

other authors has long been acknowledged by Seventh-day Adventists” is only an extension of the white lie. Although it is technically true that, as far back as the 1880s, the church has been righting a rear guard action concerning the use of others’ material in the name of God and Ellen, the declarations have always been made with defensiveness and quick justification.

William S. Peterson’s article in a *Spectrum* issue of 1971, for example, was to bring down upon him a chorus of spiritual invectives that, in the language of the truck driver or stevedore would curl the paint on any container at thirty paces. That Ellen had borrowed just was not so, it was said from that autumn issue until the 1980s the journal has carried continuing charges and counter charges, denials and counter denials that try to refute any suggestion that she would have incorporated anyone’s vocabulary or been influenced in any of her writing.³

Not until Neal C. Wilson, president of the General Conference, wrote the eighteen members of the special Glendale Committee set up to review the amount of certain findings about Ellen’s “borrowing” were the readers of *the Adventist Review* to learn that she had used the works of others for “descriptive, biographical, historical, spiritual, and scientific information.”⁴ As one member of the committee was to point out to Wilson, “That hardly seems to leave much except direct revelation. Is that the issue the panel is to decide?”⁵ Surely the personnel of the White Estate must have known all along that most of the church has been uniformed about the amount and extent of her “borrowing.”

At least a great many church scholars who have tried to pry loose White Estate historical material that would help in making

comparisons with others’ writings know they have received very little help and encouragement from those guarding the sacrosanct vault of the Estate. The policy of “selective revelation” (that is, the Estate selects what may be revealed) has had such a hold that only when members of the Clan pass from the scene may the church expect access to information that may reveal the truth. Time and again the men from that office, while riding the national circuit-which they do rather often to help quiet the restless natives-have had to meet the question of why the vault cannot be open to all researchers and information made available to friend and foe alike, and why picking and choosing is always left to the Clan Plan.

Notes:

1. Ellen C. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1870/1884), vol. 2, p. 5.
2. Robert W. Olson, “EGW’s Use of Uninspired Sources,” photocopied (Washington: EGW Estate, 9 November 1979), pp. 14, 7, 8.
3. William S. Peterson, “Ellen White’s Literary Indebtedness,” *Spectrum* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1971): 73-84. Since Peterson’s article, others have appeared in *Spectrum* each year since 1971.
4. Neal C. Wilson to Glendale Committee on EGW Sources, 8 January 1980.
5. Jerry Wiley to Neal C. Wilson, 14 January 1980



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Pamphlet 038

Ellen Gould White and Plagiarism

Dr. Fred Veltman

Chairman of the religion department of Pacific Union College, Dr. Fred Veltman, was asked by the Seventh-day Adventist church to analyze the charges of plagiarism by Ellen Gould White. They chose Dr Veltman, assumably because they thought he would be one person that could justify her use of others materials. After nearly eight years of study, Dr. Veltman’s released to Ministry Magazine a report of his findings. The whole report is available from the White estate, but we have obtained several key quotes for you to read from Ministry magazine from their December, 1990 issue.

“It is of first importance to note that Ellen White herself, not her literary assistants, composed the basic content of the *Desire of Ages* text. In doing so she was the one who took literary expressions (copied) from the works of other authors without giving them credit as her sources (plagiarism). Second, it should be recognized that Ellen White used the writings of others consciously and intentionally. ... Implicitly or explicitly, Ellen White and others speaking on her behalf did not admit to and even denied (lied) literary dependency (copying) on her part.” p. 11.

