

The Case of the
Castrated Colporteur

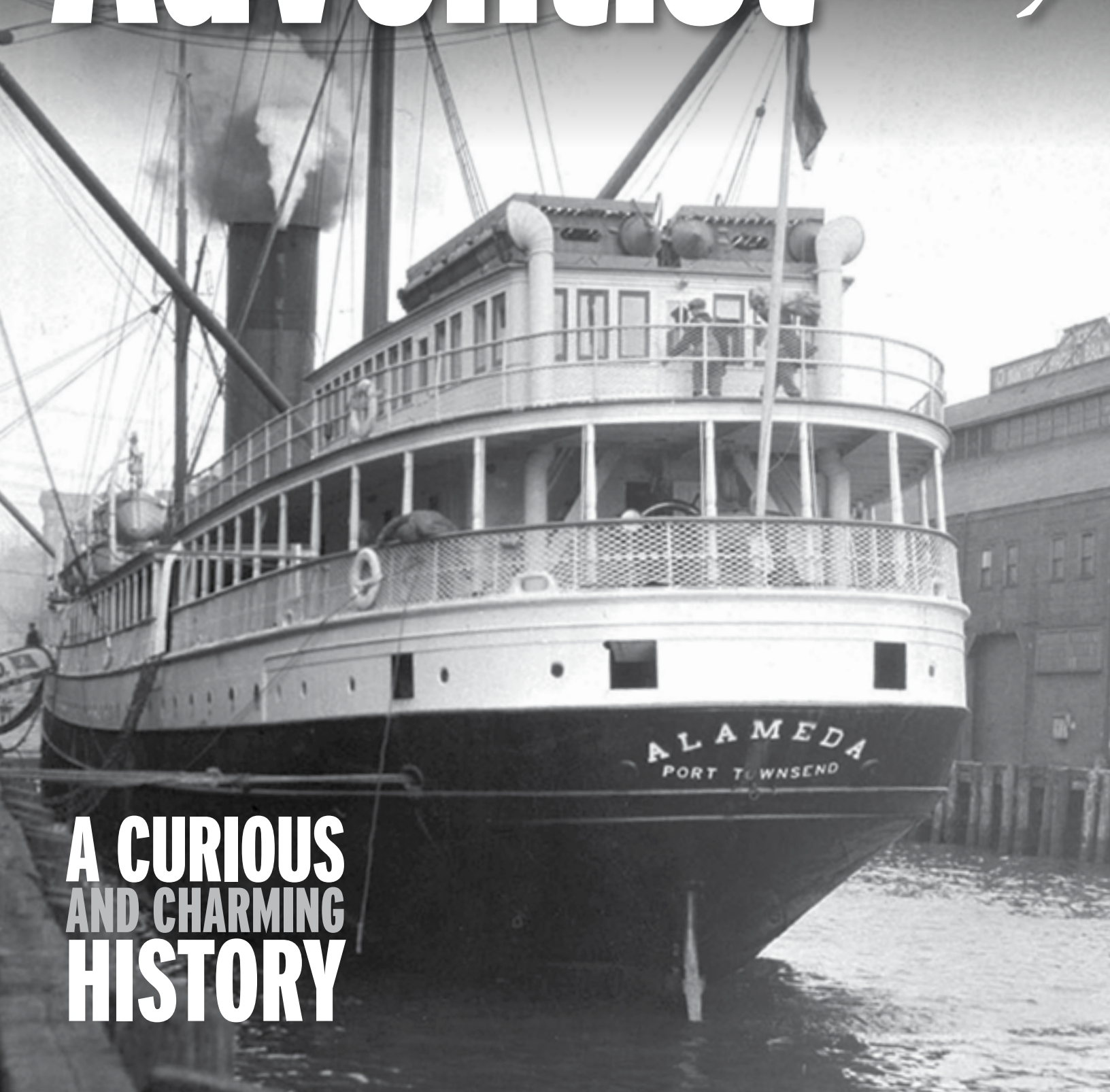
Where Did
October 22 Come From?

When Huldah
Went to College

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Adventist *Today*

A CURIOUS
AND CHARMING
HISTORY





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We Love Our History—But We Aren’t Trapped in It

By Loren Seibold

SEVERAL FAMILIAR APHORISMS REVOLVE AROUND the idea that history is a cyclical affair. Most often cited is one by Spanish philosopher George Santayana, who in 1905 wrote: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Events can be similar, but they’re never identical. No one nowadays believes the ancient doctrine of eternal return: that the universe is like an 8-track tape, cycling through the very same tunes without end. But because there is a sameness to human behavior, both individually and corporately, patterns recur. Mark Twain altered Santayana’s original when he famously said, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

We humans are pattern-recognizing creatures, and thoughtful observers have made some very particular observations about historical patterns. Civilizations and nations, they say, seem to go through an arc: from founding, to growth, to success, to plateau, to conflict, to decline, until they at last weaken and fall. Businesses start with verve and energy but eventually grind to a stop, sometimes from the friction of their own corporate machinery.

Churches and Sects

Religious movements, too, have a historical arc. German writer Ernst Troeltsch called it the sect-church typology.¹ A sect comes into being when a few motivated folks hunger after a “truer truth” or a more intense spiritual experience than they can get in an established religion. Sects are driven by reform and revival. Like new businesses, they start with innovators and visionaries. They are nimble, and they take risks.

But in time the flexible, informal structure no longer works. The group requires policies, employees, payrolls, property, and formal statements of beliefs. They don’t like to think

they’ve changed, and they’ll protest that they still *believe* the same things they started out with, but change has snuck up on them. Growth means they operate in a different way than they used to.

With so much at risk, stability and continuity become more important than flexibility and innovation. While sects don’t care whether they fit into society, churches do. There wasn’t much at stake at first, but with so many assets now, it becomes important to make a good impression. In short, they want to be liked.

Yet, the more their leaders try to please everyone, the more problems arise. The precious original beliefs clash with the real world. Wanting to be “respectable” clashes with the founders’ counterculturalism.

And to our point here: many churches have difficulty making changes, even when it would appear obvious that they should. Some try to defend every scintilla of what they once received, no matter how indefensible. They are like a man straddling two boats that are drifting apart: one foot on the gunwale of that precious history, the other in the modern world.

History Isn’t Forever

I like our Adventist history. It’s curious and charming in its own way. I just don’t think we have to be locked into it.

I have some friends who inherited an old house from their grandparents. It was where the extended family had often met for holidays and summer picnics. What to do with it? It had an antique charm, but it was no longer attractive or practical.

Still, it spoke of a past that they wanted their family to continue. A lovely porch to sit on while they talk. A nice yard, with proximity to parks and a beach. Views from the front window. A great school and church within walking distance. Neighbors,

The Adventist identity is crippled by the ugliness of being told we are trapped here by antique beliefs, including abusive judgmentalism and terrifying narratives.

some of whom were the offspring of families they’d known in Grandpa’s and Grandma’s time. And, of course, memories.

But it needed more than a bit of spit and polish: the plumbing, the electrical system, layers of lead paint, leaky basement walls, asbestos, and overgrown landscaping would have made it not just impractical to live in, but unsafe.

By the time they’d finished remodeling the homestead, much of the house, like the ship of Theseus,² had been replaced. Rooms had been added at the back, and some had been taken away by removing walls to make new spaces. The kitchen was now modern and spacious. The house had air conditioning, good lighting, and Wi-Fi. The walls and attic were insulated. A new roof stopped leaks.

Some once-precious things were gone, though. One of the beautiful old trees, deemed in danger of falling against the house, had been removed. The familiar old wallpaper had been stripped away, replaced by a softer color scheme. The wavy-glassed wooden-framed windows that rattled when the wind blew had given way to snug, new double-panes.

But it was the same house! It had the homey feeling that Grandpa and Grandma and years of family history had instilled in it. Grandpa and Grandma, who had moved to a smaller place without stairs or a yard to take care of, were delighted when they saw what their descendants had done to the old place. They’d changed it, but those changes had given it a new life.

A Remodeled Church

A few years ago, for one of the annual General Conference (GC) Executive Committee meetings, GC President Ted Wilson orchestrated a cosplay: all attendees were to grow beards and wear Victorian costumery. It might have been just a bit of fun, had it not been meant to send a message: we should aspire to be the church that existed 150 years ago.

Living in Ellen White’s church isn’t working very well, though. Not only is so much of the original structure tattered—for example, our focus on urgency to present Jesus’ second coming for no less than four generations, or an emphasis on persecutory prequels—but it is also dangerous. To be blunt: while Ellen White alerted us to think about science, health, family, and eschatology, we now know that she was wrong about many things.

Unlike my friends’ grandparents, our church gerontocracy fights against remodeling. Some pastors attempt it at the local level,³ but young people continue to exit at an unprecedented pace. Our wizards in Silver Spring peep and mutter about that, but mostly they blame us. They say that we must restore the old

electrics and lead paint and plumbing, because if they were good enough for Ellen White, they’re good enough for us. We keep the old, single-pane windows and take our chances with the tree about to topple on the roof. Yes, the house is cold and drafty, but that’s how God wants it—and don’t you try to warm it up!

Yet, no one is *actually* committed to that 19th-century vision anymore. Many say they are, but their actions speak louder than their words. If the leaders at the General Conference—and in the many offices all the way down to the local pastor—really thought Jesus was coming next year, as they keep saying, they wouldn’t have tax-deferred annuities or retirement houses in the North Carolina mountains. The General Conference office would be a few portable units on blocks on a weedy lot along a gravel road. If they sincerely believed in *The Ministry of Healing*, none of them would ever go to hospital. Instead, they work out of beautiful offices, live in nice houses, drive nice cars, and have excellent medical insurance and retirement plans. Yet, it is important that everyone pretend to “believe”—even the hurtful things, and maybe *especially* the hurtful things—because the most dedicated, most generous believers respond enthusiastically to hearing about Roman Catholic persecution and Ellen White’s magical health nostrums.

I don’t see the need for us to live in a log cabin (or even pretend that we do). We can upgrade to a modern faith without sacrificing the best values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

What Will It Look Like?

Once the church is remodeled, what will remain? What follows isn’t an exhaustive list, but merely a place for us to start a conversation.

The Adventist identity is at the same time the most precious and most problematic thing about us. I love the family of Adventists. When a set of people with common beliefs and practices comes together, when they educate together and eat together and worship together and share common rituals, we are a family.

Some years ago, I visited Kolkata, India. I was a bit in awe about even being there—nearly as far from my childhood home in North Dakota as one can get! Yet, in the English-speaking church there, I felt at home. The Sabbath School lesson was the same. The worship was similar enough. Fellowship dinner offered different foods but the same warm fellowship. I didn’t know anyone there, but I met people in the Kolkata church who knew people I knew! It was a beautiful experience.

As it turns out, I love *being* an Adventist more than I love *the reasons* I was given for being an Adventist. The Adventist

identity is crippled by the ugliness of being told we are trapped here by antique beliefs, including abusive judgmentalism and terrifying narratives. It is time for this solipsistic “one true church” notion to be discarded. My church family is special to me, as is my biological family, because it is where I am at home, not because I think all other families are objectionable.

The experience of the Sabbath is eminently beautiful in itself, and had we taught it that way, we would now be nicer people, and happier. If Adventists truly believed that the Sabbath was “made for humankind,” as the Bible says (Mark 2:27, NRSV), then we would never have presented it as a legalistic demand by a critical God, or a sign of exclusivity, or an anti-Catholic placard. We’d have let it be what it is best at: the day when the television is off, when families gather at table over food or games, and when we walk on country roads, take afternoon naps in the quiet, visit friends, or sing in a nursing home.

What of the other half of our descriptive name? I confess I find our presentation of the second advent of Jesus damaged almost beyond repair by two centuries of standing on the brink of not salvation, but terror. All I can recommend is that we quit insisting, “Jesus is coming *soon*” and that we banish once and for all the rancid notion of persecution—narratives that are unhelpful in every way. Let us settle on something like this: “Jesus said he will return someday. We don’t know when. In the meantime, let us live in peace, hope, and kindness—never in fear.”

Our eschatology yielded one good thing. A side effect of both Sabbath-keeping and the fear of persecution was the desire to preserve religious liberty. Though none of our fears have been realized, we can be proud of Adventist advocacy for church-state separation.

Adventists have always had a tendency to be legalistic, especially about food and Sabbath-keeping. We have tended to prefer rules to principles. But one place we did find the principle behind the commandment was when our pioneers helped us see that the sixth commandment was as important as the fourth. That principle kept us out of combat for generations and produced our one and only legitimate war hero, Desmond Doss. We should have made that into a commitment to pacifism—and it’s not too late.

Ellen White gets lots of scorn from liberal Adventists. In part she deserves it, but those who have made her into a plaster saint deserve it more. She could yet be a blessing to us, were we to see her not as an infallible prophet whose largely plagiarized writings have been allowed to overshadow the Bible, but as our female founder who pointed the way to a church that respects and values women.

The two marvelous things toward which Ellen White directed us are far from obvious in the Bible. One is the importance of health, and the other is a commitment to education. Ellen White’s making health a spiritual discipline has been as good for us as her eschatology has been harmful. We can thank her for why we don’t use alcohol or tobacco, and why we have heathier-than-average diets. Sociologists have spoken of the “lift” that sectarians get from being in a set-apart group, and both health and clean living have contributed to ours.

Adventist education also contributed to our social lift. As a boy from a blue-collar farm family, I’m a case in point. I went to college and graduate school because of Adventist education. Thanks to our worldwide network of colleges, we have a great many professionals of all kinds, including an educated clergy.

Science has, of late, put us at odds with our doctrine. Earth can’t be 6,000 years old in biblical history but 3.5 billion years old in the fossil record. Science can’t be wrong when it shows that vaccines are safe, yet right when it puts a 400-ton airplane into the air so we can fly to the General Conference Session. We have a great deal of work to do here—but denying science has proven again and again to be a losing proposition for religion.

The Broad Church

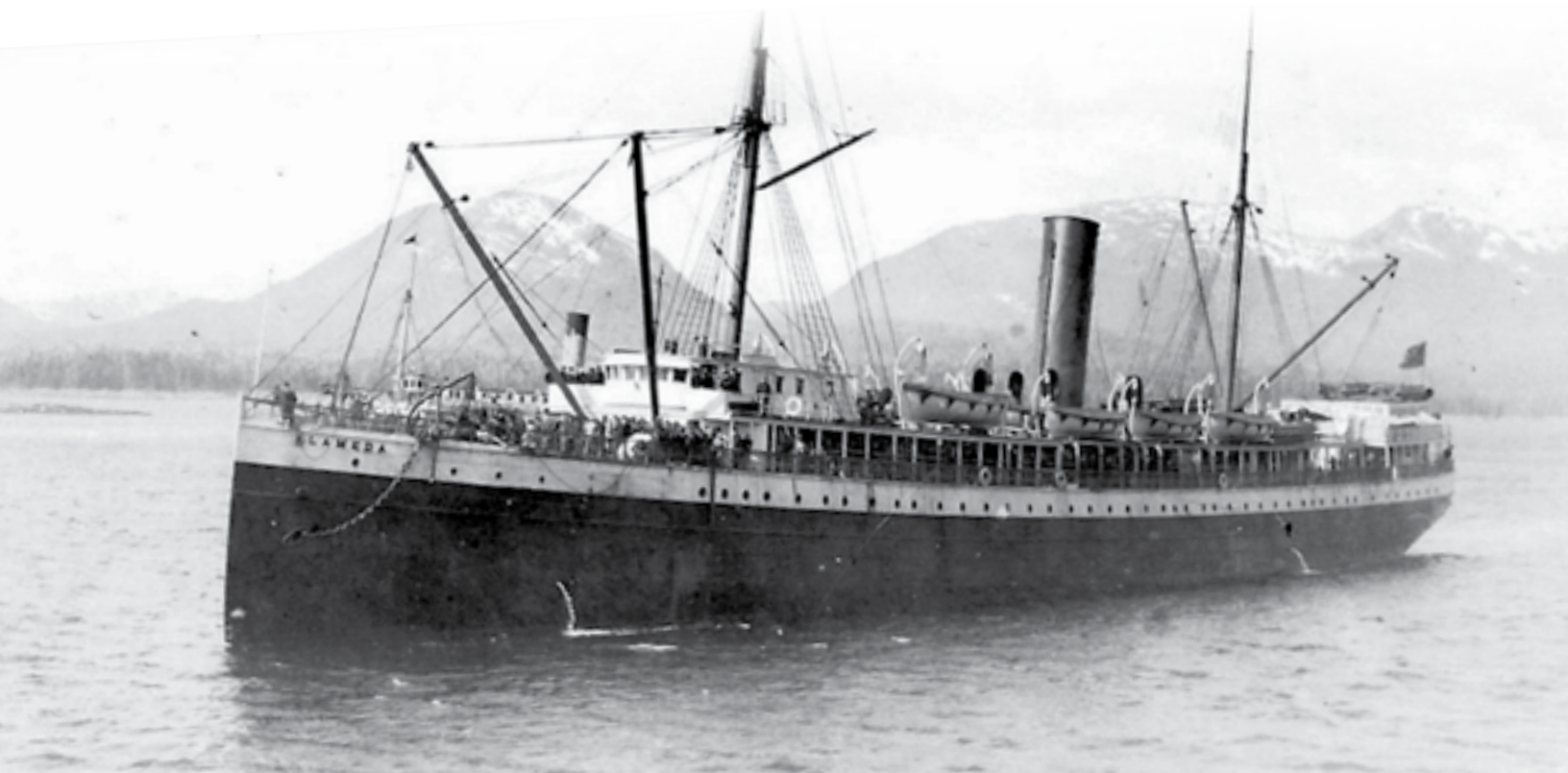
The point of this exercise is not theological revanchism. We don’t want to recapture all of the territories we’ve lost; some we should be glad to abandon. I only want to show that the house lived in by this family of Christ can be remodeled and upgraded to be a lovely place for us, so we can be part of the *Christian* family while remaining an *Adventist* family. We can become something related to who we were—something connected, but better. What we have now, at least in my estimation, isn’t a healthy Christian church. It is a big Ellen White corporation, with an excessive number of out-of-touch leaders slowly strangling it to death.

