

Book Review

STEVE DAILY ON ELLEN G. WHITE

Daily, Steve. *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography. A Psychologist/Historian Examines a Religious Icon*. Conneaut Lake, PA: Page Publishing, 2020. 360 pp. Hardcover USD 31.95 / Paperback USD 21.95 / Kindle USD 8.99.

Steven Gerald Daily, more commonly known as Steven Daily or Steve Daily, was born in Santa Rosa, California. He grew up in an Adventist home and studied at Adventist institutions, such as Rio Lindo Adventist Academy, Pacific Union College, Loma Linda University, and Andrews University.¹ In 1985 he earned a DMin from Claremont School of Theology² and in 1991 a PhD in psychology from the United States International University, Campus San Diego (currently Alliant International University).³ Daily worked for thirty-five years in Adventist ministry, mostly as a university chaplain and campus pastor at Loma Linda University and La Sierra University (1980–2000). For five years he was a pastor of the Celebration Center Seventh-day Adventist Church in Redlands, California. In 2010 he was fired from the Adventist ministry. He is currently the senior pastor of the Graceway Community Church in Riverside, California, and has become one of the most outspoken anti-Ellen-White and anti-Adventist critics.

In 1985, while still working at La Sierra University, Daily started attending John Wimber's Vineyard Church,⁴ a non-Adventist charismatic congregation that he considered "a much healthier expression of Christianity" than Adventism, and studying "charismatic religious experience" (12, 193).⁵ From his perspective, he could have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church at that time but, in his own words, "the Lord convinced me to stay in Adventism until it rejected me" (12). He says he has "felt great relief and joy since leaving Adventist subculture," where Ellen White supposedly had "learned over a lifetime how to manipulate, control, and abuse others in the name of God" (12–13). This personal assertion suggests that he believes leaving Adventism is the best way to be relieved from such immoral influences.

Over the years, Daily dealt with White in several of his writings. For example, in his MA in history thesis, entitled "How Readest Thou" (1982), he affirmed, "Concerning her own writings, Ellen White never claimed infallibility[,] much less to be an infallible interpreter of Scripture. She made it clear that her writings were to be subservient to the Bible."⁶ In his book *The Essence of Adventism* (1985), he explained in very positive terms that much of her ministry was devoted to "humbly rebuke sin and call for repentance," and that "she often agonized and wept over this responsibility." And more,

Like all true prophets Ellen White was the first to admit that she was a humble sinner, who made many mistakes, and fell far short of God's ideal in Christ. She confessed, "I do not claim infallibility, or perfection of Christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my life. Had I followed my [S]aviour more closely, I should not have to mourn so much my unlikeness to His dear image[!]" (Letter 27, 1876). . . . Although she had every opportunity to realize great personal gain from her prominent position, at the expense of the Adventist church, this was never a temptation for Ellen White. She did not accumulate

¹ See "Steve Daily," Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/stevengdailyphd> (accessed April 25, 2021).

² Steven Daily, "The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth Century America" (DMin project, Claremont School of Theology, 1985).

³ Steven Gerald Daily, "Adventist Adolescents and Addiction: Substance Use/Abuse in an Adventist Population and Its Relationship to Religion, Family, Self-Perception, and Deviant Behavior" (PhD diss., United States International University, Campus San Diego, 1991).

⁴ On John Wimber and the Vineyard Church, see "John Wimber," Vineyard USA, <https://vineyardusa.org/about/john-wimber/> (accessed April 25, 2021).

⁵ All one-, two-, and three-digit numbers in parentheses refer to specific pages in Steve Daily's *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography*, and all four-digit numbers indicate years.

⁶ Steven G. Daily, "How Readest Thou. The Higher Criticism Debate in Protestant America and Its Relationship to Seventh-day Adventism and the Writings of Ellen White, 1885–1925" (MA thesis, Loma Linda University, 1982), 124.

significant personal wealth, but invested the money she made from royalties, etc. back into the movement. She committed her life to building up the church in every possible way. . . . Thousands have accepted Christ as the result of her efforts. . . . In this writer's opinion she should be included with the faithful of Hebrews 11 of whom the world was not worthy. . . . Christ was constantly uplifted in the actions and writings of Ellen White. Two of her bestselling books, *Steps to Christ*, and *Desire of Ages*, focus completely on Jesus. She proclaimed that Christ was the center of scripture, doctrine, faith, hope, goodness, the SDA message, and the basis of all true religion. Those who wished to use her writings as an authori[ta]tive adjunct to the word of God in Christ were severely rebuked by Ellen White in a speech she made at the 1901 General Conference.⁷

