

ELLEN WHITE

UNDER FIRE

J U D L A K E

Identifying
the Mistakes
of Her Critics



Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
www.pacificpress.com

Ellen White Under Fire

Never before have criticisms of the Seventh-day Adventist Church been more accessible to the average church member and the general public. Scores of Web sites and blogs denouncing the church and its doctrines are available at the simple click of a mouse.¹ From bizarre personal attacks to more sophisticated criticisms, opponents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church relentlessly pound its teachings on the World Wide Web.² It's no exaggeration to say that the war on Adventism is a global war.³

The major target of all this criticism is Ellen White.⁴ Because of her claim to the prophetic office and her foundational role in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its teachings, she has become a lightning rod, her credibility as a prophet the target of most strikes on Adventist theology.⁵

Presently, <http://www.ellenwhiteexposed.com>,⁶ is the most extensive Web site de-

voted exclusively to discrediting Ellen White. On the main page one will find a list of "Article Collections," with such links as "Plagiarism," "Visions Examined," "Myths," "Shocking Quotes," "Ellen White versus the Bible," "Health," "Confusion," "The Shut Door," "1844 Movement," and "Contradictions." Each of these sections, in turn, contains numerous links to many pages of text criticizing Ellen White's prophetic ministry.⁷

Books targeting Ellen White are also easily available on the Internet. Salient examples are *White Out: An Investigation of Ellen G. White; More Than a Profit, Less Than a Prophet; Prophet or Pretender; The Fake Controversy; and White Washed: Uncovering the Myths of Ellen G. White*.⁸ Several older books are still available, such as *The White Lie* and *The Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted*.⁹ Unquestionably,

ELLEN WHITE UNDER FIRE

this negative campaign against Ellen White is hurting her credibility.¹⁰

Overview of Ellen White criticisms

I have organized the contemporary criticisms of Ellen White into twelve basic categories that summarize the main charges against her prophetic ministry.¹¹ At the end of each category, the reader will find an Internet source that provides an Adventist response to the specific charges.

1. *Ellen White plagiarized most of her writings.* This is the most pervasive charge against Ellen White. She allegedly copied up to 90 percent of her writings from others¹² and claimed she received the information in visions from God. Popularized in Walter Rae's *The White Lie*, this criticism receives significant coverage on the anti-Ellen White Web sites.¹³

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/plagiarism>.

2. *In her early ministry, Ellen White taught the shut door theory.* This criticism receives a great amount of attention on the various Web sites and in books. The “shut door” is a term used to describe the belief that the door of human probation was closed to the world following the October 22, 1844, disappoint-

ment.¹⁴ The critics claim that the young Ellen taught this theory during the years 1844–1851 based on her early visions. Along with plagiarism, the shut-door charge is a major emphasis for Ellen White's critics.¹⁵

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/shutdoor>.

3. *Ellen White contradicted the Bible.* One Web site claims she contradicted the Bible more than fifty times.¹⁶ From small issues such as whether or not Adam was with Eve when she was tempted to larger issues such as the investigative judgment and the great controversy theme, the critics say Ellen White got it wrong. If she contradicted Scripture so frequently, they argue, how can she be a true prophet of God? Furthermore, they say, Ellen White and her followers claim her writings are equal with the Bible's inspiration and authority, which violates the *sola scriptura* principle.

Answer: <http://www.ellen-white.com/Contradictions.html>.

4. *Ellen White contradicted herself in both what she taught and what she did.* It is claimed that she condemned eating meat while still eating meat; she condemned unclean

meats while still eating them; she condemned vinegar but was addicted to it, etc. Furthermore, her later writings supposedly contradict the earlier writings.¹⁷

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/healthinconsistencies>.

5. *Ellen White misunderstood the gospel.* According to this charge, the fact that Ellen White said that Christians should never say “I am saved,” shows she believed that Christians can’t have assurance of salvation. She allegedly taught a “faith in Christ plus good works equals salvation” theology that is contrary to the gospel.¹⁸

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/answershardsayings>.

6. *Ellen White’s prophecies failed.* Critics claim that especially in her early ministry she made a host of predictions that never came true.¹⁹ For example, it is claimed she predicted that Christ would come 1845, that the final pestilence would begin in 1849, and that Christ would come in 1856. Since these events didn’t happen, she is a false prophet.²⁰

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/answershardsayings>.

7. *Ellen White derived all of her health insights from contemporary health*

reformers. Critics claim she derived all her health teaching from human sources rather than from God.²¹ Ronald L. Numbers’s book, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, is a major source for this charge.²²

Answer: <http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/prophetess-of-health.pdf>.

8. *Ellen White’s visions were the result of temporal-lobe epilepsy.* Her visions, is it alleged, weren’t visions but rather “a unique form of epilepsy known as complex partial seizure.”²³ The supernatural element is thus discounted.²⁴

Answer: <http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/visions.html>.