Instead of demanding unity, we should strive only for comity and mutual respect in spite of our differences. I pray that my church can survive to pass on its lessons—at least its good and generous lessons—to new generations of Jesus-seekers. 🏠

¹ Troeltsch’s 1912 study is so well-known that a quick Google search will yield more information than the reader needs. Other sociologists have added to the ends of that polarity: “cult” to the right of the sect, “universal church” or *ecclesia* to its left.

² According to Wikipedia, the ship of Theseus is a “common thought experiment about whether an object is the same object after having all of its original components replaced over time, typically one after the other.”

³ I am excited about a movement called Crosswalk—look it up at crosswalkvillage.com.



Men of Muscle: Ellen White in Samoa

BY MATTHEW LUCIO

ELLEN WHITE LIONIZED HER HUSBAND, JAMES, AS “THE BEST MAN that ever trod shoe leather,”¹ but the best evidence for their physical attraction was that they produced four children. Like many in her day, Ellen was practical in matters of love, and few would be tempted to put most of her marriage advice on a Valentine’s Day card. Here’s one example: “Time strips marriage of the romance with which imagination had clothed it.”² Stop, Ellen, you’re making me blush.

Although White spun words into webs by the millions, not every part of her person was preserved in print. We are spoiled by the massive number of words she left us, but whatever feelings of physical attraction she felt toward her husband largely remained between them. “It is clear,” wrote Gerson Rodrigues and Demóstenes Neves da Silva of the Latin American Adventist Theological Seminary in Brazil, “that the love of James and Ellen did not fit the concept of romantic love of the nineteenth century.”³

You might be surprised to learn, however, from one of my favorite stories from Ellen White’s life, that she did notice and comment on male bodies.

The First Voyage

On November 12, 1892, White boarded the steamship *Alameda* in San Francisco, *en route* to Australia to begin her missionary tour. The *Alameda* first stopped in Honolulu, a city she called “especially attractive” and “very beautiful” after a week at sea. After crossing the equator on November 24, White reached Apia, the capital of Samoa, on November 27. She described Apia’s harbor, like Honolulu, as “a beautiful expanse of water, shut in by coral reefs.” Those reefs made it impossible for the *Alameda* to dock, so Samoans came out to the ship in canoes to escort the passengers to shore.

Although she stayed aboard the *Alameda*, White wanted to paint a picture for readers interested in her trip. She described the Samoans as “physically well-developed” and reported that they “are said to have the finest physique of any of the South Sea peoples.” She further observed, in her own guarded way, that “most of them are destitute of clothing except a cloth or mat about the loins.” She also noted that their skin was “of a light brown color” and “many are elaborately tattooed.” These

observations formed part of the report of her travels for the *Bible Echo* (precursor to the *Adventist Record*), published January 1, 1892.

In a letter to O. A. Olsen, then General Conference president, White noted: “The natives are in all kinds of dress. Some are entirely naked with the exception of a couple of yards of calico pinned about their loins. Their limbs, arms, and body are elaborately tattooed. They are men of muscle, and live much in the water.”⁴

While this description of the Samoan men may seem very out of character for Ellen White, she was not the only woman in Victorian America fascinated by the men of Samoa. Other women of her day wrote nearly identical observations. Frances Ormsbee, wife of the U.S. land commissioner in Samoa during the time White visited, similarly described Samoan skin as “of a pale brown color”; Ormsbee also noted the islanders had tattoos over their bodies, “wear very little clothing,” and are “in every way a most attractive race.”⁵

The Second Voyage

A hospital chaplain once asked 94-year-old Ethel “May” (Lacey) White Currow whether her first husband’s mother, Ellen White, had ever smiled and laughed. May said right away that she often had, adding that while her mother-in-law didn’t joke, she had been very cheerful and did have a sense of humor. As proof, she pointed to a second stop in Samoa, during the White family’s return voyage to America aboard the *Moana* in 1900. Unlike her journey to Australia, this time Ellen White went ashore.

“The natives of Samoa, you know, were hefty fellows who didn’t wear too many clothes,” White’s daughter-in-law reminds us.⁶ Given that the rowboats couldn’t quite make it to shore, two Samoan men formed a cradle with their arms and carried 72-year-old Ellen White to the beach, where she sat upon a large rock to watch the others disembark.


Next, a “giant Samoan” on the boat turned toward White’s daughter-in-law with her 4-month-old daughter, Grace, and took the baby in his arms as he stood at the bow. May, who was not a tiny woman and was also afraid of deep water, “could easily imagine those big, bare feet slipping off the slick wood.”⁷ The Samoan man carried young Grace in his arms, while May was bidden to jump onto the man’s back and hold fast, arms and legs wrapped tight around his torso.

The sight of this shirtless, tattooed, muscular man coddling an infant while an overdressed Victorian woman clung to his back was too much for Ellen White. May recalled: “Mother White laughed so hard at this sight that she couldn’t stop. She laughed until she fell off the rock.”⁸

Curiosity Over Superiority

These Samoan stories show sides of Sister White that are rarely presented publicly: not only her sense of humor, but also her curiosity about the ways other people live. In her comments on the Samoan men, White could have clucked her tongue at their state of undress, but instead, she noticed their bodies, their tattoos, their muscles, and their (relative) lack of clothing without apparent judgment.

White’s Victorian world, with its concern for modesty and its focus on the American-European political axis as the focal plane of Bible prophecy, made little intuitive sense in Samoa. Even the importance of the weekly Sabbath was complicated by Samoa’s proximity to the international dateline. She didn’t stick around long enough to work through any of these problems.

Instead, she did something unexpected, at least for jaded or overawed Adventists. Outside of her comfort zone, Ellen White might have adopted an air of cultural and moral superiority. Instead, we witness her capacity to delight in the world around her. That’s why these Samoan stories remain some of my favorite anecdotes from White’s incredible life. 

¹ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 131 (Aug. 13, 1906).

² White, Letter 76 (March 1894).

³ Demóstenes Neves da Silva and Gerson Rodrigues, “The Conjugal Experience of James and Ellen White: Meanings Built by the Couple,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2016), p. 275.

⁴ White, Letter 91 (Nov. 27, 1891).

⁵ Mrs. E. J. Ormsbee, “Samoa—Its People and Their Customs,” *The Congress of Women* (1894), pp. 590-596.

⁶ Ed Christian, “Life With My Mother-in-Law,” *Adventist Review* (July 7, 1983), p. 5.

⁷ Arthur L. White, “The Stop in Samoa,” *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years: 1900-1905*, Vol. 5 (1981), p. 20.

⁸ Christian, p. 5.

Render unto Caesar: German Adventists and the Nazi State

BY ROLAND BLAICH

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Cor. 10:11-13, NIV).

IN NAZI GERMANY, ADVENTISTS WERE AMONG A NUMBER OF small denominations that found themselves in jeopardy from the very beginning of the Nazi regime. As members of a small American sect with religious practices that resembled those of the Jews in several respects, they were particularly vulnerable in a state that emphasized nationalism and anti-Semitism.

The presence of radical Adventist offshoots—among these the Reformed Adventists, who categorically refused military service—could well cause authorities to confuse one with the other. General ignorance about Adventists could easily be exploited by enemies of the church. Where the Gestapo—a state within the state—held seemingly unlimited powers, individual leaders and the church as a whole were always at risk. A careless statement, or a single allegation by a Nazi Party member of opposition to the Nazi regime, might lead to the arrest of a church worker or even the dissolution of the church.

Nazi leaders knew no such thing as neutrality in matters of politics. Either you were for them, or against. Church leaders and members were keenly aware of this. A few months after Hitler became Germany’s chancellor, the Adventist religious liberty magazine *Kirche und Staat* (*Church and State*) published an article in its July 1933 issue on the principle of separation between church and state and the need to obey God more than men; it was soon shut down.

Early Adoption

The summer of 1933 was the last time a German Adventist journal explored the Christian’s duty to God in contrast to duty to one’s country. In word and print, Adventist leaders exercised great caution in order not to offend Nazi authorities.

Breaking with Adventist tradition, articles in church publications began to endorse the Nazi state. Adolf Minck,

who was director of Adventist youth ministries for the Central European Division, sounded almost jubilant in an article in *Jugend-Leitstern*, which described the Nazi era as a time of renewal, comparable to the Reformation: “A fresh, enlivening, and renewing reformation spirit is blowing through our German lands. ... This is a time of decision, a time of such opportunities for a believing youth as has not been for a long time. The Word of God and Christianity shall be restored to a place of honor. Christians are now in demand. And that, my dear youth, is a call for us. ... We are not unprepared for the new order. After all, we have helped bring it about.”¹

In *Der Adventbote*, the German equivalent of *Adventist Review*, one author contrasted Hitler’s new Germany to the old “liberal” republic, when German cities had been “in competition with Babylon, Sodom, and Gomorrah.”² He wrote that only the Nazi Revolution had saved Germany from disaster and brought about the renewal of the nation and of morality. According to this writer and many others, God had clearly ordained Hitler to save the German people from communism and godless liberalism.

Hitler banished homosexuals, restored family values, and cleaned up the movies. Pornographic magazines disappeared from the newsstands, and anyone who bought or sold them was likely to end up in a concentration camp. And so Hitler prospered, and Germany with him. But most important to Christians was that Hitler himself was a believer who often concluded his speeches with an appeal to the Almighty and with a resounding “Amen!”

Several documents from the early Nazi years are noteworthy, because they urged Adventists to adapt to the new order. In August of 1933, church leader Wilhelm Mueller distributed a circular for the East German Union Conference. Reviewing the Adventist tradition of keeping out of politics, he argued that the new situation called for a change of attitude: “Then came the National Socialist Revolution. Overnight things changed. It became necessary to take a stand. A mere religious confession was no longer sufficient. What was needed was a clear decision for or against the state. Issues arose that were altogether new. The Christian had to decide where he stood on Gleichschaltung [enforced conformity with the new order] and on the swastika, on the German- or Hitler-salute, on the Reich Labor Service, and more.”

Mueller argued that Nazi symbols and programs were no longer those of a political party, but of the state, and as such deserved active support. After all, he reasoned, “The Christian rejoices that his country is in the hands of a man who has received his office from the hands of God, and who knows himself to be responsible to Him, as Adolf Hitler has emphasized

more than once. And as an anti-alcoholic, non-smoker, and vegetarian, he is closer to our own view of health reform than anybody else.”

In October 1933, another circular titled “Concerning Our Position Toward Nation and Fatherland” called on ministers and elders of the East German Union Conference to support Hitler’s government in what it called its “peace-loving designs.”

According to the circular: “The government ... calls on us to demonstrate to all the world that the German people are unanimous in their commitment to peace. No one should be missing, ourselves included. Other governments have postponed their decision on which policy to adopt toward Germany until after 12 November. They are waiting to see whether the entire nation supports the Führer, united in the defense of its long-abused honor and in unshakable will to peace. ... Every weakness among our people will be noticed and ruthlessly exploited to the detriment of Germany. I call on every Adventist who loves his people to support the peaceful intentions of the Reich government on 12 November.”

This call to vote “yes” in the 12 November plebiscite of 1933 was the first of many to follow. They were not the product of a few errant conference leaders; rather, the writers were following instructions from the church leadership in Berlin, who had made commitments to the Nazi Propaganda Ministry.

How many Adventist members heeded their call is hard to determine, but church leadership was able to boast that in Friedensau, the small town that is home to the Adventist seminary in Germany, 100 percent had voted for Hitler.

Support and Collaboration

Given all of these efforts to demonstrate Adventist patriotism and support for the Nazi regime, it came as quite a shock when the denomination was outlawed on November 26, 1933. Although the ban was rescinded on December 6, 1933, after barely three weeks, it marked yet another change in the church’s policy.

From then on, Adventist leaders sought to reinforce the hierarchical principle to ensure that the church would speak with one voice. In a “Memorandum” to the government, which defined the denomination’s beliefs, they stressed what set the church apart from Jews (and several smaller sects), while emphasizing commonality of beliefs and purpose with the Nazi movement. The Memorandum cited the church’s emphasis on a healthy body, noting that its active welfare section had already been integrated into the state’s welfare organization and that the church’s colporteurs sold not only literature on healthful living, but also *Neues Volk* (*New Nation*), the journal of the Race Political Office of the Nazi Party.

In explaining the church’s position on the state, the document cited Christ’s famous line “Render unto Caesar,” but in doing so, it omitted the second part about a believer’s duty to God.

The denomination’s new course became evident in several ways. From this time on, Adventist journals commented more frequently and positively on political developments in Germany, emphasizing the duty of the Christian to actively support the state. Supporting the state meant, of course, endorsing National Socialism and the racist *völkisch* state. At ministerial conferences and in circulars, gospel workers were told to use their influence to put the church on a pro-government course.

In a circular to pastors that explained the reasons for this departure from past practice, the president of the Rhenish Conference wrote: “Since we ministers have usually abstained from any politics, some might think that we should not give any instruction this time either. That would be wrong, however. ... Surely, as Christians you want to have the right attitude toward the great and difficult tasks of the government.”

Things have changed, he argued; the time of politics was past. All state power was of God, and St. Paul had written: “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” (Rom. 13:2, KJV).

Clearly, this church leader believed it was the Christian’s duty to support the government in whatever it did.

Hulda Jost



The Adventist welfare organization and its energetic leader, Hulda Jost, had shown during the ban how vital it was for the church to work closely with the state. From 1934 on, the Adventist assistance program became more fully integrated into the National Socialist People’s Welfare Department (NSV),

the official Nazi welfare authority. As the church’s welfare mission became entwined with its Nazi counterpart, National Socialist propaganda entered the church. Events sponsored by the Adventist Welfare Society in German churches offered visible proof with Nazi flags, speeches by Nazi officials, the Hitler salute, the Nazi anthem, and Adventist Hitler Youth in uniform.

Support for the Nazi state reached beyond German borders as Adventist leaders took advantage of their foreign ties to promote the Third Reich abroad. They worked closely with Nazi authorities and filed detailed reports.

Particularly noteworthy is the American lecture tour by Hulda Jost and other members of the German delegation at the

occasion of the 1936 General Conference (GC) Quadrennial Session in San Francisco. This tour was carefully planned and orchestrated by German Adventist leaders in conjunction with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, and the German Foreign Office. Personal ties to Nazi officials, which were expanded during these collaborative efforts with the state, proved invaluable when the church in Germany came under pressure.

Offensive Literature

Seeking to remove anything that might meet with Nazi disapproval, Adventist leaders there purged offensive literature such as *The Great Controversy* from the shelves of church libraries. Gone were the days when the church in Germany used press and pulpit to proclaim prophetic issues, the signs of the times, the second coming, and the Sabbath.

This policy affected even American publications, since the General Conference adopted and enforced a policy preventing publication of any commentaries about Nazism or even fascism in American church journals.

The church in Germany also cracked down on “fanatics” and speculators by counseling them and refusing them the opportunity to preach. Only those who were “politically reliable” were allowed to hold office in the church. Those with liberal or leftist political views were considered a definite liability. “Incorrigible fanatics” who refused to heed the counsel of the leaders had to be reported to church administrators.

Adventists of Jewish ethnicity were shunned, and in some instances, members were forbidden to visit them. While individual Adventists did assist Jews, sheltering them at the risk of their own lives, typical church policy is better illustrated by the case of a member in the Berlin Conference who wanted to assist a Jewish family: the conference warned him not to expect any support if he should get into trouble.

After Reformed Adventists were outlawed and persecuted in 1936, the church exercised great caution to prevent those individuals from joining the Adventist fold. Political loyalty had to be established prior to baptism.

Membership in Nazi organizations was required for Adventists in certain professions, such as denominational teachers or editors, but it also offered considerable benefits to ministers and book evangelists. Membership was evidence of loyalty to the Nazi regime, and lapel pins proved a visible sign of support. In dealing with government authorities, it could open doors that might otherwise stay closed. Consequently, several Adventist leaders joined the Nazi Party, as well as a number of its subsidiaries, including supporting organizations of the Schutzstaffel (SS), the Nazi secret police.

Sabbath Compromise

To Adventists, the issue of the Sabbath was most crucial, since it was at the very center of their identity. While the church in Germany made early adaptations to accommodate Nazi sensitivities—Sabbath was changed to *Ruhetag* (Rest Day) to sound less Jewish, and Sabbath School became *Bibelschule* (Bible School) and then “study of the Word”—on the whole, Adventists were successful in keeping Sabbath privileges during the first years of Nazi rule. While children in other European countries were required to attend school on Sabbath, in Germany they could attend church instead.