These appreciative statements appeared also in Daily's more widely known book *Adventism for a New Generation* (1993).⁸

Meanwhile, Daily began speaking more emphatically for social justice and sexual equality in regard to women's ordination. In his DMin project "The Irony of Adventism" (1985), he expressed his frustration that even after the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights,⁹ Seventh-day Adventists continued opposing those rights by "the ironic elevation of a single woman [Ellen White], combined with a simultaneous subordination of women in general."¹⁰ He believed that

Pauline passages, which had traditionally been used to promote the subordination of wives and other women, were generally either supported or left unchallenged in the writings of Ellen White. Not only did she strongly subscribe to Paul's declaration that the husband was head over the wife, but condemned any action on the part of women that detracted from the husbands "dignified position."¹¹

Even so, Daily still recognized that White was "both a visionary and a recipient of the prophetic gift."¹²

Steve Daily's critical stance towards White became more evident in his two-volume spiral-bound work *The Prophetic Rift* (2007 and 2009).¹³ Much in line with Wayne A. Grudem,¹⁴ Daily argued for "a huge difference" between the Old Testament prophets, who negatively rebuked kings and high priests alike, and the New Testament ones, who positively edified, exhorted, encouraged, and comforted God's people. For him, "by confusing these roles, Adventism imposed on Ellen White an Old Testament role that was inappropriate for her and for the body as a whole, and she in turn imposed this role on herself."¹⁵ Throughout these two volumes, Daily aligned himself with the major critics of White but remained strangely silent about D. M. Canright. Daily declared of himself, "As one who has been attacked by both the right and the left in Adventism, I want to make my case in favor of pluralism."¹⁶ But what kind of "pluralism" was he actually arguing for? His later writings confirm that it was, among other things, a "pluralism" that implied the inclusion of the more "reliable" critics of White and the exclusion of her "biased" apologists.

One would imagine that *The Prophetic Rift* was already the highpoint of Daily's criticisms against White. But in his book *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography*, Daily leaves aside both the reliability of a historian and the ethical stand of a psychologist to become utterly judgmental of the already long-deceased White. Reading this book, the most natural assumption would be that it was produced "out of spite or bitterness against the Adventist Church," even though the author emphatically denies it (12). Yet, such a denial becomes doubtful in light of the repeated and strong anti-Ellen-White and anti-Adventism spirit that permeates the whole book. It is noteworthy that the author even subtly tries to transfer to God his own responsibility for the publication of his book. He says, "I have prayed that if my own attempt at

⁷ Steve Daily, *The Essence of Adventism: An Introduction to Seventh-day Adventism* (Riverside, CA: Chaplain's Office, Loma Linda University, 1985), 199–202.

⁸ Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland, OR: Better Living, 1993), 192–193.

⁹ Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Daily, "The Irony of Adventism," viii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹² *Ibid.*, vi.

¹³ Steve Daily, *The Prophetic Rift: How Adventism Has Historically Misunderstood and Misapplied the Prophetic Gift, 1840–1900* (Portland, OR: Better Living, 2007); and Daily, *The Prophetic Rift II: How Adventism Has Historically Misunderstood and Misapplied the Prophetic Gift, 1900–2000* (Portland, OR: Better Living, 2009).

¹⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 43–54; and Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 21–49.

¹⁵ Daily, *The Prophetic Rift*, x–xi.

¹⁶ Daily, *The Prophetic Rift II*, 137.

psychobiography provided in this book will do more harm than good, God will not allow it to be completed or published” (13). So, the reader is induced to believe that, since God did not stop its publication, He actually approved it.

As a well-accepted pattern, reliable authors present first the evidences for or against a given issue and then their conclusions based on those evidences. But Daily reverses this pattern and already concludes in his introduction that “the matriarch of Adventism” was guilty of “promoting a lie and a fraud” (10), that “her life contained patterns of premeditated fraud and deception,” as well as “patterns of narcissism and high-functioning sociopathy,” and that she “may have been one of the most successful con artists in history” (11).¹⁷ These are not mere hypotheses to be proven or assumptions to be taken into consideration during the reading of the book. They are indeed value judgments—colored with countless labels and accusations—that set the tone for the whole discussion that follows, in which the author tries to corroborate his well-defined and predetermined conclusions.

