

Site Orientation
Sermons
Great Controversy
Books Online



Current Feature
Sermon mp3s
Mailing List
EGW Issues

Shall Any Teach God Knowledge?

A Reply to Samuele Bacchiocchi's Endtime Issues Newsletter #87: "A Reply to Criticism, pt. 1: The Use of E.G. White's Writings in Interpreting Scripture," with Special Emphasis on Issues Concerning the 1911 Edition Great Controversy

Larry Kirkpatrick

[Version history: 9, 11, 12, 13 August 2002. This is a preliminary version of this document.]

It was with considerable regret that I prepared the following document. My friend, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, is presently found declaring not only that he thinks that the Papacy and Islam meet the identifying specifications of the little horn "equally well,"¹ but that in some ways Islam fits better.² He proposes that changing our denominational view in this way³ would "make our Adventist interpretation more credible and defensible."⁴

However, more troubling than this is the stance taken in his latest Endtime Issues Newsletter (EI) #87 concerning the prophetic authority of Ellen G. White. According to Bacchiocchi, "as a church we have failed to develop rational criteria for a responsible and healthy use of Ellen White's writings."⁵ He undertakes this work, proposing that beyond the devotional level, those writings be classed (or at least treated) as non-binding "tradition" that scholars may freely bypass in their quest for historically and doctrinally sound descriptions of truth.⁶

He asks "Are Adventists close-minded Christians who blindly accept their traditional teachings without ever testing their biblical soundness?" answering that if this is correct, "then those who accuse us of being a cult are not far from the truth."⁷ In the same paragraph he admonishes SDAs to "avoid becoming victim of a

cultish mentality."⁸

In combination with these statements, he proceeds to point out what are, in his view, inaccuracies strung throughout Ellen White's Great Controversy which he feels need correction. He longs for an opportunity to sit down with her and explain the facts of history to her.

Dr. Bacchiocchi urges readers to withhold their evaluation of his ideas until he has sent them forth with a greater measure of completeness. Already he has produced or published several score pages of research text on these topics in recent newsletters.⁹ In this paper we'll devote our main response to some of the points which he has already presumably addressed to the depth he desires to, and especially the facts surrounding the 1260 year period and the 1911 edition Great Controversy. We will look here especially at his thoughts on "the relationship between EGW's writings and the Scripture."

Although we do not believe he intended to be perceived as attacking the book Great Controversy, still we note that in effect, this is what he has done. However we define his Newsletter #87, let us address its ideas. As another said rather well, "I have learned to be wary of someone's theology when they first have to make a special point of defining (or redefining) the role of Ellen White before they launch into their 'creative' new theories."¹⁰

To Sit Down and Instruct Ellen White?

Repeatedly Bacchiocchi states he would like to sit down and have a chat with Mrs. White. He asks, "If Ellen White was alive today, would she welcome the service of competent scholars willing to correct the remaining inaccuracies found in The Great Controversy and other publications?" His answer is, "There is no reason to think otherwise, because she was a woman who recognized her limitations, and was committed to the search for truth. On my part I would be glad to offer my services to her, because I can never stop thanking God for the inestimable contributions she has made to my spiritual life and to the message and mission of our Adventist church."¹¹

And again,

"If Ellen White were alive, I would love to sit down with her and share all this historical information that is missing in The Great Controversy. I have no doubt that she would be grateful for the opportunity to learn more about how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity, and to update her account in The Great Controversy. After all, she was a truth-seeker who recognized her limitations and gratefully accepted the help from competent people."¹²

However, it is not prophets who need to sit down and listen to scholars, but scholars that need to sit down and listen to prophets! One can go to the writings of Ellen G. White and discover occasions when someone sat down with her to explain things to her more accurately, soon to learn only that they themselves were in need of correction.¹³

In the current case, God could have brought improved historical information to light in Ellen G. White's day. He could have caused great Adventist scholars to arise in her day and bring to light these improved facts at that time -- before Great Controversy ever saw print. Was God behind because He did not do this? God has not put His prophets under the authority of scholars, nor assigned the writings of prophets mere devotional status.

Let us be clear. "The Bible with its precious gems of truth was not written for the scholar alone. On the contrary, it was designed for the common people; and the interpretation given by the common people,

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when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus. The great truths necessary for salvation are made clear as the noonday, and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God."¹⁴

Intriguingly, the context of the above quotation is an admonition concerning parents care in raising their children. She asks if the parents are "opening to them the precious truths of the word of God"?¹⁵ She says that the Bible "was designed" for the common people. For the scholars yes, but she says "not for the scholar alone." For the children too. Checking those paragraphs shows she was asking parents to explain "to them the reasons of our faith."¹⁶ So we know that she is not limiting the Bible to accuracy in explaining salvation only, but all the reasons of our faith.

"The Bible is the poor man's book, and all classes of people are to search the Scriptures for themselves. God has given reasoning powers to men, and by bringing our mental faculties into connection with the Word of God, the spiritual powers are awakened, and common people, as well as teachers and clergymen, may understand the will of God."¹⁷ Here is another assertion that the Bible is not only for teachers (scholars), not only for the pastor (clergymen), but for everyone.

What about it? Does inspiration subdivide its reliability when discussing salvation as opposed to the historical, prophetic, or other categories? Why does Jesus refer to Noah and the flood as fact (Matthew 24:37-38; Luke 17:26-27)? He took Bible history seriously. "The Bible must be your counselor. Study it *and* the testimonies God has given; for they never contradict His Word."¹⁸ Remember, the same principles of inspiration operate, whether within the pages of the Bible or outside of it. Consider this portion of an Ellen G. White diary entry: "While I am able to do this work, the people must have things to revive past history, that they may see that there is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence, in that which I have written."¹⁹

Indeed, the books prepared by Mrs. White are, except for the Bible, the most important to come before the world. "Physically, I have always been as a broken vessel; and yet in my old age the Lord continues to move upon me by His Holy Spirit to write the most important books that have ever come before the churches and the world . . . when He may see fit to let me rest, His messages shall be of even more vital force than when the frail instrumentality through whom they were delivered, was living."²⁰ It seems difficult to account for

God leaving what Bacchiocchi names "glaring historical inaccuracies"²¹ behind to taint "the most important books that have ever come before the churches and the world."

Honestly, what would be more cultic? Hearing the voice of God through His prophets, or following along the track marked out by a small elite of scholars? How wary the scholar must be that he not fall into the trap of becoming a modern shaman who reads the chicken entrails and the oil in the water, by arcane practice of literary arts pronouncing the proper interpretation of the prophet for the common people!

While finishing my degree at Southern Adventist College (now Southern Adventist University) in Tennessee in 1992-1994 I met Robert Francis. He was one of the men Evangelist Joe Crews had spoken to me of when I was considering attending that school. By then Dr. Francis was retired, and in fact he passed to his rest while I was at Southern. But he told me about a meeting he had had with several theology teachers some years previous. The question at hand had been how to relate what scholarship produced with what had been laid down in the Spirit of Prophecy writings.

According to Dr. Francis, at one point he told the group of his peers, "Here is where we differ. You are putting the Bible first, then the scholars, and only then Ellen White. What we should do is put the Bible first, and then Ellen White, and then the scholars. There are fundamentally two different classes of writings: inspired and uninspired. The Bible and the writings of EGW are in one class; yours and mine are in the other."

His point was plain. No matter how brilliant the scholarship, unless the scholar is also a prophet, his writings are *uninspired*. Inspiration is a supernatural phenomenon specific to prophets. Under inspiration, writings are guarded by the Holy Spirit and may be said to be infallible. When you or I write or speak, even with the influence of the Holy Spirit upon us, we experience what theologians have called "illumination."

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Illumination is a special influence by the Holy Spirit under which we receive insight, for example as we study, but there is no supernatural guardianship that prevents us from erring. When a preacher

preaches, hopefully illumination is in operation. Something unique and special is happening; but we pastors must admit, we come with no guarantee of infallibility. We may err, even as we seek to speak that which we understand is indited by God. Anyone may have illumination if God gives it, but it is a fundamentally different phenomenon than inspiration. Pastors and scholars and church leaders must not forget this distinction.

Fundamentally we should keep the classes of writings distinct in our mind. Let those of us with scholarly training stay very humble. God is in heaven and we are on earth. Let our words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). Our position in relation to the prophet is not to instruct him or her, but to listen to heaven speaking through him or her. As soon as we forget this, we have entered theological quicksand. The quiet wisdom of Dr. Francis is very worthy of our consideration. It was some of the best instruction I ever received.