This changed in 1936, when the German delegation to the GC Session returned from a goodwill tour of the United States, and it was becoming increasingly clear that a second world war was approaching.

In 1939 Adolf Minck, by this time president of the German Adventist church, was called to Gestapo headquarters and told that he would be held personally responsible for the conduct of Adventists in Germany. The official told him to order church members to work on Saturday. Minck refused, and for the time being, the Gestapo did not press the issue. In 1940, with Germany at war, Minck was told in unmistakable terms that absence from duty on Sabbath would not be tolerated and that the leaders of Adventist churches, conferences, and unions would be held accountable.

As a result, church leaders instructed all ministers to admonish church members, “so that our members will not cause more trouble for themselves and the church.” One union president wrote, “We know that in total war there can only be total investment and sacrifice.” A circular from the Central Eastern Division quoted from 2 Peter: “Submit yourselves, for the Lord’s sake, to every authority.” The more Adventists performed their “duty” during the war, the more they could expect respect for conscience after the war.

By 1943, after the disaster of Stalingrad led to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels’ proclamation of total war, pressures increased once more. Minck issued a circular to the presidents of the East German Union and its local conferences, asking them to educate members on the need to adapt to the times and urging them not to imperil the church by refusing service on Sabbath. Performing one’s duty on the Sabbath was not disobedience, he said, but a virtue, for “Christian faith must be proven by Christian deed.” And so, most German Adventists conformed to the demands of the times and, more specifically, to the Nazi regime.

To accommodate the state as much as possible had become Adventist policy. The theology behind this course of action is perhaps most clearly expressed in a 1943 paper titled “Our Way

in the Storm of the Times.” In presenting it to his ministers in the Hesse Conference, A. Sachsenmaier, the conference president, sought to map a course that would neither place the church in harm’s way nor betray the cause of the gospel. His main premise was that God’s law provided room for flexibility, since he is a God of freedom.

Regarding the Fourth Commandment, Sachsenmaier argued that in times of total war, it was necessary to work on the Sabbath: “The unshakable principle is: the seventh day of the week is and remains the holy day of the Lord, and it is to be recognized and kept holy as such.” But, he reasoned, the application of the law depended on the circumstances. Nature, he thought, offered an important lesson: When a storm blows across the land, the tree will bend with it and thus survive the storm. After the storm passes, the tree will stand upright again. Without this flexibility to bend, the tree would be uprooted. The apostate Reformed Adventist movement had refused to bend, and so it was banned. “We are still here, thanks to flexibility,” he concluded.

After the war, as Minck defended the German church against charges of apostasy by the General Conference, he used yet another interesting concept in explaining German Adventist policy. The two German words for apostatizing are *abfallen*, meaning “to fall away,” and *abweichen*, meaning “to turn aside” or take a detour. German Adventists had not apostatized, he explained, but merely detoured. “It is not apostasy, but merely turning out of the road to go around an obstacle and then to come back into the road.”

Assessment

In our assessment of Adventist policy and what motivated it, we must resist the temptation to reduce what was really a complex set of factors, which surely varied from person to person. Yet, by their own admission, German Adventist leaders were guided by one consideration above all others: to keep the church from being outlawed. This is why they lent pen, pulpit, and church institutions to the Nazi cause. This is why respect for conscience applied only when it did not endanger institutional interests. This is why they adapted theology to meet their need. It was institutional reasoning above all else that led to compromise.

Render unto Caesar! Given the Adventist emphasis on prophecy and the coming time of trouble predicted in Daniel 12:1, KJV, it is revealing that when it did come, they were ill-equipped to meet the crisis without sacrificing their principles.

It seems that German Adventists, along with other Christians, did not grasp the nature of a totalitarian state. In 1935, Martin Niemöller had explained in one of his sermons that in such a


state, it was “no longer possible to determine which things were God’s and which were Caesar’s: Caesar wants it all.” German Adventist leaders were caught in a three-way tug between God, the state, and the church. They chose the church.

But saving the institutional church came at significant cost. While lauding the state’s policies in many sectors, they were silent when people were arrested at will by the government, in the name of national security, and sent to prison or concentration camps; when Germany waged aggressive and pre-emptive war; and when German special forces carried out ethnic cleansing, rounding up millions and exterminating them. By serving the state in the way they did, lending their support despite evidence of evil, in effect they became part of the Nazi cause and an accomplice in its deeds. Willingly or unwillingly, Adventist speakers and writers led their listeners and readers to believe that Nazi policies were in the people’s best interest, and in keeping with God’s commission to the church. As insiders, leaders had the confidence of their people, which made their propaganda more effective than the Nazi Party’s own.

Were They Wrong?

Should German Adventists have followed a different course? Minck and his colleagues thought not. If they had to do it over again, they could not imagine any strategy other than the one that had guided them. After all, the Adventist ship was safely in port. They believed God had given them wisdom to steer the right course.

In a passionate defense of their policy, Minck argued that the alternative was not simply the prohibition of the church and its institutions, but untold suffering and even death for thousands of Adventists. “No widows or orphans accuse us today” because they lost a husband or father, he wrote to J. L. McElhany, then-president of the General Conference. “Believe me, Brother McElhany, it would have not been difficult to make martyrs of the 500 ministers and 43,000 members. More than once, a mere shrug of the shoulder would have been enough, and the entire denomination would have been outlawed and the work smashed. My associates and I were not ready to make such a decision, and I believe to this day that we have acted correctly.”

Should a policy be judged on the basis of principle or of consequences? The Adventist church in Germany survived the Third Reich, but not as the voice of truth in a chorus of lies, not as a light illuminating the darkness of evil, and not as an instrument of peace and justice. 

¹ Adolf Minck, “Reformation,” *Jugend-Leitstern*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1933), pp. 51-52.
² *Der Adventbote*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Feb. 15, 1934).

The Strange Story of Walter Harper and His Wives

BY AMALIA GOULBOURNE

IN MANY ADVENTIST SPACES, ELLEN G. WHITE’S BOOKS ARE referred to as the Spirit of Prophecy, which can suggest that her writings serve as an all-encompassing rulebook with simple answers and clear-cut commentary; however, many who use her writings as a rulebook often miss the hope of her complicated, real-world advice and instead cling to the shame of not meeting her more idealistic claims. Studying White’s letters written to everyday people provides a glimpse into how she looked at the complicated messiness of everyday life from a realistic and nuanced perspective. It demonstrates to Adventists today that their own messy stories are worthy of hope.

One of the most fascinating examples has to do with the love life of a Seventh-day Adventist colporteur named Walter Harper. In the spirit of a wise counselor, White wrote advice, encouragement, and rebuke to Harper and to the women who crossed his romantic path.

Walter’s First Marriage

The story begins in January 1888 with a journal entry from Ellen White after she’d stopped by to see Walter Harper and his first wife, Laura, in St. Helena, California (Manuscript 22, 1888). White was so worried about the couple’s disintegrating marriage that she wrote in earnest seven days later to Brother and Sister Knight, requesting that they speak to Laura and convince her not to divorce her husband.

According to the Ellen G. White Estate in *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*, Laura wanted to divorce Walter because he—as a youth, following a literal translation of Matthew 19:12—had been castrated. (It is unknown whether he performed the operation himself or found a willing physician.) Walter declared that Laura had known this before she married him, but as word of his condition spread within the church in Oakland where they were working, some meddling members convinced her that she needed to leave him.

In five different letters, White tried to convince Laura to stay with Walter. She argued that divorce was warranted in cases of abuse, but not of foolishness. She explained that sexual abuse,



One of the most fascinating examples of Ellen White’s letters of advice concerned the love life of an Adventist colporteur named Walter Harper.

where a woman’s body is neither considered nor respected, is grounds for divorce. Walter, although senselessly castrated, was not that sort of monster.

White described genuine abuse to Laura in these words: “There are such terrible revelations made to me from men and women, bound by marriage ties, of the defilement of the marriage bed, the abuse of the marriage privileges, that the woman yields her body to administer to beastly passions that are destroying physical, moral, and religious health. The untold misery that women suffer through the uncontrolled passions of sensual minds and hearts, debase both the husband and wife beneath the level of the brute creation, and yet all is done under the garb of Christianity (Letter 6, 1888).

Despite these efforts, Laura did not follow White’s counsel to remain married. In the last letter Laura received on the subject, White asked her to do one final interview with her father and husband, and she also pleaded with Laura to stay in relationship with Christ no matter what she decided (Letter 51, 1889).

Meanwhile, White was also ministering to the husband’s broken heart. In her August 1888 letter to Walter, she explained that the best thing he could do was to leave Laura to her own decision. She told Walter to take rest in Jesus, to continue to work as a canvasser, and to not become self-centered from the hurt caused by the failed marriage (Letter 40, 1888).

Walter’s Second Marriage

Seven years later, White wrote to Walter’s new mother-in-law, who was in a panic over her daughter’s choice of a husband. Walter Harper, who by this time was age 40 or 41, married 25-year-old Florence Ketrang in 1895.

White hoped to convince Florence’s mother that Walter had “a right to the affection of a woman” (Letter 50, 1895). In her letter, she stated that if his potential wife understood Walter’s condition and he was not at fault for his past divorce, the man should be able to remarry. White encouraged Sister Ketrang that this new marriage had the possibility of bringing both Florence and Walter closer to Christ.

In White’s earlier letter to a Brother and Sister Knight, she had described what became of many families during that time: while a husband tried to satisfy his sexual drive, the wife was overburdened with children and died young, or if she stayed alive, she was so exhausted by her overgrown family that she was not able to provide the necessary love and support to her children (Letter 6, 1888).

According to White, this unusual situation of Walter’s castration afforded Florence the joy of working for the Lord by either accompanying her husband in his ministry or else staying at home, “as if she was unmarried” (Letter 50, 1895). Walter’s inability to have children, said White, released Florence from what could have been a serious burden and allowed her to freely pursue ministry.

While White wrote hopefully about the couple’s marriage, they were clearly experiencing familial issues and financial tensions. In White’s letter to Sister Ketrang, she optimistically described his issues with stewardship—and his failure to provide money for his new wife—as careflessness.

Ellen White knew something of Walter’s financial situation; in fact, she had asked him for donations for different Adventist projects, particularly the campaign to fund African-American pastors in the South, and he had gladly acceded to her requests. However, White also knew that Harper could impulsively

fluctuate between being lavish and severely meager with the money God had given him. Although she briefly mentioned this issue to Sister Ketrang, the years afterward proved Walter to be a harsh husband.

Letters to Walter

By 1903, the Harper marital problems led White to write a harsh letter to Walter. After reading it a second time, she then wrote him a softer letter, which she sent (Letter 174, 1903).

At the time, Walter had taken Florence far from her family. While his new mother-in-law may have been rather too tightly bound to her daughter, White admonished Walter to consider

Stupidity convinced a woman to allow one church’s opinion of her spouse to control her view of him. Pride drove a man to become so controlling of his spouse that she could not do anything without his consent.

his wife’s duty to care for her mother. She also urged Walter to provide a good home for Florence, stressing that while Walter was an amazing colporteur for the Adventist movement, he had forgotten that his primary responsibility was to his wife. He had left her in unsafe areas, far from family, and without a space to call her own.

As money matters and the animosity between family members continued to create significant tension for the couple over the next four years, White finally concluded that Walter himself was the problem, treating his wife as “a child,” “a pupil,” and even “a

bondslave,” as if her wishes and plans did not matter (Letter 174a, 1903; Letter 47, 1904; Letter 45, 1904).

In her rebuke, White asked Walter: “What do you suppose your wife married you for? – To be trained by you, and dictated to, and compelled to obey your wishes?” (Letter 47, 1904). She asserted that Florence had a right to make her own judgment calls, to care for her family, and to ask for financial support from her husband. She also agreed that Florence could oppose Walter’s

At the same time White was rebuking Walter, she was sending letters of love and sympathy to his wife. She encouraged Florence that her duty was to go and care for her mother, adding that leaving was not breaking the covenant of marriage. In her final letter to Florence, White advised her not to return to Walter, since the marriage would bring her the same unhappiness as in the past. She even offered Florence a job working in the sanitarium after she finished caring for her mother (Letter 148, 1907).

Stupidity and Pride

One of the lessons to be gleaned from this story is that Ellen White saw a difference between stupidity and pride.


Stupidity prompted a young man to castrate himself because of a misinterpretation of Scripture. Pride led countless husbands to selfishly engage in sexual intercourse without concern for their spouse’s or children’s well-being.

Stupidity caused a man to mismanage money. Pride motivated the same man to purposefully withhold money from his wife.

Stupidity convinced a woman to allow one church’s opinion of her spouse to control her view of him. Pride drove a man to become so controlling of his spouse that she could not do anything without his consent.

While stupidity can be forgivable, pride is often more harmful—and it led to the demise of Walter Harper’s marriages.

We often see Ellen White’s counsel idealized in the form of a quote extracted from a closely scrutinized book, yet in the context of this real-life situation, we can sense that she understood the inherent messiness of Christian marriages and relationships. Her realism offers us the chance to also be authentic and honest about our flaws and the stupidity and pride found in our own stories.

The next time a problem has you rushing to your Spirit of Prophecy collection to find a quote, I would suggest that you take time to comb through her advice in the real-life scenarios she faced as a pastor and counselor for the Adventist movement. 

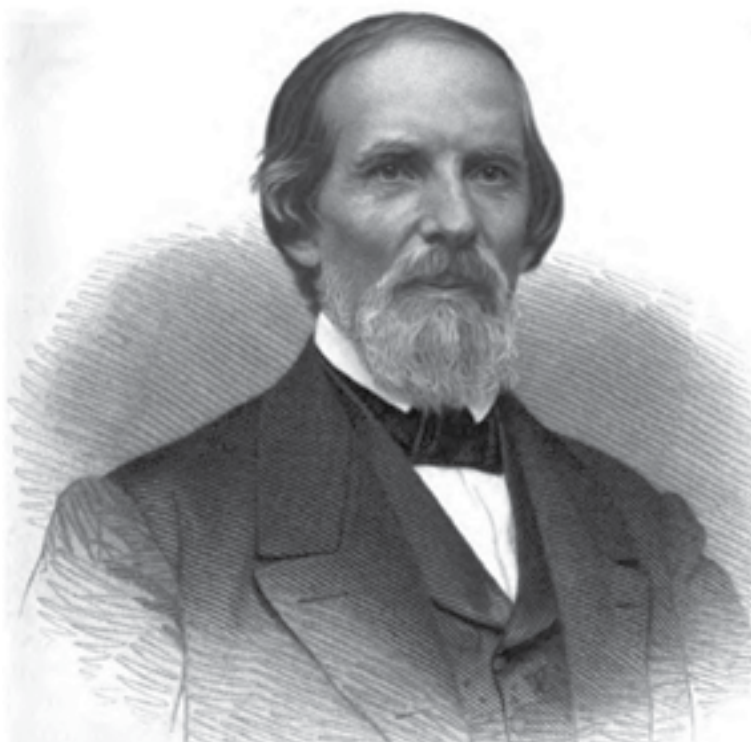
In the context of this real-life situation, we can sense that Ellen White understood the inherent messiness of Christian marriages and relationships.

plans if she thought them not in harmony with God’s will.

In 1904, Florence left Walter to spend time with her mother and take care of her grandfather. When Walter sent White a letter pleading with her to ask his wife to return, she replied that she would not honor his request until he produced evidence of spiritual change. Knowing Walter’s propensity to call his wife crazy for leaving him, White sternly warned the man: “Never, never leave on her mind the slightest impression that she is in any way inclined to insanity. If she be, it is you who are responsible” (Letter 45, 1904).

How the Palestinian Barley Harvest Set the Judgment Date

BY DONALD E. CASEBOLT



Samuel S. Snow proposed the method that Millerites ultimately used to set October 22, 1844, as the date for Jesus’ second coming.

IN 2003, THIS QUESTION WAS POSTED ON THE ELLEN G. WHITE Estate website: “I have been studying the feast days and using the sources available. I have noticed that the feast day of Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, did not fall in October 1844. In fact, it was on September 23rd. Why are the Adventists so much set on October 22, 1844 when the month is wrong?”¹

William Fagal, then-director of the Ellen G. White Estate branch office at Andrews University, and Gerhard Pfandl, now-retired associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, responded online. They reviewed the Old Testament origins of the Day of Atonement as well as the history of the Karaite Jews, the oldest surviving alternative to rabbinic Judaism, and

their particular method of calculating the proper date of Yom Kippur. Fagal and Pfandl conceded that even Karaite Jews in the Holy Land (assuming there were any) may have celebrated Yom Kippur in September and not October of 1844. Concerning the month discrepancy between the two groups of Jews, Fagal wrote: “The discrepancy, then, does not mean that the October date was wrong, even if *no* Jews observed it that year, for it is in harmony with the older and more authentic tradition.”²

Old Testament Harvests

Ancient calendars, including the Jewish calendar, were structured by agricultural considerations. In most agrarian societies, people planted and harvested crops at the most propitious time of the year and thanked the gods responsible for a successful harvest by holding a celebration.