The main content of the book is divided into fourteen chapters, each accusing White from various perspectives. Due to the shortness of this review, only a few of them will be mentioned. Chapter 1 claims, for instance, that “prevarication” was the repeated pattern of her life (23). In chapter 2, White’s twin sister Elizabeth is referred to as a balanced person, while Ellen is portrayed as someone who would “even outdo the Pharisees” in being blind to her own “ambition, control, dishonesty, and need for status, under the guise of doing God’s will” (33). Chapter 3 affirms that White “actually benefitted from the rock injury she experienced in her youth” to receive social and emotional attention and sympathy (38–39) and that “many of Ellen’s visions, if not all, were conveniently invented” (40). In chapter 4, she is diagnosed as having suffered from “cognitive dissonance and true-believer syndrome” (51), for “deliberately lying” or at least being “psychologically deluded” (57), and for being “the primary source of pathology for the early Sabbatarian Adventists” (60). In chapter 5, she is labeled as a hypocrite who coped with her own fears by building “a following of others who were controlled by fear” (74). In chapter 6, her entire life is regarded as “one huge double bind” (84), always appealing “to ‘visions’ or divine guidance to put her detractors or enemies in their place” (87). In chapter 7, she is described as having shifted “from charismania to charisphobia” (91) and having “embraced the heresy of perfectionism and projected its condemnations on to God” (99). In chapter 8, she is diagnosed as having suffered from “grandiose delusions” and having used “a false humility, designed to cover a lifetime pattern of dishonesty, fraud, God delusion and ‘holy’ plagiarism” (114–115). In chapter 9, she is qualified as a fraudulent person who developed “a premeditated plan that intentionally plots, deceives, manipulates, defrauds, and grossly misrepresents God to others, in order to gain financial and political clout” (122) and as “one of the most successful con artists to ever lead a movement” (135). Chapter 10 portrays her as an extremely jealous prophetic schizophrenic (141, 145–146) whose “religious schizophrenia destroyed many people over the years” (144). Chapter 11 speaks of her as “a religious bully, who would strike fear in those who threatened her or question her, through her prophetic trump card” (156–157), and of being “a seer into the personal lives and faults of others” (173). In chapter 12, she is qualified as “the most successful plagiarist and con artist of all time” (188) and “a political wolf in sheep’s clothing” (215). Chapter 13 portrays her as an arrogant person with a “matriarchal self” who “went out of her way to try to present herself as the humble servant and instrument of God” (250–251). Finally, in chapter 14, she is labeled as “a globe-trotter who not only traveled to Europe and Australia, but also all over the United States” (282). But this is not all, for the author even claims that there are “fifty shades of pathology that are fascinating to explore in light of her creative malady” (46).

From my reading of Daily’s book (and perhaps my mind is betraying me now), I recall having seen only one positive statement about White, where he denies any suggestion from his part that the three cofounders of Adventism (including Ellen) were “primarily greedy or self-seeking in their leadership” (82). But just three paragraphs later, he accuses them of exercising a leadership that was of a “self-serving nature” (83). When you start reading any of his many stories about her, you already know the predictable outcome: she was always on the wrong side of the issues involved, and whenever she was on the right side, it was only for political reasons and financial advantages. Yet, when I read his version of the story of Margaret W. Rowen, who claimed to be the prophetic successor of White, I had no idea how he would end it. But, in keeping with his negative pattern, he suggests White never named or supported any successor

¹⁷ A “con artist” is “a person who deceives other people by making them believe something false or making them give money away” (Cambridge Dictionary Online, s.v. “con artist,” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/con-artist> [accessed April 25, 2021]).

because she “knew deep down that her gift was not a legitimate gift from God, as she claimed,” and because she wanted the enormous incomes from her books to “continue to flow to her family” (278). Taking seriously Daily’s endless charges against White, one could imagine that she was perhaps the worst and most hypocritical person who ever existed.