Inspiration or Tradition?

The very reference that spurred Dr. Bacchiocchi's Endtime Issues Newsletter #87 is the following:

"The periods here mentioned -- 'forty and two months,' and 'a thousand two hundred and threescore days' -- are the same, alike representing the time in which the church of Christ was to suffer oppression from Rome. The 1260 years of papal supremacy began in A.D. 538, and would therefore terminate in 1798. At that time a French army entered Rome and made the pope a prisoner, and he died in exile. Though a new pope was soon afterward elected, the papal hierarchy has never since been able to wield the power which it before possessed."

"The persecution of the church did not continue throughout the entire period of the 1260 years. God in mercy to His people cut short the time of their fiery trial. In foretelling the 'great tribulation' to befall the church, the Saviour said: 'Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.' Matthew 24:22. Through the influence of the Reformation the persecution was brought to an end prior to 1798."²²

This interpretation is presented by Bacchiocchi, not as inspired, but traditional. While Bacchiocchi's "Islam as Little Horn" thesis is presented as being but tentative,²³ his views on the relationship of Ellen G. White's writings to the Bible are not. He is most definite, at least as to the end result: "A study of the context of each text will show that this time prophecy can hardly be delimited by the traditional dates of 538 to 1798."²⁴

Of special concern to us is Bacchiocchi's refusal to see Mrs. White's statements as bearing inspired authority. He classifies what she has written in perhaps her most widely circulated work (the book Great Controversy) as merely a "traditional" viewpoint. In fact, at one point in his newsletter he suggests that she may have been influenced by a interpretation which he regards as uninformed and calls an "old interpretation."²⁵

Repeatedly he mentions his respect for her and his favor for her on the *devotional* level.²⁶ But at the close of his newsletter he writes, "there are still glaring mistakes [in the 1911 edition of Ellen G. White's Great Controversy] that need to be corrected. In the light of this fact, it is unwise to criticize an Adventist scholar who proposes a new interpretation of the 1260 days that could ultimately make our Adventist interpretation more credible and defensible."²⁷

"Over the years" says Bacchiocchi, "many Adventists have come to believe that Ellen White is the final authority on prophecy, history, diet, health, education, evangelism, etc. For them Biblical research consists primarily in searching out what Ellen White has written on the subject being investigated."²⁸ And some of us are to be faulted for use of the kind of short-cut method to serious Bible study Bacchiocchi describes. We should start with the Bible and derive as much insight from it as we can first, only then approaching Mrs. White's writings for additional insight.

But we should not be condemned for being interested in what God wanted to tell His end-time believers through her writings! It is thoroughly commendable that so many Adventists take inspiration seriously and

invest energy and brain-time on searching out what the Holy Spirit said through Mrs. White on topics such as "prophecy, history, diet, health, education," and "evangelism."

But when Bacchiocchi complains, "For some of my critics what the pen of inspiration says settles the matter,"²⁹ is he declaring that for him it does not? It did for Mrs. White. "I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word."³⁰ And "The more we search the Bible, the deeper is our conviction that it is the word of the living God, and human reason bows before the majesty of divine revelation."³¹

What Mrs. White has written down is no mere devotional thought or nonbinding traditional idea having no significance for us today. We understand these writings to be inspired and authoritative. There is a most substantial difference between sustaining at all costs what a couple of uninspired denominational leaders dreamt up a hundred years ago that became the basis of some denomination, and an uninspired person, even a brilliant scholar, putting his understanding above that of a real prophet.

Our agreed upon statement of the biblical understanding of the SDA church worldwide is that the writings of Mrs. White are viewed, not merely as "devotional," but as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth. . ."³² In short, our understanding as a denomination accepts and underlines the inspired authority not only of Scripture, but also of the writings of Ellen G. White, popularly among us called the "Spirit of Prophecy." Any view short of this is not what we believe as a people; it is not Seventh-day Adventist.

Ellen White warned. "When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this."³³ Let the reader notice well the last sentence in the above quotation -- *the same caution is given* regarding her writings as is given regarding the Bible! But Bacchiocchi, after describing events which Ellen G. White discusses as centering at the end of the 1260 year period says, "This dogma [Papal infallibility finally pronounced in 1870] has greatly enhanced the authority of the Pope, and discredits any attempt to attribute to 1798 the downfall of the papacy."³⁴

Notice: inspiration tagged 1798 as the downfall of the papacy. Bacchiocchi says the Papal pronouncement occurring in 1870-71 "discredits" "any attempt" to call 1798 its downfall. Notice also, Mrs. White lived and wrote voluminously for another 45 years after that event. Surely she had learned of the papal pronouncement by 1871. We know she knew because her very first edition of the Great Controversy, published in 1884 as Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 4, already condemns papal infallibility!³⁵

Is it not interesting that Mrs. White knew of the dogma of papal infallibility and lived with knowledge of that lying-claim's existence -- very comfortably -- side by side with the conventional SDA interpretation of the beginning and end points of the 1260 year period at AD 538-1798? Bacchiocchi may have a problem with this, but Mrs. White did not! We need not wonder what she would do with this information. She already had it.

Authoritative Writings From Heaven

Are we free to ignore, or arbitrarily label as "tradition," the writings or portions of the writings, of Ellen G. White? Of these writings she explained, "This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth."³⁶ When was it to come before the people? In her day and ours. Why was it to come before the people? To correct specious (plausible sounding yet wrong) errors, and to specify what is truth. But if we can pick and choose what is truth, then we must ask how could her statement be correct? How could her writings specify anything if they specify nothing? It is all or nothing when it comes to inspired writings.

In another place she wrote, "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the 'last days'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth."³⁷ Judging from what inspiration has said about the 1260, I can only understand that Mr. Bacchiocchi has erred from Bible truth. Thus his views, which he says he is willing to abandon on the basis of constructive criticism offered by readers of his newsletter,³⁸ need to be subject to the constructive criticism of heaven through Mrs. White.

Bacchiocchi quotes Mrs. White's statement in Early Writings that visions given in the last days are not given as a new rule of faith."³⁹ But he refuses to highlight the phrase in the same statement that says that their purpose is "to correct those who err from Bible truth."⁴⁰

Plainly, according to this passage from Early Writings, what she writes will be in harmony with the Bible. Not added to the canon of its 66 books, but equally authoritative with it, for it is equally inspired to it. The real difference between the Bible and the Ellen G. White writings has to do with exposure to them. She urges our people not to make them a test to those who have not had sufficient opportunity to examine them and come to a thought-out position regarding them.⁴¹ Let them, she urges, "find their position" regarding the Testimonies, "and become established for or against."⁴²

In Great Controversy at the very beginning (in the 1911 ed.) she wrote "As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed -- to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future."⁴³

She was bidden -- commanded by God -- to make known to us what He had shown her. Past and future have been traced by her, opening to us the history of the controversy between good and evil. We must -- all of us -- allow God to use her writings in this way. God had a purpose, but this purpose is defeated if we refuse to hear His speaking to us. Shall any teach God knowledge (Job 21:22)? Shall we instruct God and give to Him a history lesson? Would He not address us as He did Job, but asking, "Where were you when 'The 1260 years of papal supremacy began in A.D. 538'?"⁴⁴ "And where were you when the 1260 year period terminated 'in 1798'?"⁴⁵

Through the writings of Ellen G. White, in the book Great Controversy, already He has shown us the facts concerning this point. We are told when it began, when it ended, even what happened during the period. Nor let us not forget that besides the specific beginning and ending dates of this prophecy plainly sustained in Great Controversy, a large portion of the book itself is devoted to a sequential description of what happened

when God and the devil battled in the age of martyrs and Reformers.⁴⁶

There is vast difference between inspiration and illumination or tradition. We do not see anywhere where our scholar has addressed this distinction. We feel this considerably weakens his claims. But let us now continue with a look at our author's chief voiced difficulty.