Barley cultivated in Egypt (Exod. 9:31) and Palestine (Lev. 27:16; Deut. 8:8) was sometimes used as food for horses (1 Kings 4:28) or made into bread (2 Kings 4:42; Judg. 7:13) that was often eaten by poorer people. Because it was the first crop harvested in Palestine, typically in the middle of April at the time of the Passover (2 Sam. 21:9; Ruth 1:22), Yahweh had ordered that a sheaf of ripe barley was to be waved before the Lord (Lev. 23:10-12) at that time.

It was important for calendars to remain in sync with the seasons, which was accomplished in one of two ways. The first, which we are accustomed to seeing in our Gregorian calendar, is to insert an intercalary day every fourth (leap) year. Julian and Gregorian calendars are both examples of solar calendars, based on the number of days that Earth takes to orbit the Sun. The Jewish calendar, however, is based on lunar cycles and uses an intercalary month to synchronize with the seasons, when needed. In a lunar calendar, one month equals the amount of time it takes for the moon to make one complete revolution around Earth.

The Karaite Jews began their months when the new crescent moon was first visible, which could vary, because cloud cover sometimes obscured the new moon. They were supposed to rely on actual empirical observations of both the moon and the ripening barley, determined by when a “sheaf of ripe barley” would be available (Lev. 23:10-12). If Jews could make direct observations of Palestinian barley and the new crescent moon, they could comply with God’s divine commands for commemorating seasonally determined celebrations.

But how could they obey God’s commands once Jews were exiled to the far corners of the world? Even if the local remnant of Palestinian Jews knew the precise date, this information could not be communicated in a timely fashion to the Diaspora.

Consequently, rabbinic Jews turned to astronomical and mathematical calculations based on the vernal equinox.

Karaite vs. Rabbinic Judaism

Karaite Judaism differs from rabbinic Judaism in its view of what constitutes the Jewish canon, as well as its hermeneutic for how to interpret that canon. Karaites consider only the written Jewish “Bible” to be authoritative, whereas rabbinic Judaism considers the oral law, or Talmud, as equally authoritative.

Karaites observe the letter of the Torah in all religious issues. Despite the practical difficulties in determining the new crescent moon and the ripeness of the barley, for many years their calendar remained in sync according to a literal interpretation of the Torah’s commands. It was so critical that in Karaite marriage contracts, the bride and groom had to swear to celebrate the

It is dubious whether a fundamental Adventist doctrine, which the church proclaims the investigative judgment to be, can be grounded in an Old Testament ritual regulated by Judaism.

Jewish feasts according to the visibility of the moon and the appearance of the barley in the land of Israel.

The Millerites recognized in the Karaites a type of Jewish Protestantism, with a *sola scriptura* view of authority, in contrast to what seemed the more “papal” approach of relying on oral tradition, as practiced in rabbinic Judaism.

That distinction became important when the Millerites tried to determine when the Day of Atonement occurred in 1844.

Setting Jesus’ Return

William Miller initially expected Jesus to return no later than March 21, 1844, which he calculated to be the last day of the Jewish year 1843, according to rabbinical Jewish calculations. Miller had always admitted that his calculations might be slightly

in error. When March 21 had passed and it was apparent that Miller had been wrong, his followers were strongly motivated to find a new time.

If they went by Karaite calculations, they gained an additional month. The last year of Earth’s history would be from April 1843 to April 1844, rather than Miller’s March-to-March calculation. However, this date also failed.

Millerism became rife with speculation, as various factions proposed more than a dozen different dates, and all failed. This created a vacuum and a state of hyper-expectation.

Solitary Millerite enthusiasts pursued various hypotheses, including using Karaite rather than rabbinic dating. The *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* article “Karaite Calendar” cites Nathaniel Whiting, an accomplished Baptist scholar, who became a Millerite leader and editor and who defended the Karaite calendar method. In late April of 1843, writing in the weekly Millerite journal under the pen name of “Philo,”³ Whiting asserted that the date for the first fruits harvest that was originally calculated using rabbinical calculations was impossible, because “barley is not in the ear at Jerusalem until a month later” and noted, “The accounts of many travellers confirm the position of the Caraites.”⁴

An Anonymous Report

On June 21, 1843, a Millerite claimed to have evidence that Karaite Jews living in the Holy Land observed the Day of Atonement on a different date from rabbinic Judaism.⁵ The unsigned article said: “Now there is at dispute between the Rabinical, and the Caraite Jews, as to the correct time of commencing the year. The former are scattered all over the world, and cannot observe the time of the ripening of that [barley] harvest in Judea. They therefore regulate the commencement of the year by astronomical calculations, and commence with the first day of the new moon nearest the vernal equinox, when the sun is in Aries. The Caraite Jews on the contrary, *still adhere to the letter of the Mosaic law, and commence with the new moon nearest the barley harvest in Judea; and which is one month later than the Rabinical year* [emphasis added]. The Jewish year of AD 1843, as the Caraites reckon it in accordance with the Mosaic law, therefore commenced this year with the new moon on the 29th day of April and the Jewish year 1844 will commence with the new moon in next April [1844], when 1843 and the 2300 days, according to their computation, will expire. But according to the Rabinical Jews, it began with the new moon the first of last April [1843], and will expire with the new moon in the month of

March next [1844]. It may then be asked why we are now to look for the coming of the Lord, if we are but just entered the last of the 2300 years?”⁶

According to the article “Karaite Calendar” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*: “At this point Millerites were simply seeking a basis for determining the close of the biblical year 1843”—since the failure of the March date nudged them toward adopting what some thought was the Karaite-calculated April 1843 date—and “If the Jewish year of 1844 began with the new moon of April 1844, then Yom Kippur, a little more than six months later, would fall on October 22, not September 23.”⁷

Although the anonymous Millerite claimed there was a dispute “as to the correct time of commencing the year,” the point was largely, if not entirely, moot by 1843. Karaites living in Palestine may have initially retained their strict adherence to the letter of the Torah; however, there is no evidence that any Karaite Jews were living in Palestine who calculated and observed a Day of Atonement different from the date calculated according to rabbinic Judaism. Today, most Adventist apologists also acknowledge a lack of evidence to support the writer’s claim that Karaite Jews “still adhere to the letter of the Mosaic law.”

Notice that the dispute over calculating the beginning of a new year necessarily involved determining the end of the previous year. The end of the 2300-year period would coincide with the end of the Jewish year in 1843. But which Jewish year? Until about the spring of 1843, Millerites had assumed the rabbinic Jewish year, but now they had an alternative: the Karaite date. The calculations between Gregorian, Julian, and a generic Jewish year were already esoteric, and it began to appear that this vital doctrine of the date of Christ’s return was dependent on which Jewish sect’s astronomical calculation was more reliable.

Adventist historian George R. Knight notes in his book *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* that it was not until April 4, 1844, that leading Millerite preacher Joshua V. Himes had adopted that explanation.⁸ Only after March 21, 1844, had been disconfirmed did Millerite leaders adopt a new calculation.⁹ In fact, Miller and Himes didn’t set October 22, 1844, as the definitive date until October 6, 1844.

The historic impact of this rejiggering was that from March 21, 1844, to April 18, 1844, Millerites confidently continued to predict the second coming of Jesus by April 20, 1844. When that date likewise failed, they proposed an ephemeral “tarrying time” to buy yet more prophetic time. This justification eerily foreshadowed their post-October 22, 1844, explanation; Josiah

Litch said, after April 1844, that the Millerites were “only in error relative to *the event* [emphasis added] which marked its [the Jewish year 1843] close.”¹⁰

Who Was Samuel S. Snow?

The largely unknown writers of 1843-1844 who mentioned the Karaites are not credited with leading the Millerites to adopt their method of calculating the end of the Jewish year. Instead, the credit goes to Samuel S. Snow. It was his publication, *The True Midnight Cry*, that explicitly endorsed October 22, 1844.¹¹ Yet, nowhere in this indispensable Millerite tract does he mention the Karaite method of calculating the Jewish calendar or argue its virtues as contrasted with the rabbinic method! Not once does he mention the importance of ripe barley or the observation of the new crescent moon.

Knight observes, “It was determined that the tenth day of the seventh month in 1844, according to the reckoning of the Karaite Jews, would fall on October 22, 1844.”

But who exactly “determined” this? I have been unable to find any Snow document in which he explicitly argues the correctness of the Karaite reckoning. Neither of his letters published in *The Midnight Cry* (February 22, 1844, and June 27, 1844) mentions the word “Karaite”—though he does vigorously assert in his document published August 22, 1844, that he had found 15 biblical texts proving that mankind could know the exact day of Christ’s return and that it would happen in the autumn of 1844, rather than the spring.

It appears that the Millerites had been living in a high state of expectancy for several years, and Snow’s letters to the weekly journal convinced the greater number of them that since their spring prediction had failed, autumn must be the time fervently awaited. Snow’s trumpet call, which he published on August 22, 1844, set a date a bare 60 days in the future! No one had time to nitpick over whether any observant Karaite Jews in the Holy Land were still attentively observing the skies for a crescent moon and their fields for ripe barley.

In December of 1844, Ellen White’s first vision retrospectively endorsed Snow’s doctrine and even claimed that the light coming directly from Jesus’ glorious right arm was Snow’s indispensable “Midnight Cry”: “They [the Millerites] had a bright light set up behind them at the first [1844] end of the path, which an angel told me was the Midnight Cry. ... Jesus would encourage them by raising His glorious right arm, and from His arm came a glorious light which waved over the Advent band.”¹²

That Ellen Harmon White should equate Snow’s “Midnight Cry” with divine light is somewhat ironic, particularly once you know Snow’s history. His biography in the online *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* says that Snow described himself as a “hardened *Infidel*” in his youth. In 1839, at the age of 33, he read a Millerite book and felt convicted of its truth. He joined a Congregationalist church in the autumn of 1840 but withdrew from it shortly thereafter, when it opposed Miller’s teachings. In 1842, at a Millerite camp meeting in New Hampshire, he resolved to devote himself full time to promoting the coming advent, despite (like James White and William Miller) having no pastoral education.

In December 1843, Snow was ordained to gospel ministry and became a Millerite lecturer. Two months later, on February 22, 1844, his letter to *The Midnight Cry!* presented his initial argument for expecting Christ’s return in the autumn of 1844 rather than Miller’s original spring date. Then, he followed this up with another epistle published June 27, 1844. Only in his August article, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh,” did he propose the exact date of October 22, 1844. Regardless of Snow’s limited skill and experience in Bible interpretation, Ellen White attributed divine qualities to his teachings, just as she had to Miller’s.

After the disappointment, Snow published in 1845 a new paper, *Jubilee Standard*, in which he uncompromisingly affirmed his October 22, 1844, calculation. Later that year he pronounced himself to be Elijah the prophet, the messenger who would appear immediately prior to Jesus the King’s advent. His followers founded a periodical called *The True Day Star* to spread his message.


In 1848, Snow issued a universal proclamation declaring himself to be Christ’s prime minister and demanded all earthly leaders to “surrender of all power and authority into my hands” or else suffer catastrophes like those described in the Apocalypse.¹³ Perhaps he took Ellen White’s estimation of his importance too seriously.

Current Apologetics

In responding to the question posed at the beginning of this article, Pfandl wrote that a critic “may think that our pioneers were half wits, but reading their literature indicates that they were more knowledgeable than he thinks. They knew very well that the Jewish Day of Atonement was in September, but they knowingly rejected it and chose October 22 instead. Ellen White’s testimony

concerning the 7-month movement confirms that God was in this movement and that they did not have to reject it.”

Because of the first Millerite disappointment of March 21, 1844, our church pioneers turned from a rabbinic method of calculating the Day of Atonement to a later date, which retroactively was said to determine when Jesus moved from the holy place in heaven to the most holy place—even though there is no evidence that Karaite Jews in Palestine at that time were actually observing the barley harvest or celebrating the October 22 Day of Atonement.

It is dubious whether a fundamental Adventist doctrine, which the church proclaims the investigative judgment to be, can be grounded in an Old Testament ritual regulated by Judaism. Christians have left to the Jews the correct date of the Day of Atonement for over two millennia; it would be better to leave 1844 to them, too, rather than make the “authentic” Day of Atonement in that year an object of Adventist apologetics. It is difficult to imagine what difference it could make to affirm that on either September 23, 1844, or October 22, 1844, an imperceptible heavenly movement occurred. 

¹ “1844 Calendar,” Correspondence at EllenWhite.org, Document 187561.

² *ibid.*

³ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 4 (1954), p. 640.

⁴ Nathaniel N. Whiting (as “Philo”), *The Midnight Cry!* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Apr. 27, 1843), p. 6.

⁵ The White Estate and other Adventist writers have implied that the writer of this unsigned article, who lived in the United States, was acquainted with Karaite Jews living in Palestine who could make direct observations of the barley harvest. It’s more likely that this unsigned writer knew something about the historical practices of the Karaites—not that he was there.

⁶ “Chronology,” *Signs of the Times and Expositor of Prophecy*, Vol. 5, No. 16 (June 21, 1843), p. 123.

⁷ Bob Pickle, “Karaite Calendar,” in eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013), p. 915.

⁸ George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (1993), pp. 163-165.

⁹ This same post hoc revisionism was operant both with the postdiction of the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1840 and the recalculation of the fall of the papacy from 1798 to 1799—both championed by Millerite Josiah Litch. The repeated practice of rejiggering dates and events after a prediction has failed in its initial form is one of the most substantial reasons for discounting their probative value.

¹⁰ Knight, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Samuel S. Snow, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh: Go Ye Out to Meet Him,” *The True Midnight Cry* (Aug. 22, 1844).

¹² Ellen G. White, “Suppression and the Shut Door,” Manuscript 4 (1883).

¹³ Knight, pp. 255-256.

When Huldah Went to College

BY WARREN C. TRENCHARD

RECENTLY I WAS REMINDED OF THIS KING JAMES VERSION (KJV) translation of 2 Kings 22:14 (cf. 2 Chron. 34:22): “So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.”

So, Huldah the prophetess lived in a college in Jerusalem? Was this a four-year institution or a community college? Was she a member of the faculty/staff or a female student? What was her discipline? Did she live in the dorm or in married student housing?

One group, which seemed especially mesmerized by this shadowy Israelite coed, invoked her memory for many decades—even to the present. In Seventh-day Adventism, Huldah became a very big deal for a long time.

Exegetical background

The New Revised Standard Version of 2 Kings 22:14 states that Huldah “resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.” The setting for this is the introduction of King Josiah, who began to rule Judah as an 8-year-old boy. He is said to have followed Yahweh as did his ancestor David (verse 2). In his eighteenth year, Josiah launched the repair of the deteriorated temple, during which someone found a Torah scroll, “the book of the law.” The high priest, Hilkiah, told the king’s assistant about the discovery and gave him the document, which he read.

After reporting to the king on the repair project, the king’s assistant, named Shaphan, told Josiah about the scroll and read it to him. The young king, who was horrified at the divine wrath he perceived as imminently coming upon him and his people for their evil ways, ripped his clothes in guilt and shame.

Josiah wanted to know what Yahweh was going to do, so he sent Shaphan with a delegation, including the high priest, to the prophetess Huldah, who lived in the city. She told them to assure Josiah that Yahweh would indeed bring judgment upon the nation, but because of his piety, not until after his death.

The Hebrew expression translated by the KJV as “in the college” is הַנְּשִׁימָה from the word מִשְׁנֵה (*mishneh*). This word, widely used in the Masoretic Text, means “second, double” (see the Brown–Driver–Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner

lexicons of the Old Testament). In Zephaniah 1:10, it is used to describe a location in Jerusalem: “the Second Quarter” of the city. Accordingly, most modern translations of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles translate it as the second or new district.

The Septuagint uses the expression καὶ αὐτὴ κατῴκει ἐν Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἐν τῇ μασενα—“and she was living in Jerusalem in the masena”—a transliteration of the Greek word.

The few current Bible versions that follow the KJV’s “in the college” include the 21st Century King James Version and the BRG Bible (Blue Red Gold edition). However, the Jubilee Bible 2000 exceeds this by locating Huldah in “the house of doctrine”—another academic institution!

How did the KJV arrive at the translation “in the college” in this text and its parallel in 2 Chronicles 34:22? Maybe the word “college” had some non-academic, general spatial meaning in the 17th century. Note, however, that the KJV properly translated all other instances of מִשְׁנֵה in the Masoretic Text, including its use in Zephaniah 1:10 that identifies a location in Jerusalem.

College

The meaning of “college” in the history of English usage does not explain the strange KJV translation. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* noted this peculiar use in 1611 as a “transferred sense,” it mentions no relationship to any other historical usage, the vast majority of which pertains to education or religion.

Most Bible commentators before the 20th century understood מִשְׁנֵה to mean in a part of the city of Jerusalem. For example, Matthew Henry (1708) quoted the KJV’s “in the college” but considered it a place in Jerusalem called “Mishneh,” which he speculated to be “the second rank of buildings from the royal palace.” Also, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (1866) included the KJV text “in the college” but translated מִשְׁנֵה as “in the second part, i.e., the suburb, of the city (cf. Neh. xi.9; Zeph. i.10). ... It was not a school or college, but a particular suburb of Jerusalem.”