9. *Ellen White suppressed theological mistakes in her writings.* Critics claim that by comparing her early writings with later writings, one can find numerous deletions of theological mistakes and that Ellen White herself is chiefly responsible for this alleged deception.²⁵

Answer: <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/egwhc/EGWHC17.html#c17>.

10. *Ellen White endorsed the mistakes of the Millerites.* According to this view, William Miller used fifteen faulty proofs that Christ would

come in 1843. Ellen White endorsed these proofs and therefore is a false prophet.²⁶

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/mischarges/millerproofs>.

11. *Ellen White made some “strange” statements.* For example, she allegedly said that tall people live on Jupiter, Satan has better success with women than with men, wigs cause insanity, and God doesn’t love children who misbehave.²⁷

Answer: <http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/answers/answershardsayings>.

12. *Church leaders have covered up Ellen White’s mistakes and failures.* This suppression, according to some critics, is one of the greatest cover-ups in the history of the Christian church. Some critics call for the church to be forthright and tell the real truth about Ellen White.²⁸

Answer: http://ellenwhiteanswers.org/gen_dyn.php?file=media/pdf/Coonplagiarism.pdf.

As noted in the introduction, it is beyond the purview of this book to give specific answers to all the charges against Ellen White. For those interested in more Seventh-day Adventist answers to these

charges, appendix D contains a list of Web URLs and books.

How shall we respond to these criticisms?

Some time ago, I received an email from a Seventh-day Adventist who had encountered some of the anti-Ellen White material on the Internet. Although this person had been raised in the Adventist Church, she was shocked at the intensity of the criticisms and deeply concerned that she had no immediate answer to them. Like this person, more and more Adventists feel overwhelmed with the sheer volume of material criticizing Ellen White. They’re bewildered and unsettled, wondering if they’ve been deceived.

How shall those who highly value the prophetic ministry of Ellen White respond to this aggressive and negative campaign? My personal response has been mixed. At times I feel frustrated when reading the anti-Ellen White books and Web sites. The rhetoric can be quite negative, and the view of Ellen White presented on these sites is a far cry from the real Ellen White revealed in her writings and in Adventist history. Other times, though, I find myself glad for these criticisms. They’ve led me to study the issues about Ellen White—and that has blessed me and strengthened my understanding of the prophetic gift. Exploring the background of the many charges and finding satisfactory answers has increased my faith

in her prophetic ministry significantly from what it was before.

Many Adventists who read this negative material shake their heads and discard it, while some end up rejecting Ellen White's prophetic ministry and leave Adventism.²⁹ Others, however, feel angry at these criticisms and take some kind of action, such as condemning the critics via email or engaging them in debate. This is not the best idea. Debates can easily turn into hostile engagements, and some of the anti-Adventist publications tend to exploit angry Adventist letters by publishing them and giving a rejoinder. We have the option of a better response—a calm and rational response provided through Christian apologetics.

Apologetics

The term *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which in the New Testament³⁰ means to give “a reasoned defense” of the Christian faith “in light of objections raised against it and of offering positive evidence on its behalf.”³¹ Activities such as providing a reasoned defense of Christ's resurrection in the face of objections,³² advancing arguments for the existence of God,³³ or answering skeptics of the Bible's reliability³⁴ are all a part of the apologetic enterprise. A defense of Ellen White's prophetic ministry would fall under this larger umbrella of defending the Christian faith in the sense that Seventh-day Adventists believe she was a

postcanonical prophet who upheld biblical Christianity and, in particular, pointed her readers to Scripture and exalted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Additionally, Adventists believe that the Bible itself teaches that the prophetic gift would continue after the closing of the scriptural canon. As such, in the Adventist context, defending her prophetic ministry against critics is a part of defending the Christian faith.

Christian apologists frequently base their reason for, and approach to, apologetics on 1 Peter 3:15, which says, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (NASB; emphasis added). The “hope” Christians defend in this context is the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the salvation found in Him (see 1 Peter 1:3).

In 1 Peter 3:15, the apostle gives important counsel regarding the enterprise of apologetics. The Greek word he used here is *apologia*. In other words, he was calling for a carefully reasoned, well organized, and intellectually satisfying response to the questions of outsiders and the challenges of opponents regarding the Christian faith. So, the Christian defense of the gospel is to be credible. Furthermore, Christians should continually be “ready” to answer and defend the hope of salvation in Christ and make

ELLEN WHITE UNDER FIRE

their defense with a spirit of “gentleness and respect.” Ultimately, Christians should maintain “Christ as Lord in their hearts” and seek to honor Him in the way they deal with challenges to the faith.

This passage contains lessons that can be applied to defending the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, as well as Adventist teaching in general. First, our “defense” of her prophetic gift must be credible—carefully reasoned, well organized, and intellectually satisfying. The critics speak as if we have no defense for Ellen White, and they arrange their criticisms in such a way as to overwhelm the reader with the apparent problems. Like the person who sent me the e-mail, many Adventists are not equipped to answer the maze of criticisms and don’t know how to respond. But there *are* answers to the many charges, and we must present them in a responsible and credible way.