Bacchiocchi Concerns about the 1260 Prophecy

Bacchiocchi takes for the centerpiece of his case against the inspired authority of Ellen G. White the mild changes made in the 1911 edition of her book Great Controversy. Most of his data is drawn from one paper (hereafter referred to as "Involvements").⁴⁷ According to Bacchiocchi, the need for the book's revision in 1911 was precipitated by two factors: the old printing plates were worn out, and "some people challenged some of the historical data and they wanted references for the historical quotations."⁴⁸

Actually Bacchiocchi is mistaken. The work on this edition of the book began wholly as a matter of needing to replace the printing plates. In fact, the first 120 pages had been sent to the foundry and 100 more pages besides had already been completed and were ready for typesetting⁴⁹ -- all this before discussion of mildly refining the text occurred. Thus, the refining of the text was incidental.⁵⁰ At the outset then these facts warn us to caution concerning Bacchiocchi's claim: "The 1911 revision of the Great Controversy provides a helpful case study to understand Ellen White's recognition of her limitations."⁵¹

The work undertaken was not considered to be anywhere near a full-scale revision. Sources historically closest to the project refer to it as more of a "refinement" of the text.⁵² Only after work on the first third of the book was well along did Mrs. White expand the project. One reading Bacchiocchi's summary of the "Involvements" paper could develop a truncated sense concerning what had occurred. Actually, according to W.C. White, "When we presented to Mother the request of some of our canvassers, that there should be given in the new edition, not only scripture references, but also references to the historians quoted, she instructed us to hunt up and insert the historical references. She also instructed us to verify the quotations, and to correct any inaccuracies found; and where quotations were made from passages that were rendered differently by different translators, to use that translation which was found to be most correct and authentic."⁵³

This was only after the work was well underway. Only afterward did our leaders at the Presses solicit and obtain the suggestions of the colporters asking that the new edition of the book contain more references. Mrs. White wanted to make it the most compelling outreach volume she could, and directed that a more thorough search be made especially in regard to the references and historical quotations. It is well to note that the main editorial energy was directed at the sources and references, and not to the volume's argumentation or subject matter.

Mrs. White approved changes that mildly moderated some statements that could be especially offensive to Catholics.⁵⁴ The work done was not to change the ideas, but to take the edge off of some of the stronger statements. Those reviewing the statements will find the work to be not a matter of changed ideas but of mild changes in expression. Contrary to what one might think reading Bacchiocchi, it was not that Mrs. White wanted her helpers to weed-out blatant errors (which Bacchiocchi charges yet remain in the book!⁵⁵), but

simply her common-sense desire to bring the book together with the newer references and to verify that the work was undertaken according to sound method.

The necessity of this work becomes clear when one begins to consider the many hundreds of quotations and references that were being checked over. For example, it was eventually discovered that there were five different translations of D'Aubigne's history in circulation but only one of those editions that had been approved by D'Aubigne. Moreover, the earlier editions of the Great Controversy had quoted from among those differing translations. Work now commenced to bring these statements presented in the Great Controversy only from the author's "approved" translation of them.⁵⁶

Great Controversy contains hundreds of quotations from a variety of sources. Some of the specific quotations originally used by Mrs. White could not be located and so, as Willie White said, ". . . the wording in the new edition has been so changed that the statement falls easily within the range of evidence that is readily obtainable."⁵⁷ These were points where the absolute details were somewhat peripheral to the broader explanation being made. Ellen White did not want to make minor issues into major ones by presenting statements not readily demonstrable by then available works, so in some places the text was modified.

Bacchiocchi asserts that Mrs. White's request that workers with access to the better libraries search out "corrections" "shows that Ellen White recognized that in her writings there were inaccuracies that needed to be corrected."⁵⁸ But we have seen that her intention was simply to make the book as perfect as possible, to go painstakingly through the historical references and make certain the best currently available materials were being used.

Did she, as Bacchiocchi asserts, recognize that there were "inaccuracies" in her writings, or was she simply seeking to do thorough work with the quotations that were being used? Is it fair or sound to pit her meticulous nature and its interaction with the quotations against the authority of her writings in general? This seems to be comparing apples and oranges. After all, one has to do with the overarching whole and the other has to do with mere specific citations; one has to do with her own original words and ideas, the other with the words of others selected for inclusion.

Having in EI#87 declared the changes from the 1888 Great Controversy to be not merely peripheral but "substantive,"⁵⁹ he proceeds to offer his best evidence for this: the change of one or two sentences in the book. One had read "The 1260 years of papal supremacy began with the establishment of the papacy in A.D. 538, and would therefore terminate on 1798."⁶⁰ The new edition was changed to "the 1260 years of papal supremacy began in A.D. 538, and would terminate in 1798."⁶¹

Bacchiocchi is also concerned about the changes from the papacy being "abolished" to speaking of its "downfall" in another place.⁶² Although Bacchiocchi may wish to make a considerable concern out of this, we are not so inclined. There are many ways in which human language might be used to express the idea of initiation and termination of the 1260 year period. Everyone, not the least of which Ellen White herself, is quite fully aware that in the most rigid sense, Rome's existence extends both before and after the 1260 year period. It is within the bounds of that period that her power attained to its most massive and dangerous proportion. Nor did she or we forget the prophetic warning that foretold the healing of her deadly wound (Revelation 13:3).

Yet through prophecy, heaven put the highlight on this period. It shows little soundness of method to quibble over minor rewordings when all the ideas remain the same. Bacchiocchi does not appear to acknowledge that whatever wording she used either time, her concept had never changed. From beginning to end of her writing and speaking career her viewpoint on this teaching was unchanging. It is a matter of determining the optimum means of expressing it. Furthermore, we use the word "abolition" much less frequently and more narrowly than it was used in Mrs. White's time where a broader usage and range of meaning prevailed. If these arguments are the best the author can bring forth, it only shows the thinness of his thesis.

My teenage daughter and her bedroom decoration illustrates the differences in wordings between overarching ideas and specific expression of details. When we moved into our current home, the room that became her room was a certain size. It was a certain place. It had certain dimensions. The door, closet, and window all were in a specific place. But from time to time we hear noises from that room; at a given point in time her bed is along one wall, then the other. At our arrival the room was painted one color, now a different. Her nuances of decorating her space are there. But later, when years have passed, and the Lord calls us on to a different field, that room will still be the same size, have the same dimensions, the door, closet, and window will all be in the same place. The decorations will have changed, but the core facts will be the same.

The application should be obvious. The constant dimensions and facts of the room are like the argument and subject matter of Mrs. White's writings; the change in the color of the room, the location of the bed, these are like the quotations most readily available at a given point in time. The 1260 prophecy is part of the constant dimensions; it is part of the argument and subject matter of the book Great Controversy. The quotations that can be updated from time to time are less permanent and more transitory. Over time they can be reshuffled.

Another example should be readily understood by those who teach. On one occasion when you are lecturing you quote more Luther than you commonly do, on another, more Calvin. The actual course of the history recounted is unchanged by your lecture, but each class taught has a different mix of students, with different points of personal interest, etcetera.

The facts of history are unchanging; they are locked-in; but the precise expression of them is dynamic, different each time. The outline of the course remains the same, but the delivery of the lecture differs somewhat with each recapitulation. Those specific sets of class-sessions in which the course is delivered may be likened to the different editions of a book.

A course follows essentially the same outline each time through, but the assigned reading for the course differs from year to year as new textbooks become available or unavailable. Like the quotations, these represent the current research on an area. In short, the inspired record of the principles does not change, but interests more localized to time and place can be regularly updated as books come into or depart from "in print" status.

Prescott's 1911 1260 Suggestions and EGW Rejection

Samuele Bacchiocchi wishes for an opportunity to sit down and explain the facts of history to Ellen White. But he should not be so sure that she would accept his help as that of a "competent scholar." When the

perfecting for the 1911 edition quotations was undertaken a request went out to some of our most competent men of the time, one of whom was William Warren Prescott.⁶³ A "competent scholar,"⁶⁴ W.W. Prescott offered her his suggestions but without all the results he had desired.

In mid-April of 1910 he was asked to go through the book's then-current edition and to submit proposals for refinement to the text. Prescott submitted his suggestions to W.C. White on April 26, 1910 in a 39 page double-spaced letter.⁶⁵ Of particular interest, he repeatedly and specifically proposed in his 53rd, 54th, 55th, 75th, and 85th considered changes revising the 1260 year period. All were rejected.⁶⁶

Prescott wrote, "The argument in the last paragraph of this page [p. 54] would seem to favor commencing the 1260 years with the decree of Justinian in 533. . ." ⁶⁷ According to this competent scholar, ". . . the whole question of the proper application of the 1260 years needs reconsideration and a new interpretation made."⁶⁸ In comparison, Bacchiocchi says that in her current edition of Great Controversy, the book Mrs. White herself valued "above silver or gold,"⁶⁹ "there are still glaring mistakes that need to be corrected."⁷⁰ And as we have already shown, Bacchiocchi's main concern revolves around his disagreement with Mrs. White's position on the 1260 year period!