By the last quarter of the 19th century, the mystery of the strange KJV translation in 2 Kings 22:14 placing Huldah “in the college” in Jerusalem began to unravel. In 1875, Milton Terry offered the following explanation:

“**In the college** – This rendering seems to have been taken from the Targum of Jonathan, which reads, *house of instruction*, and probably originated in the supposition that Huldah had charge of a school of the prophets. The Hebrew is הַנְּשִׁימָה, *in the Mishna*, and is thus translated as a proper name in the Septuagint; but it means literally, *in the second*, and is so rendered

in Zephaniah 1:10, where it means the second part, or a later addition to the city. Thus the word designates the section or district of Jerusalem in which Huldah lived.”

In 1893, Matthew Easton extended the same notion. While noting that the Revised Standard Version properly translated the Hebrew *mishneh* as “second quarter,” he indicated that the “Authorized Version followed the Jewish commentators, who, following the Targum, gave the Hebrew word its post-Biblical sense, as if it meant a place of instruction.” This implied that the KJV translators took the word to be vocalized as *mishnah* [מִשְׁנָה] rather than *mishneh* [מִשְׁנֶה], suggesting that Huldah resided in Jerusalem in the house of teaching or instruction.

Huldah was not exactly a luminary among Hebrew personalities, nor was she mentioned in the New Testament.

Mystery solved! For whatever reason (and without explanation), the KJV translators erroneously read the meaning of a Hebrew word from many centuries in the future into the 7th-century BCE story of a female prophet. Huldah did not live or work in an ancient institution of higher education. By the end of the 19th century, even conservative scholars recognized that Huldah did not live “in the college” in Jerusalem.

Huldah was not exactly a luminary among Hebrew personalities, nor was she mentioned in the New Testament. Among patristic writers, she appears only in Jerome—and with no fanfare, since he thought (without biblical evidence) that Josiah sent the delegation to Huldah only because Jeremiah was imprisoned at the time. Apparently, Jerome could not conceive of an official public ministry for a woman.

Adventists and Huldah

Nevertheless, Adventists kept alive the story of Huldah in college.

Many Adventist women were named Huldah, especially in the 19th century. Between Huldah Mott in 1857 and Huldah Fritz in 1993, *Review and Herald* listed about 45 Huldahs, representing every decade except the 1930s and 1980s. The name appeared mostly in lists of donors or obituaries but also in graduation lists.

References to the biblical Huldah, found in *Review and Herald/Adventist Review* until about 2000, fall mainly into three categories:

1. Many articles mention Huldah only regarding the reformation activities of King Josiah, without any details about her except possibly a note that she lived in Jerusalem. Articles in 12 issues of the church publication quote the KJV statement about her, including reference to “the college,” but without elaboration. Only one article in this category is specifically about Huldah as a prophetess.¹

2. In 28 issues of the Adventist magazine, the biblical Huldah appears in the company of two other female prophets mentioned in the Old Testament: Miriam and Deborah. Most such references concern the issue of prophecy, an ingredient *Review and Herald* writers expect to find in what they consider to be “remnant” Christianity, and the embodiment of this expectation in Ellen Harmon White, who is overtly or covertly seen to be in the tradition of these biblical prophetesses.

3. Most interesting are the articles in five issues of *Review and Herald*—and in other publications—that, despite available published information to the contrary, took seriously the KJV reference to “the college” and imagined a role for Huldah in an educational institution.

Besides these general classifications, one other relevant article deserves special mention. It quoted a series of questions by an unnamed wife of a Congregational minister, reprinted in 1858 from *Golden Rule*: “Who made Huldah chaplain to the king, instructress of the high priest, and professor in the theological seminary at Jerusalem?”²

Also noteworthy are a few articles and books by early Adventist authors Alonzo T. Jones and John N. Loughborough.

In 1885, Jones echoed 2 Kings 22 in the KJV when he wrote that Josiah sent messengers to Huldah the prophetess, who “dwelt in Jerusalem in the college.”³ Twelve years later, he similarly wrote that Josiah sent people “to Huldah, the prophetess, who dwelt in Jerusalem in the college, ‘to inquire of the Lord concerning



CASPAR LUYKEN, 1708

the words of the book.”⁴ The next year, he wrote a much more detailed account based on the erroneous KJV translation “in the college”:

“Here was, in Jerusalem, a college, or school, in which ‘*dwelt*’ the prophetess. This at once shows this school to have been a school of the prophets, because that which made those schools the schools of the prophets was the fact that a prophet dwelt with the school, and was, under God, the head of the school. This fact is revealed in the two other instances in which they are mentioned: in 1 Sam. 19:20 ‘the company of the prophets’ was seen, and ‘Samuel standing *as appointed* over them.’ In 2 Kings 6:1-6 we meet again ‘the sons of the prophets,’ and Elisha the prophet is dwelling with them; for they said to Elisha, ‘The place where we dwell *with thee* is too strait for us.’

“Thus we find three schools of the prophets in three widely separated ages,—the age of Samuel, the age of Elisha, and the age of Josiah,—and in each instance a prophet is dwelling in the school. These three passages were written to give us information as to the schools of the prophets. And first, they show why these schools were called schools of the prophets—because a prophet was the head of the school; they show also that the college, or school, in Jerusalem, in which dwelt Huldah the prophetess, was a school of the prophets as certainly as was the school where dwelt Elisha the prophet or Samuel the prophet.”⁵

The writings of Loughborough exhibit a similar curiosity, although with less embellishment. In 1899, he wrote of “Huldah the prophetess, [who] seems to have been connected with the school at Jerusalem, and was sought for counsel.”⁶ But in 1903, he more generally stated that “Huldah was a prophetess who dwelt in the college at Jerusalem,” and he cited 2 Kings 22:14. In a later book (1911), he repeated almost verbatim his statement from 1899.

Three 20th-century Adventist books include brief references to Huldah, at least two of which imply her role in an educational institution:

- Missionary and editor Stephen N. Haskell noted that Huldah was “married and dwelt in the college.”⁷
- Long-serving General Conference president Arthur G. Daniells mentioned that Huldah “was living, probably as an instructor ... in the college.”⁸
- Roger W. Coon, a former associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, indicated that Huldah “dwelt at Jerusalem, in the College.” His capitalization of “college” (KJV) suggests that he understood it as an educational institution.⁹

A *Review and Herald* article in 1948 by William A. Spicer, a former General Conference president, represents a change in acknowledging the origin of the “college” reference associated with Huldah. After the heading “Associated With College Work,” Spicer continued in his article: “The few brief words of the text about Huldah, the prophet of the Lord, give little information about her work, save as we find her receiving counsel for the king on this occasion. She dwelt ‘in the college’ quarter of Jerusalem. The Revised Version would render it, ‘in the second quarter.’ But the comments by the rabbinical writers and the Talmudists hold to the school idea.”¹⁰

He quoted from the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, reporting the traditional notion that Huldah had some role in a school.

Adventist Bible Commentary

No doubt this is the background for the more definitive statements in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* and *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*. The commentary on the text of the KJV in 2 Kings 22:14 reads: “**College.** Heb. *mishneh*. Literally, ‘second,’ that is, ‘second part’ or ‘second quarter.’ The reference is probably to the new or outer city—the expansion of Jerusalem to the north of the old city, which had been enclosed by the wall of Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:14; cf. Zeph. 1:10, where *mishneh* is translated ‘second’). According to Neh. 3:9, 12, there were two ‘half’ parts of Jerusalem. The translation ‘college’ is the rendering of the Targums, which take *mishneh* in the sense of the later *mishnah*, ‘instruction,’ from the idea ‘to repeat,’ hence ‘to teach’ and ‘to learn.’”¹¹

This is echoed in the *Dictionary*: “The translation ‘college’ in 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22; KJV, appears to have been based upon an assumed connection between the Heb. *mishneh*, ‘second,’ and the later Heb. *mishnah*, ‘instruction.’”¹²

Before discussing the most comprehensive treatment of Huldah in Adventist literature, we should note Ellen White’s position on these issues. She was clearly the identified or implied focus of the many Adventist references to Huldah among other Old Testament prophetesses. Yet, White seems not to have participated in those discussions or ruminated on the possibility that Huldah lived and worked in a school.

She was silent on Huldah until near the end of her life. In what was likely her last published article in *Review and Herald*, she noted that “the prophetess Huldah was living in Jerusalem, near the temple” at the time.¹³ Ellen White had died six days earlier. The last page of this issue announced her death on July 16. The

editors of her posthumously published *Prophets and Kings* in 1917 seem to have used this material in compiling the book, including the notion that Huldah lived “near the temple” (p. 398).

Biblical Fiction

I conclude with the description of *Huldah*, an imaginative biblical novel by Adventist author Lois N. Erickson. Like her similar volumes on Leah, Zipporah, and Hannah, this 125-page book, deriving from one sentence in the KJV that mentions the “college,” is a fantasy on the life and career of this shadowy figure. Advertisements of the book in *Adventist Review* include this description: “From the moment she disguised herself to sneak him to the Temple, Huldah seemed destined to play a leading role in young Josiah’s life. Through the Assyrian capture of King Manasseh and the evil reign and assassination of Prince Amon, she had risked all to secretly teach him the will of God.”¹⁴

Erickson fictionally develops Huldah’s educational role. Here are some excerpts from page 63 of her book:

[The king:] “From now on I want you to enlarge your school to include the wives and daughters of my captains and city officials.”

[The king:] “See those gates that lead into the royal court and the palace? I will send out a proclamation that certain women shall attend your school, and I will instruct my guards to allow them through those gates.’ He turned away from the window, [adding:] ‘From now on you will no longer use Sumerian writings. You will teach the history of our people, using scrolls that I keep in my library.’


“In the passageways, Huldah walked with her head up and a smile on her lips. *My school! I can teach from Hebrew scrolls—the prophecies of Isaiah and history from our chronicles.*

“In the months that followed, Huldah greeted each day in happy anticipation of satisfying hours with her students. The school flourished. Women from the city came to learn.”

In his review of Erickson’s novel, Andrews University professor Scott Moncrieff describes it as “Biblical fiction—full-blown narrative compatible with scanty scriptural sources.”¹⁵ For this volume published in 1991, as well as for Erickson’s other titles, Review and Herald Publishing followed the industry practice of whitewashing protagonists on book covers, so that the cover features the image of a young, 20th-century Caucasian woman instead of an ancient, Semitic female.

My account of Adventist fascination with Huldah spans 130-plus years of embracing a mistranslation in the KJV. It started

in 1858 with the notion that Huldah was a “professor in the theological seminary at Jerusalem” and ended with a novel that imagines her role in the education of Jewish women in the 7th century BCE.

Some managed to reflect the biblical story without distortion, but others used this woman’s prophetic role to justify the career and ministry of Ellen White. All of this occurred within Adventism, long after biblical scholars had concluded that “in the college” in 2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22 of the KJV was a mistranslation for something like “in the second quarter” of the city. 

¹ A. S. Hutchins, “Huldah the Prophetess,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 60, No. 25 (19 Jun 1883), p. 2.

² “On Keeping Silence: Ought Women to Keep Silence in the Churches?” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec. 16, 1858), p. 27.

³ A. T. Jones, “Notes on the International Lesson. 2 Kings 22:1-13. Josiah and the Book of the Law,” *The Signs of the Times*, Vol. 11, No. 49 (Dec. 24, 1885), p. 6.

⁴ Jones, *The Empires of the Bible from the Confusion of Tongues to the Babylonian Captivity* (1897), p. 382.

⁵ “Studies in the Book of Daniel,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (Feb. 1, 1898), pp. 8-9. This unsigned article, which starts on the editorial page that lists Jones as one of the editors, is most likely his because of its similarity to his later book. The second quoted paragraph is almost identical to one in Alonzo T. Jones, *The Place of the Bible in Education: An Appeal to Christians* (1903), p. 81.

⁶ John N. Loughborough, *Spiritual Gifts* (1899), p. 8.

⁷ Stephen N. Haskell, *Bible Handbook* (1919), p. 143.

⁸ Arthur G. Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (1936), p. 133.

⁹ Roger W. Coon, *Ellen G. White’s View of the Role of Women in the S.D.A. Church* (1986), p. 14.

¹⁰ W. A. Spicer, “Counsels of Reform, Ancient and Modern,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 125, No. 18 (Apr. 29, 1948), p. 5.

¹¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2 (1954), p. 121.

¹² *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (1979), s.v. “Second Quarter.”

¹³ Ellen G. White, “The Book of the Law,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 92, No. 36 (July 22, 1915), p. 4.

¹⁴ *Adventist Review* (May 16, 1991; May 23, 1991; June 20, 1991).

¹⁵ Scott Moncrieff, “Holiday Reading,” *Adventist Review*, Vol. 171, No. 48 (December 1994), p. 14.

The Talented Johannes de Heer and the 1902 Devastation of the Dutch Church

BY REINDER BRUINSMA

ONE OF THE THINGS I FEARED IN MY EARLY MINISTRY WAS THAT people to whom I was giving Bible studies would get their hands on a little book written by Johannes de Heer, titled *Het Zevende-dags Adventisme en de Sabbat-Vierings*, which in English is translated as *Seventh-day Adventists and Sabbath-keeping*.

The title was more irenic than its content; the booklet was a series of hard-hitting arguments against worshiping on the seventh day of the week. Its author knew all of the nuts and bolts of the Sabbath-Sunday issue; he had worshiped on the Sabbath for more than six years before he abandoned it. The foreword was written by D. M. Canright, “a former prominent Adventist preacher in America,” who concludes, “I am fully persuaded in my own mind that the evidence is overwhelmingly against the observance of the seventh day.”

Becoming a Household Name

Johannes de Heer was born in 1866 in Rotterdam and lived a long and rewarding life, to age 95. After finishing elementary school, he worked in his father’s blacksmith shop but later found employment in a music store. From his early childhood, the boy had been fond of music, which suited him for his new job. Though he never learned to read music, he taught himself to play from memory on the small pump organ his parents gave him.

When de Heer began to feel uneasy with the kind of music his employer was selling, he decided at age 32 to start his own music store. His small company soon flourished and is still, after more than 125 years, a successful enterprise, now known for selling musical instruments of all kinds.

A man of extraordinary talent, Johannes de Heer was a larger-than-life figure who would become a household name among Dutch Protestants because of the hymnal he created, which first appeared in 1905. Since then, many greatly expanded editions have been published. A total of 7 million copies have found their way into Christian homes and (mostly evangelical) congregations.

De Heer himself wrote many hymns and translated others. A few dozen of his hymns are still found in the current Dutch Adventist hymnal.

His Days in the Dutch Church

When de Heer and his wife, Cornelia Petronella van Meeteren, lost their 5-year-old daughter in 1896, this tragedy caused Johannes to embark on an intense spiritual search. After attending Adventist evangelistic meetings, he was convinced he had found the truth. Both husband and wife joined the newly organized Adventist congregation in Rotterdam, with its 44 members. After a short time, Johannes was ordained as an elder.

Because the literal translation of “de Heer” is “the Lord” and another elder had the surname Knecht, which in Dutch means “servant” or “employee,” it’s no wonder that Johannes de Heer and Maarten Knecht were jokingly referred to as *de heer en zijn Knecht*, or “the lord and his servant.”

De Heer, who assumed a prominent role in the small group of Adventists in Rotterdam and its surroundings, took his new faith very seriously and decided to close his business on Saturdays. In *Het Zevende-dags Adventisme en de Sabbat-Vierings*, he described his pattern of Sabbath-keeping in a way that can only be characterized as extremely legalistic.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, his love affair with Adventism did not endure. In 1901, de Heer began to have doubts about the Christian’s obligation to keep the Sabbath. A year later, he left the Adventist Church with 140 other members. Although few details were preserved, it is said that some pastors were among those leaving.

In the end, only 37 church members remained in the entire Netherlands! Pastor Reinhold Gustav Klingbeil (1868-1928) was so shaken that he withdrew from the ministry for a time.

Little is known about how the conflict developed or what transpired to cause the departure of more than three-quarters of the Adventist members. When Louis R. Conradi, the leader of European Adventism in 1925, looked back on the devastation in the Dutch field, he pointed to three things. First, he believed that many Adventists there were unhappy with the Dutch church’s close organizational ties with the church in Germany and felt that too much of their money went to German projects. Also, the Sabbath School lessons of the second quarter of 1901 dealt with the topic of the sanctuary and its services, which led to intense discussions and created a widespread uneasiness about distinctive Adventist beliefs. And finally, many were unconvinced that Ellen G. White had prophetic authority almost on a par with the Bible writers, as some Adventists insisted.

De Heer became a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and was soon involved in large-scale lay-evangelistic activities. He became one of the pioneers of tent-evangelism in the Netherlands, and he started a journal and an interchurch movement that focused on proclaiming the soon return of Christ.



Adventist Conflicts

The conflict that shook Dutch Adventism is more than a century in the past, but we have good reason to try to understand it. In many ways, it is a model of how controversies develop in Adventism.

When conflicts erupt, a particular event may be the drop that makes the bucket overflow. Theological issues could be mingled with misunderstandings, leadership challenges, or ethnic/cultural biases. But a few doctrinal topics keep coming up.

The members of the Dutch Adventist Church of 1902 were not the first or the last to question the traditional understanding of the heavenly sanctuary and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as our high priest in its most holy apartment. Their questions also touched on the specific Adventist teaching of the investigative judgment that, they were told, had been in process since 1844.