Second, it behooves every believer in Ellen White’s prophetic gift to be “ready” with a reasoned defense. Simplistic answers won’t do. Issues such as Ellen White’s relationship to the Bible, the nature of her inspiration, the integrity of her claims, the ethics of her personal life, the nature of her literary borrowing, her stance on the divinity of Jesus Christ, and many others must be fully understood by those who support her prophetic ministry. Not all of us will be asked to make a formal defense, but all of us will need to

resolve the issues in our own minds. In the age of the Internet, the criticisms are only a mouse-click away. Readiness is essential for all, not just pastors and theologians.

The third lesson from 1 Peter 3:15 is that our defense of Ellen White’s prophetic ministry must be made with “gentleness and respect.” The construction in the Greek indicates this defense must be made “in company with” gentleness toward people and humility before God.³⁵ One commentator suggests that Peter may have in mind “a profound acknowledgment of the power of God and of one’s own poverty and dependence on Him.”³⁶ This kind of God-centered attitude will certainly find expression in how we treat those opposed to our faith. While we can be confident in light of research findings that favor Ellen White’s prophetic status, we should discard defensiveness and contentiousness. Arguing in highly adversarial ways about Ellen White—or any other theological subject, for that matter—tends to alienate people. If we honor “Christ as Lord in our hearts” and depend on Him for help, we can defend our faith in a way that glorifies God and respects our fellow human beings, even when they oppose us. Thus, we can “[keep] a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Pet. 3:16, NIV).

However, when our opponents bear false witness against us, we must firmly protest. Jude called it contending for the faith (Jude 3). Jesus and Paul, for example, held nothing back when their opponents confronted them and truth was at stake. Consequently, there will be times when we'll need to meet aggressive tactics with vigorous argument. Nevertheless, in our apologetic activity we should never lose sight of "gentleness and respect."

Conclusion

Ellen White understood and accepted the fact that her life and work would always be under attack. "I expect that the raid will be made against me till Christ comes," she wrote. "Every opposer to our faith makes Mrs. White his text. They begin to oppose the truth and then make a raid against me."³⁷

In the midst of the assault on her prophetic credibility, her philosophy regard-

ing the criticisms emerged: "Every charge should be carefully investigated; it should not be left in any uncertain way, the people should not be left to think that it may be or it may not be." They "must be undeceived," she declared, and "must not be left to believe a lie."³⁸

This statement and others like it are the basis for the apologetic approach advocated in this book.³⁹ When every charge is carefully investigated in light of the literary and historical contexts of Ellen White's life and writings, a different picture emerges from the one found in the critical Web sites and books. The truth awaits our investigation.

One area extremely helpful in addressing Ellen White criticisms is the history of those criticisms and the church's response. Understanding this aspect of Adventist history, to which the next three chapters are devoted, is vital to understanding the contemporary situation.

Chapter Summary

1. The Internet has made criticisms of Seventh-day Adventism more accessible today than ever before.
2. Many Web sites, blogs, and books are dedicated exclusively to discrediting the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its teaching.
3. Ellen White is at the center of the target for most of the criticism of Seventh-day Adventism.
4. Presently, <http://www.ellenwhiteexposed.com> is the most extensive and popular Web site devoted exclusively to discrediting Ellen White.

Chapter Summary

5. The criticisms of Ellen White can be divided into twelve categories:
 - a. She plagiarized most of her writings.
 - b. She taught the shut-door theory in her early ministry.
 - c. She claimed inspiration equal to the Bible and contradicted the Bible.
 - d. She contradicted herself.
 - e. She misunderstood the gospel.
 - f. Her prophecies failed.
 - g. She derived all her health insights from contemporary health reformers.
 - h. She experienced temporal-lobe epilepsy rather than authentic visions.
 - i. She suppressed theological mistakes in her writings.
 - j. She endorsed the mistakes of the Millerites.
 - k. She made some strange statements.
 - l. Church leaders have covered up her mistakes and failures.
6. The response of church members to the Ellen White criticisms is varied: most reject the criticisms; some become angry and attack the critics; others reject Ellen White and leave the church.
7. The best type of response is one modeled on the enterprise of Christian apologetics—a reasoned defense of the Christian faith in light of objections raised against it; one that offers positive evidence on its behalf.
8. First Peter 3:15, 16, the key text Christian apologists use as their reason for, and approach to, apologetics, can be applied to the defense of Ellen White. Based on those verses,
 - a. Our “defense” of her prophetic gift must be credible—carefully reasoned, well-organized, and intellectually satisfying.
 - b. Every believer in Ellen White’s prophetic gift, not just pastors and theologians, must be “ready” to answer the charges with a reasoned defense.
 - c. The defense of Ellen White’s prophetic ministry must be made with “gentleness and respect” toward our detractors.
9. Ellen White believed that every charge against her should be carefully investigated and answered.