Back to Prescott, White Estate documents state that "The facts are that the Prescott suggestions which would have resulted in sweeping changes in the book [the upcoming 1911 ed. Great Controversy] were, after careful consideration, rejected outright. Only a little more than half of the 105 suggestions were accepted and a large part of these related to precision of expression or called for supporting references or Appendix Note explanations."⁷¹

Prescott repeatedly and specifically proposed revising the 1260 period in the 1911 edition Great Controversy. EGW rejected the idea.

According to Arthur White, "The few suggestions that questioned prophetic dates, prophetic applications, and doctrine were turned down. Ellen White was adamant on points of this character."⁷²

W.C. White writes, "In a few places where ambiguous or misleading terms have been used, Mother has authorized a changed reading, but she protests against any change in the argument or subject matter of the book."⁷³

How did the workers and Mrs. White arrive at the final editorial decisions? "Each item that was sent in suggesting possible changes for the new edition was reviewed on May 23, 1910 by a group consisting of W.C. White, C.C. Crisler, D.E. Robinson, A.G. Daniels, and Homer Salisbury."⁷⁴ "Aside from this [historical quotations], where we are working under a general order, we shall show her every change of wording that is proposed, and if it does not meet her approval, it will not be followed."⁷⁵

Returning to our classroom analogy, we might say that each time Ellen White "taught" her "Great Controversy" course (that is, in 1884, 1888, and 1911), she gave the "1260" part of the lectures with AD 538 as its start-point and 1798 as end-point. And when one of her students (W.W. Prescott) in 1910 after experiencing her 1888 lecture (evaluating the references dating back to the 1888 edition of her book Great

Controversy), suggested she change those dates to AD 533-1793, she went ahead in her 1911 course and continued to give the dates as 538-1798. We think this says something about those dates.

Concerning the refinements finally made in the 1911 edition, Mrs. White states, "As a result of the thorough examination by our most experienced workers, some changing in the wording has been proposed. These changes I have carefully examined, and approved."⁷⁶

Clarence Crisler's (one of Mrs. White's literary helpers) observation is of interest to us:

"In all this historical work [he is discussing the work on the chapter involving the French Revolution, pp. 265-288 in 1911 edition of the Great Controversy], we are eager to have the MSS that may be submitted, given the most searching tests. We need never be afraid of historical truth. However, we would do well to avoid accepting the conclusions of some of the more modern historians who are attempting to rewrite history so as to shape it up in harmony with their philosophical viewpoint. We find it necessary to exercise constant vigilance in this respect; and this leads us to set considerable store by the original sources, or fountain heads of history The more closely we examine the use of historical extracts in Controversy, and the historical extracts themselves, the more profoundly we are impressed with the fact that Sister White had special guidance in tracing the story from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, down through the centuries until the end."⁷⁷

We do not here assert that Prescott sat down with Mrs. White and urged her to accept his view on the 1260 days and she verbalized a rejection of it. We do say that Mrs. White's plan for the Great Controversy was not what she considered a revision but a refinement; that she was divinely guided in some measure in selecting her literary helpers; that her literary helpers were by no means incompetent as historians in their own right; that she made it clear to the literary helpers working on the GC refinement that neither argumentation nor subject matter was to be changed but only some quotations and references; that Prescott's concept of changing the 1260 was doubtless known not only to her literary helpers but to herself⁷⁸ (for he was never behind in canvassing his views); and that his recommendation (constituting some half-dozen of his 105 suggestions) to change the beginning of the 1260 period from AD 538 to AD 533 was rejected.

Are We Saying That Ellen G. White is "The Last Word"?

One of the concerns raised by Bacchiocchi is that when serious Adventists accept what Ellen G. White has said, they are guilty of making her "the last word." He says for example, "It is unfortunate that even a few Adventists are victims of the same blind acceptance of tradition [as other Christians who uphold tradition without checking for its biblical soundness]. They strongly believe that what the pioneers or Ellen White taught, is the final word."⁷⁹

But I wonder. Is it saying that EGW is "the final word" when she says God instructed her "to specify what is truth"?⁸⁰ When God gave the book of Daniel through the inspired writer, did that mean that the later inspired book Revelation was out of place? We have to agree with everything in Daniel and yet Daniel was not the last word. Revelation (the 66th book of the Bible) was given and guess what? A. It didn't take anything away

from Daniel, and B. It extended the understanding; it aided in specifying what was the truth in Daniel. A similar relationship exists between the Bible and EGW writings.

The Bible does not exhaust all that can be said by inspiration. But because heaven speaks in inspiration through Mrs. White doesn't mean she or we hold that what she has written is "the final word." Mrs. White is not

When God gave the book of Daniel through the inspired writer, did that mean that the later inspired book of Revelation was out of place? We have to agree with everything in Daniel and yet Daniel is not the last word.

disagreeing with the Bible or herself, and not claiming to be the last word, but she is simply fulfilling what we would today call her "mission statement," i.e., specifying what the truth is in order to aid those who have erred and departed from Scripture.

Some will here want to make a distinction between the Bible and EGW writings that in some measure reduces the authority of Ellen White making whatever she has written subnormative because it is not part of the Bible. Bacchiocchi insists that the Bible alone is "normative."⁸¹ But we have already heard Mrs. White saying, "The Bible must be your counselor. Study it *and* the testimonies God has given; for they never contradict His Word."⁸²

Let's venture carefully here. Ellen G. White's writings are inspired in like manner as any other inspired writing we find in the Bible. They are simply not contained in its canon. The canon of Scripture is the test of all things including the writings of Mrs. White, as she herself stated.⁸³

They are tested by Scripture as John was tested by Moses, as Paul was tested by Isaiah, and so forth. As the Scriptures were laid down, each added unit of inspired writings was tested by the previously existing inspired writings. Hence the book of Joshua had to harmonize with the books of Moses, and so on.⁸⁴

Paul is not "subnormative" or "less authoritative" or "less inspired" than Moses because his writings were produced 1500 years later than Moses; they are tested by Moses but equally authoritative with Moses (when they pass the test). In like manner, the Ellen G. White writings are tested by all inspiration that comes before, but equally authoritative (when they pass the test). They are not subnormative in any other sense than this. With a thoughtful eye to human attitudes about the Bible Mrs. White urged her readers to test everything by the Bible. And Paul urged his readers to test what he said by the Old Testament Scriptures (the New Testament was still being laid down).

Do we think that we no longer need the help of prophetic guidance? Have the scholars somehow become less error-prone in recent time?

"God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. . . . the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it

was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word. . . . The Spirit was not given -- nor can it ever be bestowed -- to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. . . . Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit is of vital importance to the church of Christ, it is one of the devices of Satan, through the errors of extremists and fanatics, to cast contempt upon the work of the Spirit and cause the people of God to neglect this source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided. . . . In harmony with the word of God, His Spirit was to continue its work throughout the period of the gospel dispensation. During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. . . . Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. . . . I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed -- to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future.⁸⁵

Yes, Mrs. White was simply living out her God-granted mission statement. She never asked for the assignment. Are we willing, are our SDA scholars willing, to partake of "the source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided," the gift of prophecy through the writings of Ellen G. White, a "continuing and authoritative source of truth"? It is certainly a biased thinking process that dares to compare those who endeavor to be faithful in following God and taking seriously the work of His prophets, with those who are locked in blind, hidebound adherence to the traditions of men.

Pulling the Rusty Old Sword

Upon entering into his topic, Bacchiocchi pulled a rusty sword -- the "verbal inspiration" argument.⁸⁶ Having gone through the denomination's contemporary process of theological training in our institutions of higher education, I can attest that this is a very common argument. So-called "conservative" Adventists are portrayed as being afraid of Bible study, believing in "verbal" (every word) inspiration, holding to tradition, and so forth.

Yes, some Adventists are guilty of some of these things. But the use made of this kind of diatribe almost invariably is to set aside any meaningful authority for the EGW writings. For example, while attending an Adventist college in the state of Washington such sentiments were (it seemed to me) continuously presented in my classes. Our people are fearful of Bible study, accept verbal inspiration theory, on and on was the spiel.

And yet the place of impact of such propaganda ever is to strip authority from the prophet. To the mind of many an Adventist academic, Mrs. White's not being "verbally inspired" translates to "We are scholars; we are allowed to pick and choose from them." If you've been through the coursework I have, you'll understand what I am saying. It is a rusty old sword. It cuts the wielder, for it slices him loose of God's guidance through His prophet. It is, for that person, as if God has never spoken anywhere except in the Bible. I am discussing how the idea works itself out in a practical way in the work of Adventist academics. Instead of stating the problem positively (the thoughts, not the words, were inspired), it is said "the words were not inspired," but then by intellectual slight-of-hand it is inevitably the *ideas* that are negated!