Many well-known dissenters who have left the Adventist community have done so, at least partially, because they concluded that the sanctuary doctrine is faulty and that Adventist theology needs a new focus on Jesus Christ and his saving grace. Albion Fox Ballenger (1861-1921), who was dismissed from the Adventist ministry for his sanctuary views, is a well-known example. Others who came to doubt, and then to reject, the Adventist version of the sanctuary doctrine were prominent men such as D. M. Canright (1840-1919) and, more recently, Robert Brinsmead (1933-) and Desmond Ford (1929-2019). It is no secret that some of the church’s ministers, including professional theologians and administrators as well as many theologically astute members, share these doubts but have chosen not to express them.

Another reason people decide to leave their church is that legalism remains an ineradicated plague in many segments of Adventism. This was one of the things that severely affected the spiritual experience of Johannes de Heer.

In his book about the Sabbath, de Heer told how he had kept his business closed on the Sabbath so that he did not have to work during its sacred hours. The commandment specifies that “neither your manservant nor your maidservant” should work for you, either. In an attempt to avoid causing others to work for him, de Heer had asked his customers and suppliers to carefully choose the time for sending mail to him so that it would not arrive on the Sabbath. Merchandise could not be delivered to him on Saturdays, but how could he be sure that boxes had not been packaged for him on the seventh day, or that his music had not been printed on that day?

The role of Ellen G. White has been a source of friction from the days of the pioneers until the present. Once these Dutch church members no longer accepted the sanctuary doctrine, it was almost inescapable that they also would no longer trust the prophet who was its key champion. Much of the polarization in current Adventism is due to controversies around the prophet.

At the end of the 1920s, some church leaders defended a moderate view of White’s inspiration and attempted to bring her down to earth—where she should have stayed. But in the era when fundamentalism gained a strong foothold in many parts of American Protestantism, the Adventist Church also became infected by this theological virus. Adventists became fundamentalist even about Ellen White. She was placed on a high pedestal, and some claimed an almost verbal inspiration for her.

Research in recent decades has produced a wealth of information and has provided a new view of her person and work. But members of the church have been largely kept in the dark about these discoveries. And, of course, when people do find out, they often feel deceived and may wonder whether they want to stay with the church that has kept the truth from them.

Many brothers and sisters may have told us that they left the church because of doctrinal differences, but perhaps an unspoken reason was that in the small community in which they had to experience their Adventist faith, they were not given the space they needed to be who they are.

Most of these disputes have not led to the founding of a competing denomination. (The Adventist Reform Movement, with around 40,000 members in 132 countries, is perhaps an exception.) Some who leave Adventism connect with other Christian communities, though others lose interest in organized religion or abandon their faith altogether.

Too Big for a Small Church?

Why do people such as Johannes de Heer leave the Adventist Church? More than a century later, the available documentation is too meager to give a full picture. The things that bothered de Heer have perturbed many others and have undoubtedly driven some to exit the church.

But it seems to me that another factor could have played a role. Could it be that the small Adventist community of fewer

than 50 members in Rotterdam (of about 200 members in the entire country) was simply too small for an innovative and multi-gifted individual such as de Heer? Could it be that he was just one of those people who—because of extraordinary personality, creativity, and other competencies—find that the church is not big enough for them?


When we think of the history of Adventism in Europe, the name of Louis R. Conradi inevitably comes to mind. He, too, was an extraordinary, visionary leader. In his departure from Adventism in 1932, several doctrinal issues played a role similar to what de Heer reported. I wonder: was European Adventism in the 1930s perhaps still too small to accommodate such a visionary leader as Conradi?

In North America, the history of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg is no doubt better known. Several books describe in detail the increasing rift between the doctor, the “brethren,” and the prophet. The conflict climaxed in 1903 with the publication of his supposedly pantheistic book *The Living Temple*. Kellogg may not have been an easy person to deal with—he was undoubtedly an eccentric, and he was also a genius. Was he too big to fit within the small denomination of his days?

This question could perhaps make an interesting topic for a dissertation. But in the meantime, allow me to raise a related idea that may be worth considering. The majority of Adventist congregations in the world are quite small and do not resemble the churches of 1,000 or more members, which exist in some major Adventist bubbles. It is essential that in small congregations, of perhaps a hundred or even fewer members, men and women with a unique personality and/or extraordinary qualities feel welcome and are given the space they need to breathe and to fully participate, without being judged or ignored.

Many brothers and sisters may have told us that they left the church because of doctrinal differences, but perhaps an additional unspoken reason was that in the small community in which they had to experience their Adventist faith, they didn’t have the space they needed to be who they are.

I do not know to what extent the departure of Johannes de Heer was due (at least partly) to this. But I do personally know several very talented and erudite people who, I believe, left the church not solely because they had questions about Ellen White or 1844, but because the congregation they attended was not spacious enough for them to be, and remain, happy Christians. They were not accepted for the talented women and men they are.

I believe this matter needs our urgent attention. 

Ellen White and *Mirror of the Soul*

BY RONALD D. GRAYBILL

ELLEN WHITE SPENT FROM August of 1885 until August of 1887 in Europe. In late May of 1887, she was in Vohwinkel, Germany, about 30 miles from Cologne. There she had a dream in the early morning hours of Saturday, May 28.

In the dream, she was conversing with a group when a stranger entered the room and took a seat in a dark corner so as not to be noticed. As conversation among the group continued, the stranger stood up and started speaking to them. In her diary, White recorded the speech as more than 1,200 words long.

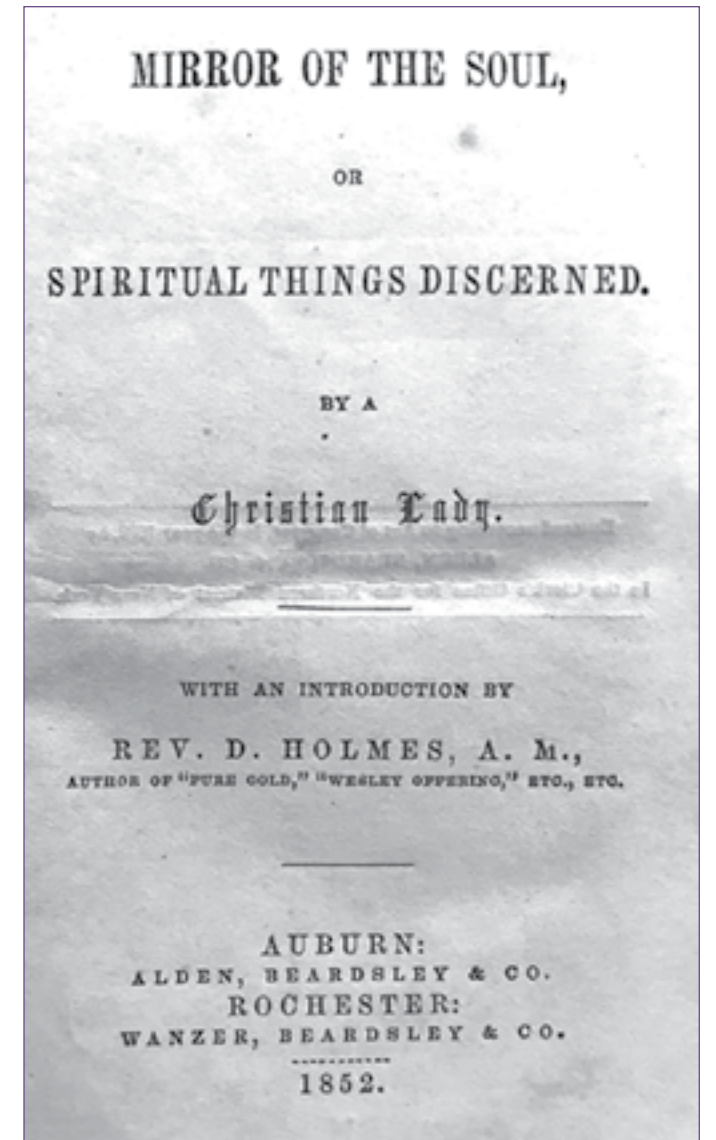
Among other things, the stranger said: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. They are united to Christ as the branches are united to the one living vine. They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. These are living examples of Christianity in the world. They are called Christians because they are like Christ and because Christ is in them. Of a truth they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The help of the Spirit and the words of eternal life are their wisdom and their strength. And they are led into all truth because they are willing and obedient.”

As the stranger’s speech concluded, a beam of sunlight lit his figure, and “all knew in a moment” who had been speaking to them. They exclaimed, “It is Jesus; it is Jesus!”

The problem is that many of the words that White placed in the mouth of Jesus were virtually copied from a small book, *Mirror of the Soul*: “As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Being created anew in Christ, they walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit; and these are living examples of Christianity in the world. They are called Christians because they are like Christ, and because Christ is in them; of a truth they are the light of the world, and salt of the earth. The help of the Spirit and the words of eternal life are their wisdom and strength, and by these they are led into all truth and all obedience.”

Mirror of the Soul

Mrs. White had long been familiar with *Mirror of the Soul*. The editor of the volume, Rev. David Holmes, identified the book’s author only as a “Christian Lady” who is designated elsewhere as “a popular writer in the Methodist Society.” White may have acquired her copy soon after its publication in 1852, because snippets from it appear in three of her letters between 1853 and 1859.



Mirror of the Soul is often wordy and repetitious. It reads like someone’s personal diary entries, which contain many scattered thoughts from day to day. The writing was finished during the author’s final years of sickness. She quotes extensively from the King James Version of the Bible and then often lapses into Elizabethan English as she records her reflections on spirituality. It was a miracle of sorts that White could find so much useful in it—but then, she lived in the same spiritual and thought world as the anonymous “Christian Lady” and was also a devoted reader of the King James Version.

White’s first published use of the book’s language appeared in 1858 in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, where she copied nearly 100 words, including two complete sentences. She made further use of *Mirror* in 1860 in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 2. The next year, 1861, she borrowed extensively from *Mirror* in a February letter. Then, in July of that same year, she used a different section of the book in a *Review* article. That same year, *Testimony for the Church* – No. 6 used some *Mirror* language, as did *Testimony for the Church* – No. 7, in 1862. An 1872 letter to M. E. Cornell borrows from *Mirror*,

One way to explain this dream, in which Jesus seems to be quoting from an 1852 book, is simply to say that the dream was not a divine revelation but a common, ordinary dream such as any of us might experience.

and that passage was reprinted the next year in *Testimony for the Church* – No. 22. Other parallels cropped up in *Testimony for the Church* – No. 31, written Sept. 25, 1881, and in an 1884 *Review and Herald* article.

When White recorded her dream in 1887, she may have had her copy of *Mirror of the Soul* with her in Germany. She may also have taken it with her to Australia, for we find the use of Christian Lady’s language in an 1897 *Youth’s Instructor* article, as well as in a personal letter that she wrote while in Australia.

Plagiarism or Familiarity?

Pacific Union College Professor of Theology Katrina Blue first noticed Mrs. White’s use of *Mirror of the Soul* in her writings in 2015, while she was writing her doctoral dissertation at Andrews University. In the course of her research, Blue set out to read every book on spirituality that was in White’s library when she died in 1915, including *Mirror of the Soul*.

In 2024, after I noticed the parallel in the 1887 dream, I found still more parallels. Kevin Morgan, a pastor and expert in Ellen White’s history and writings, found most of the other parallels I cited above.

Morgan prefers to say that White “adapted” wording from *Mirror of the Soul* or used that wording merely to convey the gist of what Jesus said. I prefer to say she “virtually copied” some parts of the speech.

Of course, White’s most vociferous critics will call it plagiarism, a term I avoid because I don’t believe she used the writings of others to enhance her own reputation. The issue is rather that she claims God revealed ideas to her when it appears that the ideas could have come from her reading and been in her mind prior to any visionary experiences, which doesn’t rule out God’s endorsement of those ideas during her visions.

White’s Dreams

One might suppose that it would have been more candid for White to simply say, “In my dream, a stranger had wonderful words for the group. I don’t remember them exactly, but they were much like the following passage in *Mirror of the Soul*, which has been such an inspiration to me.” But ever since her episode of psychogenic aphasia (“I was struck dumb”) as a teenager, when she resisted the “power of God” thinking it might be mesmerism, and her subsequent terror when she saw Jesus frown on her for doubting, she was virtually unable to see her daytime visions or “visions of the night” as anything but divine visitations, and she was unwilling to attribute earthly influence to the messages she conveyed.

One way to explain this dream, in which Jesus seems to be quoting from an 1852 book, is simply to say that the dream was not a divine revelation but a common, ordinary dream such as any of us might experience. White herself says, “The multitude [i.e., the majority] of dreams arise from the common things of life, with which the Spirit of God has nothing to do.”

Already familiar with the book *Mirror of the Soul* in 1887, White doubtless had some of its language lodged in her memory. Consequently, as she dreamed, her sleeping mind mingled the words she remembered into the speech of Jesus. When she awoke, she fetched the book and expanded on what she recalled from the words of the “stranger.”

The online transcription of this diary entry places the words of Jesus in quotation marks, but in the diary, White used no quotation marks. So, she can be said to have used the words from *Mirror* to convey the gist of what she heard during her dream. On some occasions, in reporting the words of a divine guide, White only said, “I will give in substance a few things that were said.” But in reporting this 1887 dream, she seems to be quoting word for word.

White may have had another ordinary dream back in 1881. In that dream her husband, James, appeared and conversed with her, even though he had died about a month earlier. One can see this as a dream that arose from the “common things of life.” In her waking life at the time, she was grieving the loss of her husband and puzzling over the very topic James addressed in her dream. She said it “seemed so real,” implying that she knew it had not happened in her waking life, but rather, during a dream.

Genuineness

In her comments on the different types of visions and dreams, White says that dreams from the Lord are “as truly the fruits of the spirit of prophecy as visions. Such dreams, taking into account the persons who have them and the circumstances under which they are given, contain their own proofs of their genuineness.”

But if this 1887 dream in Germany was given by the Lord, where is proof of its genuineness? Some may say the evidence of the dream’s genuineness as a divinely inspired revelation lies in the insightful spiritual truths it conveys, regardless of whether parts of the dream narrative were constructed using *Mirror of the Soul*. But one could just as well argue that this particular dream contains proof of its “ordinariness.” After all, for Ellen White, reading books about spiritual matters and thinking about such topics were the “common things of life,” which she says gives rise to the majority of dreams. In the end, that reasoning offers no objective way to distinguish between her “ordinary” dreams and those that might have been divinely inspired.

More than 40 years ago, I published an article about White’s descriptions of revelatory experiences where she used the term “I saw” but then proceeded to quote from earthly sources. In that article, I did not consider the possibility that some of those experiences may have been ordinary dreams. I did, however, cite one that could fit in either category: divine revelation or common dream.

When Ellen White was in New Zealand, she read a newspaper article about four young men who were caught in an undertow at the beach, and only one was saved. That night she dreamed she was in much the same scene, only this time her son Edson was the one caught in the surf. He seemed heedless of the warnings she shouted to him. She wrote to him of the experience, and that letter persuaded him of his own spiritual danger. He renewed his faith and went on to build the riverboat *Morning Star* and launch his mission to African-Americans in Mississippi.

The report of White’s 1887 dream about a stranger’s speech, which included material from a book with which she was very familiar, raises the question of whether her use of sources in describing earlier visions might also have arisen from her familiarity with those sources prior to experiencing a vision on the topic. William C. White, in a 1934 letter to L. E. Froom, claimed that in his mother’s visions, “the main outlines were made very clear and plain to her” but “she was left to study ... history to get dates and geographical relations.” Her account of this dream suggests that even in her visions, she may have already had the “main outlines” from previous reading and then been able to go back to those earthly sources to describe her visions.

Some might question my implied presupposition that God’s contribution is only to be seen in the extraordinary and never in the ordinary. Very well. We must notice that the complete title of the Christian Lady’s book is *Mirror of the Soul; or, Spiritual Things Discerned*, an allusion to 1 Corinthians 2:14, which says the things of God are “spiritually discerned.”

Although that particular author may not have experienced any visions, she believed she had been led by the Spirit as she wrote her insightful book about the Christian life. Could it be that Jesus would be speaking to us in our own dreams if the “common things” of our daily lives, like Ellen White’s, included whole nights spent in prayer and a “thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ”?¹

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (1898), p. 83.

Ellen White and the Flat Earth

BY LOREN SEIBOLD

THAT ANCIENT PEOPLE THOUGHT EARTH WAS FLAT SHOULDN'T surprise us: it looks and feels flat. Even to those of us who understand gravity, "up" and "down" are so intuitive that it is challenging to picture other human beings oriented 180 degrees to where we stand.

The "flat earth" theory enjoyed some popularity in the 19th century and continues as a fringe view into the 21st.¹ It even touched briefly the unfolding message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White alludes to it in an enigmatic passage in *Gospel Workers*:

I quickly determined that the book was about flat-earth theory, and then I was even more surprised to find within it a quote that I recognized as coming from Ellen White.

"When at one time a brother came to me with the message that the world is flat, I was instructed to present the commission that Christ gave his disciples, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ... and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end.' In regard to such subjects as the flat-world theory, God says to every soul, 'What is that to thee? follow thou Me.' I have given you your commission. Dwell upon the great testing truths for this time, not upon matters that have no bearing upon our work."²

The Bible's Earth

A spherical Earth was proposed by Pythagoras as early as the 6th century BCE. Around 330 BCE, Aristotle offered empirical evidence for a spherical Earth based on observation of lunar eclipses.

