File DF 33).

(2) J. W. Westphal, missionary leader in charge of SDA work in South America, early expressed fears of "criticisms I have heard of his strong way of putting things" (*ibid.*, pp. 73, 74).

3. In the middle 1970s, Argentina (where the Spanish edition of GC was published, in Buenos Aires) was controlled by a Roman Catholic military dictatorship.

a. The government promulgated an anti-defamation decree which prohibited publication of any literature that disparaged or used offensive language against any religious body—a thinly-veiled law to prevent circulation of anti-Catholic literature in Argentina.

b. SDA leaders in Buenos Aires felt that, in harmony with EGW's counsel in GW 468, they should soften some of the more strident expressions in the Spanish edition, to bring it more into harmony with EGW's more moderate statements in the original English edition. She had written:

The worker in foreign fields will come in contact with all classes people and all varieties of minds, and he will find that different method of labor are required to meet the needs of the people. A sense of his own inefficiency will drive him to God and to the Bible for light and strength and knowledge.

The methods and means by which we reach certain ends are not always the same. The missionary must use reason and judgement. Experience will indicate the wisest course to follow under existing circumstances. It is often the case that the customs and climate of a country make a condition of things that would not be tolerated in another country. Changes for the better must be made, but it is best not to be too abrupt.—GW 468.

4. Some Hispanic workers, familiar with the Buenos Aires revised version, feel that those who produced it not only softened some of Forga's more harsh and strident statements, but that they also, in the process, deleted for the Spanish edition important theological material as well.

a. This newly-revised Spanish edition was sold not only in Argentina but in other Hispanic nations in Central and South America.

b. Strong opposition to this alleged deletion of theological materials eventually led to the discontinuance of sales of this newer version, and the original Forga translation was again the only version marketed (Interview with Juan Carlos Viera, White Estate, June 24, 1992).

## **IX. ROLE OF THE WHITE ESTATE SINCE ELLEN WHITE'S DEATH (1915)**

1. New Ellen White books have been developed in the past two decades in an attempt to meet the previously unmet needs of different groups as we enter the late 20<sup>th</sup>-Century and beyond:

a. **"Simplified" Books:** The original EGW text is paraphrased in a much more simplified basic English vocabulary, to meet the needs of:

- (1) Readers generally unfamiliar with the English language.
- (2) The blind.
- (3) The deaf.
- (4) Children.

b. **"Condensed" Books:** the original EGW text is retained, but substantially edited ("boiled-down") to reduce the total bulk by up to one-third the number of words in the original.

(1) Many who live in our new technological age are unwilling to attempt to read large book; *The Desire of Ages*, with its 800 + pages, would frighten them away entirely.

(2) A need was felt to adapt these large books to changing conditions, and to prepare a literature that would be contemporary, inviting, and appealing.

c. **"Abridged" Books:** The original EGW text is retained, but some passages (ranging from a paragraph to a page to an entire chapter) are excerpted from the larger EGW works, and placed in small-book format.

## Conclusion

1. There is ample evidence in both OT and NT that Bible writers employed literary assistants in the production of their respective inspired books.
2. EGW did so, too; and in so doing, she places herself squarely in the center of the Biblical tradition and precedent. Her practice, thus, need not cause concern or alarm by SDAs today.
3. EGW herself initiated, and personally supervised, from beginning to end, the revision of 1884, 1888, and 1911 editions of GC, in an ongoing attempt to develop a book more acceptable to the non SDA public-at-large.
  - a. The fact that in this process some statements were modified, and others were deleted entirely, need cause no alarm today.
    - (1) There has been no sinister conspiratorial plot to destroy her writings by church leadership.
    - (2) And EGW herself personally initiated and supervised all changes made.
  - b. The 1911 edition represented a substantially large outlay in time, money, and personnel.
  - c. And it is clear that it was this edition (and not the earlier ones) which EGW wished to have circulated among the non SDA public once it became available.
  - d. Contemporary efforts now to continue the circulation of the 1884 and 1888 editions (ostensibly because the 1911 edition is alleged to have been perverted and polluted by unconsecrated, unbelieving SDA leaders) is patently as false as it is absurd.
4. During her lifetime EGW approved the paraphrasing of chapters of DA into a more simple, basic-English presentation by her son Edson, for his use in evangelistic work among newly-freed, largely-

illiterate African-American slaves in the post-Civil War South.

a. Paraphrases of her "Conflict of the Ages" series of five works today for specialized audiences would unquestionably meet with her total approval and strong support.