No matter how many times we see the verbal inspiration argument, we must still stand firm and say that we will believe God's prophets, we will accept their writings as authoritative. The truth behind the anti-verbal inspiration argument is that in inspiration the ideas are inspired but not necessarily the precise words. However, there are places in inscripturated writings that include specifics, data-points that cannot be accurately expressed without the use of distinct wording that is singular or plural, or by definite numbers.

One example of the singular/plural issue is found at Galatians 3:16, where we read, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Paul is quoting from Genesis 17:8 where Abraham is promised Isaac and is told that thy seed after thee shall be included in His covenant and "multiplied exceedingly." In Galatians, Paul declares that "thy seed after thee" points to Christ. And his argument was "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one." That is, Paul's argument (here at least) *is* down to word-level inspiration!

As a general thing we may keep in mind that it is primarily the thoughts that are inspired, not the words. But along with that we have to admit that, at least in some cases the specificity of inspiration reaches down to what we would call verbal-level inspiration. Here is where the precise numbers given in Scripture for prophetic periods such as 490, 1260, 1290, 1335, 2300 appear to come in. Such periods would be useless to us, as would the data, for example, in Daniel 9:24-27 elucidating what occurs at each stage of the prophetic track as presented in the 70 weeks, if we declared these periods were "figurative" or "symbolic" time references not to be taken literally.

Which raises another question: why *have* a prophetic time period given in specific numbers that is merely symbolic? What use is a figurative or symbolic 1260 as opposed to a figurative 1290 or 1335 or 2300? When we go to the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24-27, and see how the period is broken into specific subsections with specific events marking each part of the developing time-period, we wonder what use a 1260 would be. Why not say "about 1000" and leave it at that, or "about 1400" and leave it at that? To take definite, specific periods such as 1260 and arbitrarily label them as figurative, seems capricious.

Origin of AD 538-1798 View of 1260 Year Prophecy

A look back into history shows us, and we are not at all surprised, that the AD 538-1798 dating plan for the 1260 year period precedes EGW. On February 15, 1798 Pope Pius VI had been dethroned in France by Berthier. "Word of his arrest had reached this country, and many keen students of prophecy told their Protestant congregations of the prophetic significance of the event and of the widespread conviction that mankind had evidently entered 'the time of the end.' -- the latter-day epoch that would finally see the overthrow of the papal antichrist."⁸⁷

United States President John Quincy Adams declared May 9, 1798 as a national day of "solemn humiliation, fasting and prayer." Thanks were given by the president for the religious freedom enjoyed by the United States. While the Papacy was not specifically mentioned in the proclamation, the public mind was very interested. The sense across the nation was that epoch-marking events had just occurred.

A Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, Samuel E. M'Corkle, a student of the prophecies, began to look

into events 1260 years previous to 1798 and discovered "that in that very year Rome was taken from Vitiges, king of the Goths by Bellisarius [sic] Justinian's general."⁸⁸

Leroy E. Froom tabulates a variety of views on the dating of the 1260 years, the most popular of which was AD 533, with several also accepting 587 or 606.⁸⁹ The Millerites followed agreeably William Miller's lead in accepting M'Corkle's AD 538 date.⁹⁰ When the Seventh-day Adventists arose from the Millerites, they went with 538.

Inspired Selection

It can be argued, as Bacchiocchi, that in the matter of the 1260 year prophecy Seventh-day Adventists simply accepted an existing traditional interpretation. But that only introduces the questions, does not God work through people in all ages? Cannot we concede the possibility that God was guiding Samuel M'Corkle in his thinking and study in 1798? Is a "tradition" automatically evil?

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 tradition is good. Of course it is true, virtually everywhere else it occurs in Scripture it comes as a negative. But those were the traditions of men. A viewpoint on the interpretation of the Bible that was God-guided to begin with and sustained by the quiet invisible working of heavenly forces in the background from one generation to the next is no mere tradition of men.

Part of the inspired writer's work is sometimes to select from among materials at hand under God's guidance (Luke 1:1-4). Bacchiocchi points out that "unlike Paul, Peter, or any other Bible writer,"⁹¹ Mrs. White operated in tandem with literary workers. His claim is mistaken. Other Bible writers had literary helpers in both Old and New Testament times, for example Jeremiah (ch. 36), Peter (1 Peter 5:12), and even Paul (Romans 16:22). Bacchiocchi identifies EGW's working with literary helpers as a sign of her humility. We are not entirely certain what his purpose in making such a statement is. Is he trying to suggest that Paul, Peter, or Bible writers were lacking in humility? Is this to him a meaningful evidence subtly dropped into the air to discredit her prophetic status by differentiating her from the canonic Bible writers? We do not know.

Infallibility Statements -- What They Don't Say

As far as "inaccuracies" in her manuscripts, we again point to the substantial difference between Bacchiocchi's thesis and the facts. Mrs. White simply sought to make good use of the opportunity then offering itself to do a thorough double-checking of the references used in the book and bring them up to date by purposefully incorporating references that, after the passage of more than 20 years, would be more up to date and more readily accessible to the reader.

It does not seem fair to us that Bacchiocchi uses words like "correction" and "inaccuracy" so loosely, failing to differentiate her meaning from the commonly expected meaning "mistakes." He has done a disservice here to one whom he says has made extraordinary contribution to the lives of millions of believers in Jesus, but who has also had her work treated in such a manner by learned critics that many have suffered disillusionment in regard to it.⁹²

Another item Bacchiocchi presents concerns Mrs. White's fallibility -- her capacity to make mistakes. He constructs questions such as, "Does respect for the authority of Ellen White preclude any fresh investigation of Biblical or historical subjects discussed in her writings? Did Ellen White see herself as the final and infallible authority on prophetic, exegetical, theological, and historical interpretations?"⁹³

The thoughtful reader should at once recognize what is going on here. By the use of obviously overdrawn statements ("does respect for the authority of Ellen White preclude *any* fresh investigation . . . Did Ellen White see herself as *the final and infallible authority* . . ." our scholar is trying to open a door and create a room within which the constraints of the Spirit of Prophecy writings do not apply. There are only a few Ellen G. White statements addressing the possibility of infallibility for herself. Perhaps we should review them.

The earliest is an 1895 letter to her nephew F.E. Belden. Here is where she says, "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible."⁹⁴ But consider the context of the letter. Belden had been making claims that what people had reported to her she had restated as coming from the prophetic realm. She counseled him to be wary of his friends. They would gather, rehashing and amplifying their complaints. She reminded him that only with a living connection to God could he "have a safe connection with men who are only fallible like yourself."⁹⁵

Having reminded him of the humanness of both himself and his friends, her next sentence included herself: "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible." She here made no admission or suggestion of error on her part, but she reminded him that she was like him in that she herself needed to maintain the same, living, supernatural connection she urged for himself. The next sentence reminded him, "His [God's] word is true, and in him is no variableness, or shadow of turning."⁹⁶ Thus we find here no suggestion that her fallibility was a reason to doubt the authority of her writings; we have simply a loving aunt seeking to come close to her wayward nephew. She affirms the reliability of God's word.

One other statement is often cited. "We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed."⁹⁷

But reading the whole of that article one discovers here no particular discussion of her relation to her own writings. The driving message behind the 11 paragraphs of her article is to be wary of bias in your Bible study. She is addressing believers in general and alerting them that they need to be careful of becoming closed-minded and shutting out additional study of the Scriptures. Appearing scarcely three years after 1888, she may have had in mind the closed attitudes there manifested.

Context demonstrates she has no reference here to potential changes in the argument or subject matter of her own writings. The statement has been misused by those coming to it with an agenda -- precisely that which Mrs. White was warning against!

What goes for Scripture goes for Ellen White. We don't go through and say Paul or Peter are *personally* infallible. But we do say that God is infallible. When He inspires the Bible writer, it is infallible. When He breaths out the writing through and in connection with the inspired prophet, it is infallible. Here is where

Ellen G. White is. We discover no reason in the Bible or the Ellen G. White writings to imagine a different degree or phenomenon of inspiration in operation in one or the other. Then it is only arbitrary to put up a wall and say the Bible is on this side and the writings of Mrs. White on the other; the Bible is authoritative and her writings are not.