But Christian scholars struggled for centuries to reconcile scientific evidence of a moving, spherical Earth with the Bible,

which they insisted must be the ultimate authority on the shape, construction, and location of our world. John wrote about "the four corners of the earth" (Rev. 7:1), and corners are not generally associated with spheres. Other passages refer to the "vault" of heaven, which sounds like a ceiling arching over a flat world (Isa. 40:20, 21; Job 22:14). Our blue planet is "founded upon the seas" (Psa. 24:2), which are immeasurably deep (Jer. 31:37) and stretched out "above the waters," which are "under the earth" (Psa. 136:6; Ex. 20:4), making the continents massive floating rafts. The world isn't traveling through space, either, according to Psalm 93:1: "Yea, the world is established, never to be moved." The familiar story of Joshua in the battle with the Amorites specifies that the Sun—not Earth—stood still (Josh. 10:13). So, the planet was flat, immovable, and at the center of the universe, with Sun, Moon, and stars circling above it. The Ptolemaic spherical Earth suspended in space gained ecclesiastical acceptance only after extensive debate.

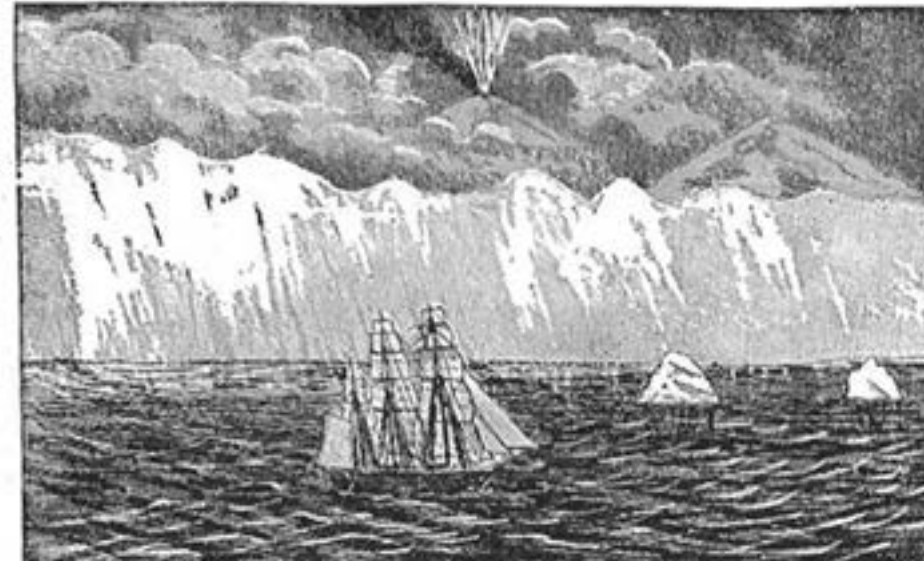
Geocentrism—the idea that Earth was the center of the universe—was harder to give up. For advocating the Copernican model of planets circling the Sun, the astronomer Galileo was condemned as a heretic. Even Luther, Calvin, and Wesley rejected the Copernican cosmology on biblical grounds.

Yet, by the Middle Ages, the spherical Earth was considered conventional wisdom among most educated people. That Christopher Columbus had to fight the Catholic Church to get sponsorship for his Atlantic crossing is a myth propounded by American writer Washington Irving, who wanted to make the case that science was held back by recalcitrant Christianity. Columbus had no doubt about the sphericity of Earth; his problem was convincing investors that he could sail to the other side of it and bring back riches for them.

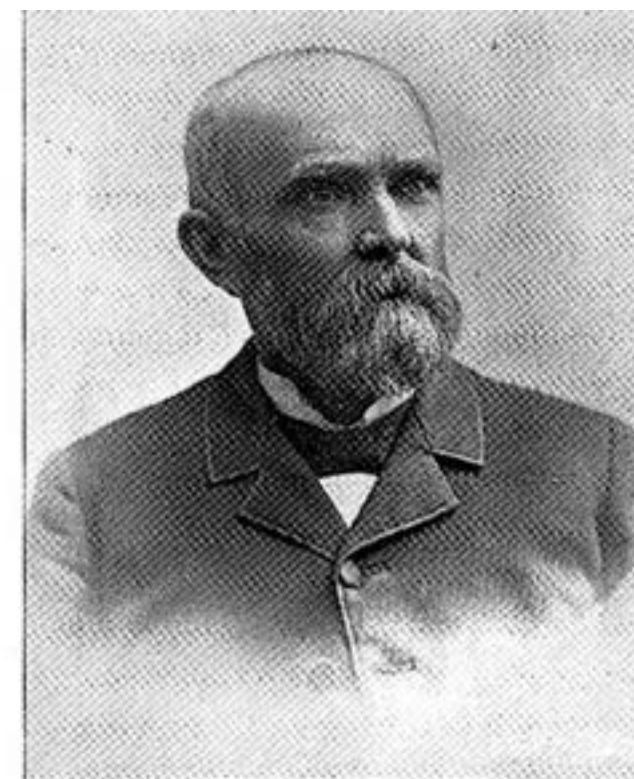
Alexander Gleason

The Second Great Awakening—the historical revival from which Seventh-day Adventists originated—led to a new level of literalism in Bible interpretation. While Adventists were calculating day-for-year time prophecies and asserting that a six-day creation began a mere 6,000 years ago, other Biblicists were studying Scripture's descriptions of Earth.

In 1979 I wandered into an antique store in Crookston, Minnesota, where a title caught my eye. On a shelf of old books, I saw *Is the Bible from Heaven? Is the Earth a Globe?* by Alexander Gleason, released in 1890 by the Buffalo Electrotype and Engraving Company. I quickly determined that the book was about flat-earth theory, and then I was even more surprised to find within it a quote that I recognized as coming from Ellen White.



Antarctica was thought to be the border of "everlasting bounds of ice."



Alex Gleason



Distances between Southern Hemisphere destinations, argued Alexander Gleason, were much farther than necessary for a round world.

Gleason was from western New York, where he conducted some of his experiments on the apparently flat waters of Lake Erie. Whether or not he was a church member, he was certainly a dedicated student of Seventh-day Adventist teachings. In *Is the Bible from Heaven? Is the Earth a Globe?* he defends both the Adventist message and the “doctrine” of a flat Earth.

While we don’t know that the man White mentioned in *Gospel Workers* was Alexander Gleason, his account of an encounter with Adventist leaders seems similar to her account of meeting an advocate for the flat-world theory. Gleason wrote: “There is a people scattered abroad throughout the earth, with whom I have had an acquaintance for over thirty-years.... Further, this people claim to be giving that everlasting Gospel, styled the ‘Third Angel’s Message’ of Rev. 14:6-12. Some prominent ones among

Christian scholars struggled for centuries to reconcile scientific evidence of a moving, spherical Earth with the Bible, which they insisted must be the ultimate authority on the shape, construction, and location of our world.

this people have taught that this subject of the shape of the earth was no part of the ‘Third Angel’s Message’ and, therefore, no part of the truth for them to receive; consequently, they are to have nothing to do with it.”³

Zetetic Philosophy

Modern “flat earthism” began in England in 1849 with the publication of a little book with a comically long name: *Zetetic Astronomy: A Description of Several Experiments Which Prove That the Surface of the Sea Is a Perfect Plane and That the Earth Is Not a Globe*. Writing under the pen name Parallax, Samuel Birley Rowbotham devoted his life to attacking the idea of a spherical

Earth. Most subsequent proponents of flat-earth theory, including Gleason, based their arguments on Rowbotham’s book and, like him, called themselves “zetetic philosophers.”⁴

According to zetetic theory, our world is a circular plane with the North Pole at the center. Insurmountable walls of ice stretch around the outside of the plane; the ice, should you try to traverse it, continues to infinity. The Equator is a circle halfway between the ice walls and the pole. The land masses actually float on the oceans, which are infinitely deep. The entire planet is covered with a ceiling, within which the heavenly bodies hang. The Sun, Moon, and other planets circle in irregular paths above Earth at a height of about 1,750 miles. The apparent rising and setting of these bodies is an optical illusion having to do with the behavior of light in the atmosphere and with a misunderstood law of perspective that explains why ships only *seem* to disappear as they sail over the horizon. The Moon’s light is self-generated and occasionally eclipsed by an unidentified dark body, possibly a comet, passing in front of it.

Gleason explains these ideas with the aid of complex circular maps, calendars of past events, long astronomical charts, and diagrams about visual perspective, most of which serve to confuse more than to convince. He includes reports by explorers of the heavens and the seas, which buttressed zetetic claims about unusual tricks of perspective in the upper atmosphere and the unusual height and length of the Antarctic ice walls.

Gleason appeals to the reader’s common sense: “Another striking absurdity of the globular theory is the course of the River Nile, whose mouth is 2,000 miles higher than its starting point. ... By looking at any map of Africa you will see that this river is over 2,000 miles high, vertical, and standing on its small end at that! ... How is this for gravitation?”⁵

In the context of her remarks about flat-earth theory, White counseled the Adventist brethren: “When questions arise upon which we are uncertain, let us ask, ‘What saith the Scripture?’ And if the Scripture is silent upon the question at issue, let it not be made the subject of discussion.”⁶ If Alexander Gleason had agreed that the Bible was silent on cosmology, he would have given his book a different title. Because his “scientific” explanations of a flat Earth in a geocentric universe seem silly to modern readers, we might miss that this book represents a sincere desire for biblical harmony. Of the shape of our planet, he writes: “Has inspiration used a medium through which to communicate to mortals, that would use other words than His, and words calculated to deceive? I cannot believe it!”⁷

The greatest portion of Gleason’s book is devoted not to the shape of Earth, but to a Bible study about major Adventist

doctrines. He discusses the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, the 2300-days prophecy, Creation, the age of Earth, and the Flood. Like an Adventist evangelist, Gleason shows how the accuracy of the Nebuchadnezzar prophecies of Daniel 2 demonstrates that the Bible is really from heaven.

But he takes the argument one step further: if the Bible is inspired, honest people must acknowledge that the Bible does not support the “pagan idolatry” of a globular Earth.

Gleason’s decisive stroke, added at the very end of the book, is a quote by White that describes our universe made new, in which she writes, “With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity.”⁸

Gleason asks, “If anyone can so construe the above quotations and language spoken, as to place the Throne of God and His Son anywhere else than on this earth when the “restitution of all things” shall have taken place? Advocate it who will, I cannot.”⁹

Ellen White’s Position

White first mentions flat-earth theory in a letter to Marvin Herrick Brown, president of the New York Conference, in 1887. Her attitude was the same as it would be 17 years later: the issue isn’t a priority.

“I learn by letters from New York that Bro. Brown has accepted and is now preaching the flat-world theory. Is it possible that this theory has been brought by Bro. Wilcox from England and that you have accepted it and are teaching it? My brother, our work is to teach the third angel’s message.”¹⁰

Milton Charles Wilcox, first editor of *Present Truth* published in Grimsby, England, seemed not a favorite of Ellen White.¹¹ She wrote: “It is a weakness of Eld. Wilcox to get hold of hobbies and to stick to some things that he had better let alone. Any kind of a theory or hobby that Satan can lead the minds of men to dwell upon he will draw their attention to so that they shall not be engaged in giving the solemn message for this time.... It is better to pray and humble the soul before God and let the world, round or flat, be just as God has made it.”¹²

Brown replied from Adams Center, New York, on April 26, 1887, confessing that he not only had some private interest in the flat Earth theory but also had engaged in some conversations on the subject.

After addressing a meeting in Melrose, Massachusetts, in the late summer of 1904, White records in her diary of Sunday, August 28: “An urgent request came to me from a man who desired to discuss with me in regard to the round world, to him a very important matter. My answer was, I have a message to this people in regard to the life they must live in this world,

to prepare them for future life which measures with the life of God. We have nought to do with the question whether this world is round or flat.”¹³

Could the man she described have been Gleason? By this time, train travel from Buffalo would have made a visit to Massachusetts convenient.

White returns to the matter at least thrice more. In a letter to her son Willie, dated the following day, she says she told this man that “when Christ gave my commission to do the work He had placed upon me, the flat or round world was not included in the message.”¹⁴ On September 12, writing from Omaha under the heading Non-Essential Subjects to Be Avoided, she mentions the encounter again and complains, “Wherever we go, we shall find men ready with some side issue.”¹⁵

On September 4, in a sermon in Middletown, Connecticut, White shapes it into a lesson on character: “I had one come up to me and want me to give information about a round or flat world. Said I, I have no such burden on my soul at all. I have nothing to say to you or to anybody else about a round or a flat world. What we want is a round character. We have altogether too much of a flat character, and we want now to think of building a character that shall be round and perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.”¹⁶

In none of her replies does she give an inspired answer to whether Earth is actually round or flat. She simply dismisses it as a question that need not be discussed and which, in fact, may have no definitive answer: “God has not given it to them to solve.”¹⁷

Elsewhere in her writings, though, she does appear to affirm a round earth. Discussing the Sabbath, she declares that “God made His Sabbath for a round world; and when the seventh day comes to us in that round world, controlled by the sun that rules the day, it is the time in all countries and lands to observe the Sabbath.”¹⁸

An “Unpopular Truth”?

Given Gleason’s appreciation for the fundamentalist hermeneutic that informed Adventist teachings such as prophecy and Creation, he was understandably disappointed that Adventists were unwilling to include flat-earth theory in their end-time message. The planet’s shape, he was convinced, was a testing truth.

Reading his book, one gets the feeling that Gleason is writing with Ellen White as his primary audience. To the argument that it was not essential, he replies: “True, it may not make any difference to us in regard to its shape, but it will make a difference whether we speak, think, act and teach the truth or a lie.”¹⁹ And he reminds Adventists of an oft-repeated maxim “that an


unpopular truth was more acceptable than a popular error.... We do find some, sorry to say, that cling to the popular error, at the sacrifice of the unpopular truth. While some are declaring that they have nothing to do with the matter, yet we still hear them preaching the Earth a Globe, and [they] are teaching it from their high schools and colleges.”²⁰

Reading these accounts over a century later, in an age when the spherical, moving Earth is an unquestioned fact, Gleason’s geocentric and flat-earth ideas seem silly, and Ellen White’s refutation of them appears to be just a minor—if odd—even in Adventist history.

Yet, one wonders why White dodged these questions when she had no hesitation addressing so many other matters having to do with science. Of the manner of Earth’s creation and its age she was certain, because God had told her. That there were better cures for disease than physicians used, God had also revealed to her. But instead of refuting the flat-earth theory, she refused to discuss it, calling it a matter of no particular importance—and wondering if it could be known at all.

Gleason believed there were no unimportant questions. He had to resolve every contradiction to prove the Bible true. White countered in *Gospel Workers* that “petty strife and contention over questions of no importance has no part in God’s great plan,” and only one thing proves the Bible true: the experience of salvation and life in Christ. “Let those who wish for something new,” she wrote on page 314, “seek for that newness of life resulting from the new birth. Let them purify their souls by obeying the truth, and act in harmony with the instruction that Christ has given.”

Those who went beyond the themes of salvation “lead their hearers into a field of thistles, as it were, and leave them there.”²¹

That’s counsel we might wish she had followed herself. 

¹ The small but defiant International Flat Earth Research Society (IFERS), based in Lancaster, California, at one point claimed 3,500 members. Its president, Charles K. Johnson, denied the “theory” of a global Earth, insisting that Australians do not hang by their feet with their heads downward. He regarded modern testimonies to a spherical Earth, such as satellite pictures and space travel, as satanically inspired (and possibly Communist) hoaxes meant to undermine the credibility of Scripture. Johnson published the quarterly *Flat Earth News*, in which he regularly labeled scientists as liars and “demented dope fiends.” In a phone conversation in 1991, he told me that because he placed great importance on the Ten Commandments, he had studied Adventist teachings and even briefly worshiped with Adventists. He later rejected all organized religion for “bearing false witness” in regard to flat-earth theory. In 1995, a fire in Johnson’s home destroyed the IFERS library and all of its records. Johnson died in 2001. Daniel Shenton resurrected IFERS in 2009 with a website at theflatearthsociety.org. He had 550 members as of the end of 2024. The first member was English musician Thomas Dolby, who had a 1984 album titled *The Flat Earth*.

² Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (1915), p. 314.

³ Alexander Gleason, *Is the Bible from Heaven? Is the Earth a Globe?* (1893 ed.), p. 382.

⁴ Whimsical pseudonyms and excessively descriptive book titles were the fashion among Flat Earthers. Another zetetic philosopher, Thomas Winship (under the pseudonym “Rectangle”), wrote *Zetetic Cosmogony: or, Conclusive Evidence That the World Is Not a Rotating Globe, But a Stationary Plane Circle* (1899).

⁵ Gleason, p. 366.

⁶ White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 314.

⁷ Gleason, p. 386.

⁸ White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), pp. 767–768.

⁹ Gleason, p. 391.

¹⁰ White, Letter 43 to M. H. Brown from Basel, Switzerland (Apr. 15, 1887), File B-43-87.

¹¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1966), p. 1428.