“The content of Ellen White’s commentary on the life and ministry of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, is for the most part derived (copied) rather than original. ... In practical terms, this conclusion declares that one is not able to recognize in Ellen White’s writings on the life of Christ any general category of content or catalog of ideas that is unique to her.” p. 12

“I must admit at the start that in my judgment this is the most serious problem to be faced in connection with Ellen White’s literary dependence (copying). It strikes at the heart of her honesty, her integrity, and therefore her trust-worthiness.” p. 14

Robert Olson of the White Estate is quoted on the Veltman report as followed:

I am totally satisfied with this study. No one could have done a better job—no one. He [Veltman] did it as a neutral person would have and not as an apologist. Ministry, Dec. 1990, p. 16

One person who has studied the literary dependence of Ellen Gould White said: “If done correctly, nearly every paragraph of *Desire of Ages* would need to be footnoted.” If you choose to read the works of Ellen Gould White, then you choose to read stolen material of others.

Report on the making of the “Desire of Ages”

If *Patriarchs and Prophets* was the cornerstone of Adventist theology, *The Desire of Ages* was the keystone in the arch of Adventist thinking and Christological views. In the preface of volume two (1877) of its forerunner, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, it was said:

“When the Publishers issued the first volume of this work, they felt that it supplied a want, long realized by the Christian world, in illuminating a subject, which is of great interest to the Christian mind, the relation of the son of God to the Father, and his position in Heaven, together with the fall of man and the Mediatorship of Christ between him and his Creator.”

In this second volume the author continues with renewed interest the subject of the

mission of Christ, as manifested by his Miracles and Teachings. The reader will find that this book furnishes invaluable aid in studying the lessons of Christ set forth in the Gospels. The author, as a religious writer and speaker, has labored for the public during more than twenty Years. Being aided in the study of the Scriptures, and her work as a religious teacher, by the *special enlightenment of the Spirit of God*, she is peculiarly qualified to present the facts of the Life and Ministry of Christ, in connection with the divine plan of human redemption, and to practically apply the lessons of Jesus to the simple duties of life [italics added].

One of the most pleasing features of this book is the plain and simple language with which the author clothes thoughts that glow with truth and beauty.¹

A lot of trouble and embarrassment would have been avoided in years to come if a few others than the “Spirit of God” had gotten some credit. Although the Scriptures do make it plain that every good and perfect gift comes from God, some of Ellen’s gifts of writing were found to have come through quite a few human sources. In the late 1970s Robert W. Olson, for the White Estate (which is always pushed to keep its readers and the church members up to date on such things), issued a rather late concession that Ellen had indeed been peeking at the work of other authors when she wrote *The Desire of Ages*:

“Ellen White’s indebtedness to other authors has long been acknowledged by Seventhday Adventists....

“The exact extent of Ellen White’s borrowings in *The Great Controversy* is not known....”

Studies by Raymond Cottrell and Walter Specht have shown that Ellen White borrowed about 2.6 percent of her words in *The Desire Of Ages*

from William Hanna’s *Life of Christ* ...

However, W. C. White and Marian Davis both mention other books on Christ’s life, which Ellen White used. It is also evident that she borrowed from some works not named by W. C. White or Miss Davis, such as John Harris’s *The Great Teacher*...

Ellen White’s literary borrowing was not limited to the three books discussed above...

Ellen White can hardly be called a “copyist” since she almost invariably rewrites, rephrases, and improves on the original author when she does use another’s material...

Concerning the writing of *The Desire of Ages* in particular, W. C. White states:

“Previous to her work of writing on the *Life of Christ* and during the time of her writing to some extent, she read from the works of Hanna, Fleetwood, Farrar, and Geikie. I never knew of her reading Edersheim. She occasionally referred to Andrews.”—W.C. White to L.E. Froom, January.

Comparison of *The Desire of Ages* with the various lives of Christ available in her day show that *she drew, more or less* [italics supplied] not only from the authors mentioned above by W. C. White, but from March, Harris, and others as well.²

Olson’s article, which may be one of the most revealing concessions to date by the White Estate, deserves detailed study. Had it been circulated, or even leaked, to the general public and the church at large (which it hasn’t as I write), this book might not have been written. Often only the “insider” gleaning so-called “top secret” information knows where to send for what-if he is privileged to know that such information exists at all.

To write or say “Ellen White’s indebtedness to