Great Controversy Not a Plastic Book

Ellen White did not write a plastic book. Heaven's design was not that the book be radically updated or continually reshaped. Contemporary events weigh heavily upon Bacchiocchi's mind. He proposes that one of the benefits of his new light is "It can also help us to make sense of the unprecedented historical growth of Islam which is still continuing today in many countries."⁹⁸ Also, "I cannot ignore the Biblical implications of the current war on terrorism,"⁹⁹ and like comments¹⁰⁰ indicate that Bacchiocchi is truly thinking in terms of Islam as a major contemporary player in the end-time setting.

But the trouble with the approach of permitting current events and their perceived importance have too free a play is that you may, as Kevin Paulsen alludes to, stampede your interpretation of prophecy¹⁰¹ -- let events drive you too quickly to new understandings. Were our pioneers simply misguided because they had not seen enough history yet to know where the Scriptures concerning the 1260 would apply? Bacchiocchi states, "It is unfortunate that our Adventist pioneers did not consider the prophetic role of Islam, as the counterpart of the Papal Antichrist. Let us not blame them for this shortsightedness. After all they lived before September 11. . ."102

We can agree at the most general level that Islam is a manifestation of antichrist. John himself warned that there would be "many antichrists" in the general sense (1 John 2:18). But the discussions of the "little horn" and the "man of sin" in Scripture give no hints that they are meant to portray antichrist in only the general sense. They point to a specific, singular, religio-political entity. It will not be difficult for Bacchiocchi to defend the view that Islam, whether past or contemporary, is a manifestation of antichrist. But making Islam fit as contained in the little horn is another matter.

Three More Concerns of Bacchiocchi

Although the main purpose of this paper is to comment upon Samuele Bachiocchi's concerns regarding EGW and the 1911 edition Great Controversy, we will at least briefly discuss a few others. For example, his concern that the Great Controversy misrepresents the origin of Sunday observance, marking it as a fourth century development only when he insists it is also a second century phenomenon.¹⁰³ We agree that the predominant sense one gathers from Great Controversy is of a fourth century focus on the Sabbath/Sunday transition. With the advent of Constantine's infamous Sunday law in AD 321 Sunday observance received the authority of the Roman empire.

When Ellen G. White writes of Sabbath-keeping in "the early centuries,"¹⁰⁴ Bacchiocchi wants to make her mean at least two hundred years inclusive.¹⁰⁵ But another way of viewing her reference to the early centuries is to understand her to mean at least a portion of each of the early centuries. After all, most of the New Testament events occurred between AD 26-100. Again, if we date the epistle of Barnabas at AD 135, then we

have no evidence of Sunday observance until past the first third of the second century. The number of years falling between AD 135-321 is about 186.

All must be honest on this topic and admit that the materials we have from the period after the New Testament and preceding 321 are but very few. On the other hand we have the legislation of Constantine in 321. In Great Controversy Mrs. White is drawing the attention of the reader to the high points in the historic development of the situation. She put her main literary energy to work at the point where there was the most historical data available rather than focusing on two centuries where the documentation is minimal. What Mrs. White wrote in Great Controversy lives comfortably beside the Bacchiocchi data, and it is difficult to see it as an either/or matter.

Bacchiocchi also complains that the power of the state was not the dominant factor in the development of Sunday-keeping. This is apparently linked with his previous discussed concern about 2nd century Sunday introduction versus 4th. It is clear from his discussion that he is trying to take what Mrs. White wrote with predominantly the fourth century in mind and set it up against his understanding of the developments in the Sabbath/Sunday situation in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Even so, the historical developments cited by him¹⁰⁶ could be held to sustain Mrs. White's position. The state may have outlawed Sabbath-keeping to overthrow the Jewish rebellion, but as Bacchiocchi points out, it was this very development that led to Rome's "initiative to change the Sabbath to Sunday in order to show to the Roman government the Christians' separation from the Jews and their identification with the cycles of the Roman society."¹⁰⁷

Bacchiocchi finds little to sustain Mrs. White's statement that in the "vast councils" she refers to, the Sunday was exalted while the Sabbath was pressed down lower and lower.¹⁰⁸ But a close reading of what Mrs. White said does not require such activities be accomplished through formal debate or that such developments find explicitly historical statement. Rather, as the result of various decisions by the councils the Sabbath was impacted indirectly, in small steps.

Perusing Mrs. White's account of the change, one easily notes the mostly gradual, incremental nature of it. We weren't looking for the kind of evidence Bacchiocchi wants to insist on. The kind of large, in-your-face changes he is after would indeed be found in the records of church councils if they still exist. Let the reader note also that he does point out the statements that do occur in record of the Synod of Laodicea (c. AD 364). Mrs. White is speaking of general and gradual shift over time. There is little here to become concerned about.

Then there is the beginning and length of the Waldenses existence. Bacchiocchi thinks the matter of determining the historical facts about the Waldenses is simple. "It was simply a matter of checking the name 'Waldenses' in a Dictionary of Church History."¹⁰⁹ But it is widely known that the Roman Catholic Church made a diligent attempt historically to destroy record of the Waldenses, as is the understanding that mostly they were successful. Again, let us recall Crisler's (one of Mrs. White's helpers who, according to Bacchiocchi were "not very familiar with church history"¹¹⁰) warning:

We need never be afraid of historical truth. However, we would do well to avoid accepting the conclusions of some of the more modern historians who are attempting to rewrite history so as

to shape it up in harmony with their philosophical viewpoint. We find it necessary to exercise constant vigilance in this respect; and this leads us to set considerable store by the original sources, or fountain heads of history."¹¹¹

Bacchiocchi wants to mark the Waldenses as deriving exclusively from Peter Waldo in 1173 and in contradiction to Mrs. White's statement that he insists means she understood the Waldenses to exist for 1000 years. What she actually says in the midst of a general discussion of the Waldenses is that "witnesses for the truth" existed in the Waldensian valleys for 1000 years.¹¹² But Jean Zurcher writes, "According to ancient usage and the etymology of the name, it seems more logical to affirm with certain historians that Waldo received his name from 'the people of the valleys.'"¹¹³ That is, Waldo received his name from the Waldenses, not the Waldenses from Waldo.

The arguments presented by Bacchiocchi on these points are unconvincing rehashes. Are they introduced in a desperate attempt to discredit Mrs. White so that the 1260 year period, which he knows cannot be fitted to Islam, can become "symbolic" or "figurative" in order to accommodate his new view? We will leave it to others who have made Waldensian history an area of special study to respond at greater length to Bacchiocchi's concerns.

Other Matters

This document has not taken up every subject of Bacchiocchi's concern. Others doubtless will address points raised by him although few, if any, are new. They are issues that have for years more or less been hashed-out over again and again.

Bacchiocchi mentions issues such as Mrs. White and the "shut door"¹¹⁴ (these concerns have been carefully examined by P.G. Damsteegt,¹¹⁵ Herbert Douglass,¹¹⁶ and others. He also raises again his interpretation of Colossians 2:14.¹¹⁷ Others will no doubt address these concerns which are only peripheral to Ellen G. White and the 1260 year period.

Summary of Bacchiocchi's Criteria

Our author's attempt to lay the foundation for "sensible criteria for the proper use of EGW's writings in Biblical interpretation"¹¹⁸ are not carefully spelled out. But it appears to be simply that we not use them.¹¹⁹ In his own words, "any investigation that attempts to understand more fully the teachings of the Bible, should be tested by its faithfulness to the biblical text, not by EGW's statements regarding the subject."¹²⁰

He insists in the same place that her statements receive "serious consideration,"¹²¹ but he rules out consideration of "EGW's statements regarding the subject."

He adds a second point, insisting that Mrs. White sought to make "corrections"¹²² to her books, that those corrections were not peripheral, and that Great Controversy retains to this day "glaring mistakes that need to be corrected."¹²³ All this, apparently to arrive at the ultimate conclusion: "It is unwise to criticize an

Adventist scholar who proposes a new interpretation of the 1260 days that could ultimately make our Adventist interpretation more credible and defensible."¹²⁴

Conclusion and Appeal

Remember W.C. White's statement: "In a few places where ambiguous or misleading terms have been used, Mother has authorized a changed reading, but she protests against any change in the argument or subject matter of the book."¹²⁵ There are in the writings of the prophet a combination of the divine and the human elements. We can be aware of this even while refusing to try to guess precisely where that line falls. Our position is to obey.

Recalling Bacchiocchi's charge that the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be guilty of a "cultish mentality" if it esteems Mrs. White's writings too highly, we must differ. Remember, he had stated this on the basis of his viewpoint that adhering to the writings of Mrs. White as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth" meant granting normative authority to "tradition." But Inspired writings, whether within the Bible canon or outside of it are no mere traditional texts; they come with the inwrought authority of heaven.