¹² White, Letter 43 (1887).

¹³ White, Manuscript 145 (Aug. 28, 1904).

¹⁴ White, Letter 390 (Aug. 29, 1904).

¹⁵ White, Manuscript Release No. 1289 (Sept. 12, 1904).

¹⁶ White, Manuscript 155 (Sept. 4, 1904).

¹⁷ White, Letter 280a (Sept. 3, 1904).

¹⁸ White, Letter 167 (1900).

¹⁹ Gleason, p. 383.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 384.

²¹ White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

The Apocrypha Has “Light for the Remnant”

Have We Discovered a Lost Statement of Ellen White?

BY MATTHEW J. KORPMAN

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, ADVENTIST SCHOLARS HAVE BEEN examining growing evidence and providing more clarity than ever on Ellen White’s use and endorsement of the Apocrypha. White is known to have received three visions regarding the Apocrypha between 1845-1850. We have her written comments for two of those visions (one from her own pen, and another from a transcript of the words she spoke while in vision). In her vision of September 1849, she described a “hidden book” as the “Word of God” and admonished the assembled Adventists to “bind it to the heart.”¹ Four months later, in January 1850, she received another vision and wrote, “I saw that the Apocrypha was the hidden book, and that the wise of these last days should understand it.”²

Among the most recent developments on this topic is that Adventist scholars have found additional documented evidence that Ellen White continued to quote and draw from the Apocrypha throughout her life.³ One of the more stunning discoveries was a letter by her son William C. White, dated to 1911, in which he acknowledged to another church administrator that “in some of Mother’s old writings she speaks of the apocrypha and says that portions of it were inspired.”⁴ He showed no reservations about the topic and appeared to consider the documents authentic and representative of his mother’s views, with nothing to suggest she had changed her mind since 1850.

This article will add to the ongoing conversation by examining another important discovery: a letter from 1915 contains what might be a quotation of a never-before-seen statement by Ellen White on the topic of the Apocrypha.

A Newly Discovered Letter

This piece of correspondence, written four years after William White’s 1911 letter dealing with the Apocrypha, touches on the same issue.⁵ In a 1915 letter, Adventist administrator Tyler E. Bowen relates to William White a memory of something Ellen White had written “in the spirit of prophecy.” Bowen thinks “there is a statement somewhere” but acknowledges that he doesn’t quite know how to find it.

This recently discovered letter, rather than quoting or summarizing what we already know from Ellen White’s two manuscripts touching on the issue, actually provides us with a new statement that seems both familiar to surviving documentation and yet also distinct from it. Bowen writes: “If I remember correctly, there is a statement somewhere in the spirit of prophecy that reads something like this: that there is light for the remnant in the Apocrypha. I do not know that I could really find that statement, but I think it has been made.”

Bowen follows this statement with an explanation of why he is interested in her views on the Apocrypha. At the same time as he had decided to read the book of 1 Maccabees in an old Catholic Bible, many Adventists were debating what to do about World War 1 military conscription in Europe. Bowen, noting the potential quandary for Adventists who were conflicted over whether to fight in the military on Sabbath days, saw a potential value in one of the stories contained in this historical book. He thought that 1 Maccabees, one of 14 books published in the original 1611 King James Version of the Bible, might provide a timely application for Adventists.

Bowen wrote: “I was interested in reading the book of Maccabees in an old Catholic Bible which a brother sent me, where it tells about the Jews during an invasion being forced to fight on the Sabbath day. At first they would not resist the army on the Sabbath, but fled to the mountains and hid in caves, etc., not putting forth any attempt to protect themselves on the Sabbath. The enemy took advantage of this, and finally a man apparently being used at that time to guide the Jews instructed them that they had made a mistake, that they should have defended themselves even on the Sabbath day. Probably this is familiar to you. It was new to me....”

In his reply to the letter from Bowen, William White only briefly mentioned our topic of interest. He wrote: “I thank you for calling my attention to the experience of the Maccabees as recorded in the Apocrypha. I will read it again soon.”⁶

“Light for the Remnant”

The central question for evaluation is whether one should consider Bowen’s recollection to represent the memory of a previously unknown statement of White’s or, rather, the paraphrasing of two previously known documents (Manuscript 5, 1849, and Manuscript 4, 1850). At first glance, it seems possible that it is a very loose paraphrase. The key points of the remembered statement certainly line up with the messages documented in our two known manuscripts. The words penned by Ellen White herself that “the wise of these last days should understand it”

Manuscript 5, 1849	Manuscript 4, 1850	T. E. Bowen Letter (1915)
“The Word of God, take it ..., Thy word, thy word, thy word, a part of it is burned unadulterated, a part of [it,] the hidden book, a part of it is burned (the apocrypha). ⁷ Those that shall despitefully tread [treat?] that remnant would think that they are doing God service. Why? because they are led captive by Satan at his will. Hidden book, it is cast out. Bind it to the heart [4 times] bind it, bind it, bind it, [laying the Bible on Oswald Stowell] let not its pages be closed, read it carefully.”	“I saw that the Apocrypha was the hidden book, and that the wise of these last days should understand it.”	“If I remember correctly, there is a statement somewhere in the spirit of prophecy that reads something like this: that there is light for the remnant in the Apocrypha.”

parallel nicely with Bowen’s remembrance that she had stated, “there is light for the remnant in the Apocrypha.” According to the transcript of her 1849 vision, Ellen White also used the word “remnant” while discussing the Apocrypha.

Yet, comparing the three statements also causes one to pause. White in 1849 used the word “remnant” in an entirely different way than Bowen’s recollection uses it. In White’s 1849 vision, the Apocrypha itself is the remnant.⁸ Also, neither document uses the word or the concept of “light” or even the idea of increasing knowledge or insight. These differences may attest to its being a previously unknown statement that no longer survives for us, as opposed to a paraphrase of surviving documents. When William White wrote in a 1911 letter that “in some of Mother’s old writings she speaks of the apocrypha and says that portions of it were inspired,” this was relatively accurate as a reflection of the content of known manuscripts (except for the idea of “portions”). William White’s statement was presented as a summary, whereas Bowen was attempting to remember and recite a quotation. He appeared convinced it was found in a *written* source, as opposed to being a statement he had heard.

It is, of course, possible that Bowen was misremembering and combining ideas together. He said that “there is a statement somewhere in the spirit of prophecy that reads something like this” and prefaced the quote with “If I remember correctly,” which suggests that it had been a long time since he last saw the statement he was trying to remember. He even noted afterward, “I do not know that I could really find that statement, but I think it has been made.”

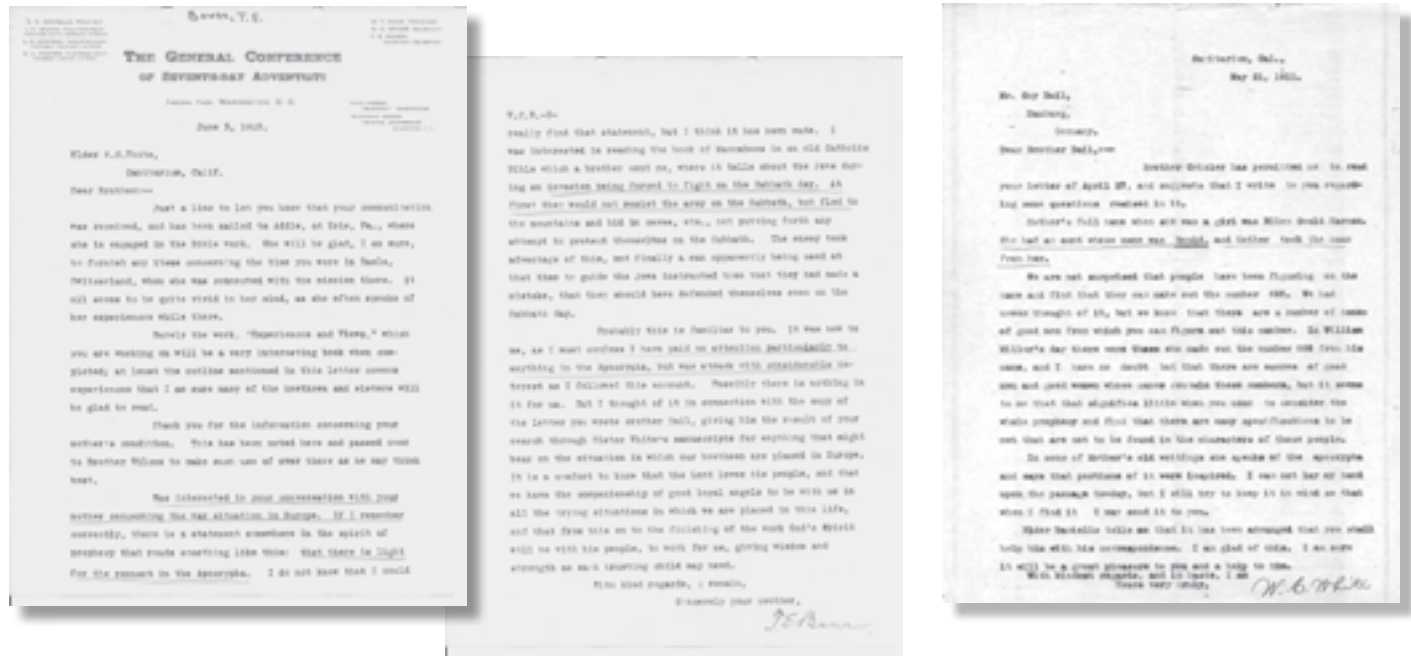
What is more curious is that William White, who four years earlier told Guy Dail (a former secretary of the European Division) that he knew of and remembered his mother’s teachings on this subject, did not correct or contradict Bowen’s remembered statement. Instead, he merely replied that he was grateful to Bowen for pointing out the circumstances of the Maccabees and said, “I will read it again.” It’s impossible to say whether White acknowledged Bowen’s quotation as something he also remembered.

Two possibilities clearly exist: either the statement remembered by Bowen is a now-lost third document written by Ellen White that agrees theologically with the other two surviving statements, or it is a garbled later summary of those original documents. If the former, we cannot know when it was made. Was this an early statement from 1845-1850, or was it a later, post-1850 statement? In either case, it would add another piece of evidence in support of the assertion that the Apocrypha was an important early resource for Ellen White.⁹


If, on the other hand, it is a garbled memory of the already-documented evidence, it demonstrates something equally important: that White’s endorsement of the Apocrypha was sufficiently known among Adventists that some could still remember, as late as 1915, these documents and what they spoke of. In fact, perhaps one of the more intriguing aspects of Bowen’s letter and White’s reply is that someone has underlined portions of the documents (specifically those aspects related to the Apocrypha) and deemed them significant.

Time to Pay Attention?

In summary, scholars cannot dismiss the idea that Bowen has perhaps provided us with a link to a third statement from White’s pen, now lost to time. Regardless of the reality, Bowen’s letter demonstrates that White’s messages about the Apocrypha were



heard and remembered, and yet, at the same time, also dismissed by many Adventists. Bowen wrote that despite knowing White’s beliefs about the Apocrypha, “I must confess I have paid no attention particularly to anything in the Apocrypha...”

Of course, he was not alone in this regard. Many Adventists regard only select books from the collection, such as 2 Esdras, as inspired.¹⁰ Whereas White identified the entire Apocrypha as the “Word of God” in her September 1849 vision, nearly a decade later, James White and the editors of the *Review and Herald* declared that due to “the question of the inspiration of these books—the reasons that might be adduced in favor of such an opinion, and the objections that might lie against it, we have never made a subject of particular study, and are not therefore prepared to discuss.”¹¹ In fact, to date scholars have not found any other Adventist who appears to have embraced White’s early message about binding the entirety of the Apocrypha to the heart. That’s what makes Bowen’s memory of her statement so valuable: it shows that a dedicated church worker still remembered it, even at the time of White’s death in 1915. It was an accepted part of her early ministry. Perhaps it’s time that Adventists began to pay closer attention to this fact? 

¹ Ellen G. White, “Remarks in Vision,” Manuscript 5 (1849).
² White, “A Copy of E. G. White’s Vision, Which She Had at Oswego, N. Y., January 26, 1850,” Manuscript 4 (1850).
³ Matthew J. Korpman, “Forgotten Scriptures: Allusions to and Quotations of the Apocrypha by Ellen White,” *Spes Christiana*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2020), pp. 109-146.
⁴ Letter from W. C. White to Guy Dail (May 21, 1911). For full discussion of this newly discovered letter by William White, see Matthew Korpman, “Is the Apocrypha Inspired? An Enlightening Letter from Ellen White’s Son,” *AdventistToday.org* (July 24, 2024).
⁵ Letter from T. E. Bowen to W. C. White (June 3, 1915).
⁶ Letter from W. C. White to T. E. Bowen (June 8, 1915).
⁷ For explanations about the bracketed corrections provided to the text of the transcript, look for my full textual study of the document, “Satan’s Captives Are Burning the Bible: Did Ellen White Endorse the Apocrypha in 1849?” to be published in 2025 in the journal *Spes Christiana*.
⁸ The Ellen G. White Estate agreed with this assessment. See Roland Karlman’s annotation 15 in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts With Annotations*, Vol. 1 (2014), p. 183: “Does it constitute a positive evaluation of the Apocrypha—that it has value but has been ‘despitefully’ treated?”
⁹ For further evaluation of the importance of the Apocrypha for White’s faith, see Matthew J. Korpman, “William Foy and the Apocrypha: Demonstrating Ellen White’s Early Belief in the Authority of 2 Esdras,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2023), pp. 12-17.
¹⁰ See Matthew J. Korpman, “Adventism’s Hidden Book: A Brief History of the Apocrypha,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2018), pp. 56-65.
¹¹ Editors, “To Correspondents: Old Style and New,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 12, No. 12 (Aug. 5, 1858), p. 96.



NEWS BRIEFS

BarelyAdventist (barelyadventist.com) is a satire and humor blog on Adventist culture and issues. It is written by committed Adventists who don't mind laughing at our idiosyncrasies.

The Sound of Music Film OK for Sabbath Viewing

SILVER SPRING, Md. — “This is a day of rejoicing for Adventist fans of *The Sound of Music* around the world,” said Elaine Biggins, a Sabbath permissions advocate. “This morning the GC-based Biblical Research Institute added this uplifting classic to its official Sabbath-approved movie listing.”

The 1965 classic tells the story of Maria (Julie Andrews), a young woman who leaves an Austrian convent to become the governess to seven children of a widowed naval officer. It has long been a favorite

in Adventist circles and now joins a list of Sabbath-approved titles that had been dominated previously by low-budget nature videos set to elevator music. The announcement led to an outpouring of joy by Adventists young and old celebrating the news.

Gwenneth Jones, 96, described the decision as the “biggest victory of my life,” sharing how she lobbied for decades for the movie to take its “rightful place next to Charlton Heston as Moses in *The 10 Commandments*.”

“We are ecstatic to give *The Sound of Music* the recognition it deserves,” said Biblical Research Institute spokesperson Milton Longton. “It’s taken years of discussion

and painstaking study, but we know that it was worth the wait.”

The institute explained its reasoning for the movie’s Sabbath-worthiness in spite of the fact that nuns appear in it. Integral to its thinking was the fact that “Maria LEAVES the abbey and its papist trappings for a life of singing and service.”

The researchers also offered some specific viewing guidelines to ensure the film is appropriate for all ages. Topping this list were strict instructions to fast-forward through what they called the “steamy garden scenes.”

7UP Proclaimed “Most Adventist” Soda

SILVER SPRING, Md. — For the first time in its history, the Adventist Church has endorsed a soda. Today, the denomination named 7UP as the most Seventh-day Adventist soda, citing not just its complete lack of caffeine, but also its “perfect name” as top reasons for the endorsement.

“Unlike other super-caffeinated and pointlessly named sodas, such as Coke or Pepsi, 7UP dares to be a Daniel for the best number in the world,” said Miranda O’Doules, Adventist Endorsements Department spokesperson.



O’Doules said that her department was so impressed with the naming of the beverage that it would be willing to overlook its sugar content. Sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, the artificially flavored Lemon-Lime soda contains 38 grams of added sugar, which is 76% of the recommended daily value.

Contributors



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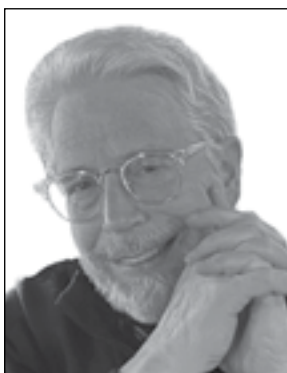
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EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

MOST SUCCESSFUL ONLINE CLASS FOR ADVENTISTS



When we started the *Adventist Today* Sabbath Seminar in 2020, we thought that the COVID-19 pandemic would quickly pass and that soon we'd all be back in our regular congregations. We didn't envision that it would become the most successful online class for Seventh-day Adventists.

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lasting purpose than we first thought. It gathers people who enjoy the chance to talk honestly and openly about our church and our own relationship with God.

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I invite you to be part of the *Adventist Today* Sabbath Seminar, which begins every Saturday at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time! Everyone is welcome; no special invitation is necessary. Links and password are on the website (AdventistToday.org), on Facebook, and in our weekly *AT Update* newsletter.

—Loren Seibold, *Adventist Today* Executive Editor

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