The true cultish mentality would be to mark-off the task of teaching and proclamation in the church and commit it solely to scholars and academics. Let no cult of the elite suppose they can set themselves above the holy writings and sit in judgment over them, carving and classing them into divine and human sets, granting to the one authority, and to the other none.

If the current issue were simply Bacchiocchi's interpretation of Islam as part of the little horn, that would be one thing. We could just look at that, check the specifications of the Bible prophecy, see the view is poorly supported, and move on. But to sustain that view Mr. Bacchiocchi has now called into question the inspired authority of Mrs. White. For this reason we have written firmly.

We hope that the intensity of our words will not be understood by the reader as uncharitable. It is just that much is at stake. Bacchiocchi says he is willing to change his views. "I am always prepared to change my views when someone shows me the flaws of my methodology and conclusions."¹²⁶ He solicits "constructive criticism."¹²⁷ In a word we may offer it: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chronicles 20:20). We think our response has shown Mr. Bacchiocchi's view concerning the authority of Mrs. White to be mistaken.

Far from providing rational criteria for understanding the relationship between Ellen G. White's writings and the Bible, our author has in EI#87 presented a vague and essentially parameterless complaint. His goal seems to be to protect the "scholar" from the necessity of bowing to inspiration.¹²⁸ Nor does it seem convincing to me, when the fruit of Bachiocchi's "Islam as co-little horn" view is to weaken the authority of the Ellen G. White writings, to suppose that God has any part in any part of it.

Constructive criticism was sought. Then consider the following points regarding methodology and conclusions:

1. Be content to view Islam as antichrist only in the most general sense. Do not try to force-fit Islam into the little horn. It just doesn't work. We suggest that brother Bacchiocchi review once again the concerns of his brethren; another look at Kevin Paulson's "Stampeded Interpretation" is in order. Islam does not meet the specifications given in the prophecies under consideration.
2. Make a careful distinction between "traditional" interpretations and "inspired" interpretations. The former, unsecured by prophetic confirmation are open to reassessment; the latter, where God has spoken through the prophet may certainly be studied yet have not been left open by heaven for substantial change.
3. Scholars need to be subservient to inspired writings just like everyone else.
4. Do not build the core of your thesis up from one document; but studiously peruse the range of available materials before developing your thesis.
5. Before spreading personal concerns or doubts about various volumes by Ellen G. White, consult with other faithful workers of experience and see whether your concerns have not been answered in the study done by them.

When heaven speaks, inspired, authoritative protection is made available to God's people. Shall we disregard it? Reading Bacchiocchi's EI#87, one might conclude that his view of Ellen White's "limitations" and her supposed need for correction by "competent scholars" has been simmering quietly and undisclosed for many years. Only now has this position been brought into the open by his reaction to his Endtime Issues newsletter correspondence with several who have presented clear statements from Scripture and from EGW that stood in the way of his Islam as little horn theory.

The "limitations" widely supposed in Mrs. White's work are largely the manufacture of those who would reduce her authority. We never find her referring to herself or speaking of "my limitations." In fact, we do not find Mrs. White in regard to limitations, referred to *anywhere* on the EGW CD-ROM! Indeed, what may be more to the point than prophets and their supposed limitations is the work of scholars who do not recognize theirs.

I wish not just to present my own findings but also to appeal to any who may have, without intending to, discovered themselves farther downstream than ever they imagined as regarding the authority and reliability of the Ellen G. White writings. We don't realize how, by the tiniest of increments, the persistent trends around us have affected us. The steady trend of recent decades has been to elevate the scholar and demote the prophet.

What may be more to the point than prophets and their supposed limitations is the work of scholars who do not recognize theirs.

Added to that is another feature that those of us sometimes engaged in scholarly pursuit must guard ourselves against. When accolades are heaped upon us by the appreciative, we are at risk of embracing the subtle trap that leads us to think ourselves to be instructors of the blind (Romans 2:19-20). In a period when our church has exercised little energy to monitor or think-through the long-term impact of fad-absorption, God's people are crying out for leaders discernibly committed to Adventism.

In such a setting, those appearing to bear a zeal for present truth sometimes have a zeal for something else. Let's face it, we are every one of us but feeble characters, entirely unable to remain psychologically healthy under the appreciation heaped upon us by thankful ones who hope that in us they've found the new Elijah. Here is one of the most subtle traps set and waiting for those who, in the face of widespread indifference, go forward to stand for the truth; that we will come to think ourselves and our opinions - even our scholarship -- larger in importance than we ought.

Let us never forget that through all the ages many learned persons have placed their ideas above the ideas of God. Through all manner of even unintended self-deception, there have ever been those who persisted in pressing forward ideas generated only by themselves. Eventually some actually come to the place where they see fit to try to instruct God. We should never let ourselves forget that over and over again the scribes and Pharisees and sometimes the sadducees sought, in their extraordinary blindness, to instruct *Jesus* about God!

We are confident that as those who study prayerfully, thoughtfully pursue their consideration of the relationship between the Ellen G. White writings and the Bible, they will come to a clearer and more positive position. It can be a position of true respect in relation to these 19th century inspired writings which have meant so much to millions of believers in Jesus. The evidence of continued research will, we think, lead to the conclusion that that which is revealed belongs to us and our children, while the secret things belong to the Lord our God (2 Chronicles 29:29).

What heaven has affirmed through the gift of prophecy in our midst, such as the 1260 day/year prophecy and the initiation and termination points anchoring that period to AD 538-1798, stands revealed. Not only the writings of Ellen G. White but the facts of history and the Bible clearly point us in that direction. For efficiency's sake, our main energies should be directed to determining which among positions held by us as a people, that have not been confirmed through inspiration, can be strengthened "to make our prophetic witness more credible and defensible."¹²⁹

We can research even positions already affirmed by contemporary inspiration. Until prophesyings shall cease (1 Corinthians 13:8-10), we can enhance our understanding. But "new" light will never contradict "old" light. We must eschew any doctrine of inspiration that elevates scholarship above revelation. The scholars are subject to the prophets and not vice versa. As are we all.

It is a late hour in the history of our planet. It is a wonderful time for all of us to humble ourselves and hear our Maker speaking to us. In the final analysis to all those who lived through the Papal persecutions -- or died through them -- the 1260 year period of Papal domination was no figurative or merely symbolic experience. Let us not become guilty of trading away verities for vagaries. There are too many graves and dead martyrs who experienced the reality firsthand.

Even now it is not too late to turn back from the precipice and find one's footing again. May our God have mercy upon all of us, and preserve every soldier for His cause. Whether in youth or having attained the sunset years of life, God grant us discernment. What an indescribable sadness it would be to labor in the forefront of the battle for years and then at the last to turn away into the darkness. And yet heaven has cautioned us so that we might escape such outcomes. And so this document closes with a warning we've all read before and should again take to heart.

"It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the Testimonies. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition. When the Testimonies, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction."¹³⁰

ENDNOTES

1. Samuele bacchiocchi, Endtime Issues Newsletter #86, "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy," July 6, 2002, p. 27, online at http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_86.html, in HTML format or http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_86.pdf accessed August 2, 2002, 8:51AM PST.
2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. For one response to this, see Kevin Paulson's "Stamped Interpretation: A Reply to Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy (Endtime Issues Newsletter #86)," August 2, 2002, available online in PDF format http://www.greatcontroversy.org/reportandreview/rr-pdf/stampeded_interpretation.pdf and in HTML <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/reportandreview/pau-stampeded.php3>.
4. Samuele Bacchiocchi, Endtime Issues Newsletter #87, "A Reply to Criticism, Part I, The Use of E.G. White's Writings in Interpreting Scripture" August 1, 2002, p. 21, online at http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_87.html in HTML format or http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/endtimeissues/eti_87.pdf in PDF format, accessed August 2, 2002, 8:52AM PST.
5. Ibid., p. 7.
6. He may protest our statement here, but we invite the reader to consider it as an accurate synthesis of his thesis in EI#87, pp. 1-22. Bacchiocchi disputes EGW's historical reliability in pp. 10-19 and her doctrinal reliability in pp. 19-20. He proposes that expressions by her he deems "traditional inaccurate interpretations" (p. 19) should not bind scholars, who are to be tested only by Scripture, and "not by EGW's statements regarding the subject." (p. 21).
7. Ibid., p. 9.
8. Ibid.
9. For example, Endtime Issues #75 (17 pp.), #85 (25 pp.), #86 (28 pp.), and #87 (22 pp.).
10. David Qualls to GCOList, email August 3, 2002. The difference here is that Bacchiocchi is working backwards. It was only after he published EI#86 and some of us pointed out to him statements from the pen of inspiration such as Great Controversy, p. 266 that he has now backtracked and is endeavoring to introduce his proposed approach to the writings of EGW. The mailing list can be subscribed to at <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/consider-gcolist.php3>.
11. Ibid., p. 11.
12. Ibid., p. 17.
13. Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 3, pp. 361-378.
14. _____, Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 331.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. _____, Southern Work, p. 46.
18. _____, Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 32, emphasis added.
19. Ibid., p. 52.
20. Ibid., p. 77.
21. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 17.
22. Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, pp. 266-267.
23. Actually, this depends on where in EI#87 you are reading. For example, on p. 2 it is "my [Bacchiocchi's] proposed new interpretation," while on p. 8 "to broaden" "our traditional interpretation," on p. 8 "only a proposed interpretation," on p. 21 "a new interpretation."
24. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 2.
25. Ibid., p. 18. "In the past some uninformed readers have taken this term to mean that the Waldenses were Sabbathkeepers. It is possible that Ellen White was influenced by this old interpretation."
26. Ibid., pp. 9-10. Several times here when speaking of his respect for EGW, he qualifies this with the words "devotional" or "spiritual."
27. Ibid., p. 21.
28. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
29. Ibid., p. 7.
30. Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By, p. 13.
31. Ibid., p. 14.
32. Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, #17, The Gift of Prophecy, Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, revised 2000 16th ed., p. 15.
33. Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 23.
34. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 14.
35. Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 4, p. 382.
36. _____, Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 32.
37. _____, Early Writings, p. 78.
38. "Your constructive criticism will cause me to modify or possibly even to abandon this PROPOSED interpretation." Bacchiocchi, Endtime Issues Newsletter #87, p. 2. That remark is made in relation to Bacchiocchi's "Islam as co-Little Horn" view, but we hope that it extends also to his view of inspiration. We hope that all these years he has not held the view expounded in this newsletter, but that this too is but a proposed view about how to deal with Mrs. White's writings in relation to the Scripture -- and one that will be rapidly revised.
39. White, Early Writings, p. 78.
40. Ibid.
41. _____, Testimonies, vol. 6, pp. 654-690.
42. Ibid., p. 668.
43. _____, Great Controversy, Introduction, p. xi.
44. Ibid., p. 266.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., Introduction, pp. x-xi.
47. "The 1911 Edition of the 'Great Controversy': An Explanation of the Involvements of the 1911 Revision." (A considerable portion of this matter is reproduced in Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 3, pp. 433-444 and may be read with considerable profit.)

48. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 11.
49. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, p. 305.
50. Ibid., pp. 303-321.
51. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 10.
52. For example, see Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, pp. 303-321; another source is "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy, WDF 84-e, p. 2.
53. "The 1911 Edition of the 'Great Controversy': An Explanation of the Involvements of the 1911 Revision," p. 3.
54. "What I have written regarding the arrogance and the assumptions of the papacy is true. Much historical evidence regarding these matters has been designedly destroyed; nevertheless, that the book may be of the greatest benefit to Catholics and others, and that needless controversies may be avoided, it is better to have all statements regarding the assumptions of the pope and the claims of the papacy stated so moderately as to be easily and clearly proved from accepted histories that are within the reach of our ministers and students." Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 3, Appendix A, p. 436.
55. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 19, 21.
56. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, p. 311.
57. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy," WDF 84-e, p. 3.
58. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 11.
59. Ibid., p. 12.
60. White, Great Controversy, 1888 ed., p. 266.
61. Ibid., 1911 ed., p. 266.
62. Ibid., 1888 ed., p. 439; 1911 ed. p. 439.
63. Prescott had been an Adventist academic for some time. "While president of Battle Creek College in the 1890s, Prescott had espoused the views in regard to inspiration of Professor Francois Gaussen, a Swiss theologian." Gaussen held a theory of verbal inspiration. It is not known whether Prescott still held this view when he prepared the suggested adjustments in 1910. See "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy," WDF 84-e, footnote, p. 3-4.
64. Ibid.
65. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy," Proposed change #12, WDF 84-e, p. 1.
66. See "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 edition of the Great Controversy, WDF 84-e, pp. 18-19, 29, 31.
67. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy, Proposed change #12, WDF 84-e, p. 8.
68. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy, Proposed change # 52, WDF 84-e, p. 18.
69. Ellen G. White, Colporteur Ministry, p. 128.
70. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 21.
71. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 Edition of the Great Controversy," WDF 84-e, p. 18.
72. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, pp. 334-335.
73. W.C. White quoted in Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, p. 335. op. cit. to DF83b, correspondence from W.C. White to A.G. Daniels, June 20, 1910.
74. Ibid., p. 307.
75. Ibid., pp. 310-311.
76. "Involvements," p. 13.
77. "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 edition of the Great Controversy, WDF 84-e, p. 23.

78. Ibid. When work was stopped on preparing the printing plates at the Press then located at Pacific Union College, suddenly a number of rumors sprouted into being. As W.C. White reported to Daniels, "Questions and suppositions and remarks come to mother from all quarters, and she will continue to be perplexed by them until the work is done." Willie White went on in the letter to point out that Daniels and Prescott had been singled out in some of these rumors as trying to bring their views into the new edition of the book. (See pp. 309-310).
79. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 3.
80. Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 32.
81. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 10.
82. Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 32, emphasis added.
83. _____, Desire of Ages, p. 459.
84. I propose here only that when we look at inspiration in the long term that those later inspired writings must harmonize with the earlier inspired writings, and that the fundamental harmony between the different inspired writings that became the Bible surely was a decisive evidence to those whom the Holy Spirit led to determine what was contained in the canon of the Bible by God's guidance.
85. White, Great Controversy, Introduction, pp. vi-x. I would urge those studying these things to read the entire Introduction written by Mrs. White. It would have been distracting to here reproduce all eight pages.
86. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 11.
87. Leroy E. Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, vol. IV, p. 62.
88. M'Corkle cited by L.E. Froom, The Prophetic faith of Our Fathers, vol. IV, p. 65.
89. Froom, p. 396.
90. Ibid., pp. 848-851.
91. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 10.
92. Ibid., p. 7.
93. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 10.
94. Ellen G. White, 1888 Materials, p. 1392.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, July 26, 1892.
98. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 2.
99. _____, EI#86, p. 1.
100. _____, Ibid., pp. 7, etc.
101. See Paulsen, p. 2-3, 8-9.
102. Bacchiocchi, EI#86, p. 27.
103. _____, EI#87, pp. 15-17.
104. White, Great Controversy, p. 52.
105. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 15.
106. Ibid., pp. 15-17.
107. Ibid., p. 17.
108. White, Great Controversy, p. 53.
109. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 18.
110. Ibid., p. 17.
111. Crisler quoted in "W.W. Prescott and the 1911 edition of the Great Controversy, WDF 84-e, p. 23.
112. White, Great Controversy, p. 65.

113. Jean Zurcher, "A Vindication of Ellen White as Historian," *Spectrum*, vol. 16, no. 3, August 1985, pp. 21-31, especially pp. 21-22.
114. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 10.
115. P. Gerard Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission, pp. 149-163.
116. Herbert Douglass, Messenger of the Lord, pp. 500-509, 554-569.
117. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, pp. 19-20.
118. _____, p. 7.
119. His actual wording is found in EI#87, p. 21.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915, p. 310.
125. Bacchiocchi, EI#87, p. 21.
126. _____, EI#86, p. 20; EI#87, p. 2.
127. _____, EI#87, p. 21.
128. Ibid., pp. 14, 21.
129. Ibid., p. 21.
130. Ellen G. White, Testimonies, vol. 4, p. 213.



Pastor **Larry Kirkpatrick** is an ordained minister of the gospel. Since 1994 he has served in the American Southwest as pastor to several churches. He received his BA in Religion from Southern Adventist University in 1994 and a Master of Divinity from Andrews University in 1999 with a specialization in Adventist Studies. While in Michigan he was employed by the General Conference at the White Estate's Berrien Springs branch office. Far surpassing in importance his scholastic preparation has been his immersion in the biblical and [Spirit of Prophecy materials](#). Presently he serves as Pastor of the [Mentone Church of Seventh-day Adventists](#), located near Loma Linda California. Larry is married to Pamela. The couple presently live in Highland California along with their two children, Etienne and Melinda.

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