But what led Daily to change his earlier positive statements about White and write this psychobiography of her that has become so ultra-critical and negative? Daily explains that back in 1984 he came across George Pickering’s book *Creative Malady* (1974)¹⁸ and deeply regretted that the author did not include a psychobiography of White (37–38). So, one could easily assume that Daily is just doing now what Pickering could have done then. However, in the introduction, Daily explains that this book is not just “a classic psychobiography” combining history and psychology.¹⁹ In his own words, “I have also sprinkled some theology and personal reflection throughout the book to make it my own unusual blend” (9–10). This “unusual blend” ends up being not an objective critical analysis of White, but rather a new way of vindicating the criticisms raised against her while at the same time disregarding all responses to those criticisms.

Even so, the author disclaims any bitterness against White. He says, “Again, it is not my purpose to try to label Ellen White with a postmortem diagnosis” (113), and “Here again, it is not my intention to diagnose the prophetess” (258). He even claims, “I do not seek to set myself up as a judge over the prophetess” (297). But one may wonder, why does he deny what he is doing so emphatically throughout his book? As incongruent as it may sound, he even concludes his whole exposition saying, “As I bring this book to a close, it is my hope and prayer that it has been interesting, informative, and helpful in terms of giving insights into how we can better treat each other as human beings” (301). Regardless of his good intentions, it is hard to see how labeling, accusing, and being judgmental of others’ motives (as he has done extensively) can help us to “better treat each other.”

Yet how can we explain the contrast between Daily’s previous pro-Allen-White position and his present anti-Allen-White stand? Daily points to the publication on the internet of “new material I have found” “from suppressed areas of the [White Estate] vault (which I wasn’t even allowed to see as a historian)” (11). He even suggests, “The evidence used to support the validity of these criticisms was very convincing then [when White was still alive], and is even more overwhelmingly today, given the new research that has come to light” (247). But this question requires a more convincing answer than just the access to new historical information (105, 294). White’s unpublished writings to which he refers have been available for study by historians and researchers at E. G. White Estate Research Centers (including the White Estate Branch Office at Loma Linda University) long before they were made available publicly on the internet. Further, the major criticisms against White—D. M. Canright (1889, 1919),²⁰ R. L. Numbers (1976, 1992),²¹ W. T. Rea (1982),²² and a few others—were already available when Daily published his *Adventism for a New Generation* (1993), several of which he had cited in his MA thesis “How Readest Thou.” Could it be that what really happened was a radical change of his own perspective, in which all the critics of White became reliable sources of information (105) and all Adventist responses to those critics were discarded as unreliable excuses?

The author claims to have used “325 references” throughout his book (301). Such a prolific number can be a strength if the presuppositions are well in place and the sources fairly reflect the available data; otherwise it becomes just another way of impressing the not-so-well-informed reader. Unfortunately, Daily is very selective in the use of sources, placing much emphasis on those that confirm his views and simply ignoring those that disagree with him. For example, Francis D. Nichol’s classic *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (1951)²³ is referred to just once but as a “famous

¹⁸ George Pickering, *Creative Malady: Illness in the Lives and Minds of Charles Darwin, Florence Nightingale, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹⁹ A classic “psychobiography” is a biography written from a psychodynamic or psychoanalytic focus on such psychological factors as childhood traumas and unconscious motives. With some roots in ancient hagiography, this kind of assessment began with the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and his psychoanalysis of Leonardo da Vinci’s childhood. Since the 1990s, psychobiographic analyses have followed a more interdisciplinary approach, integrating the psychoanalytical and personological traditions with narrative perspectives. See William Todd Schultz, ed., *Handbook of Psychobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Claude-Hélène Mayer and Zoltan Kovary, eds., *New Trends in Psychobiography* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019).

²⁰ D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of that Faith*, 2nd ed. (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1889); Canright, *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co., 1919).

²¹ Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform*, rev. and enl. ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

²² Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M & R Publications, 1982).

²³ Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951).

apologist work” with biased information (265, 357 [n. 295]). Several more recent books that respond to the very same issues raised by Daily are not even critically mentioned.²⁴ The insightful *Ellen G. White Issues Symposium* series, published yearly since 2005 by the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University, is completely ignored.²⁵ More surprising is the fact that the outstanding *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013),²⁶ considered “the most important reference work produced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a half century,”²⁷ is mentioned just once among other sources in an endnote (340 [n. 39]). One would not expect Daily to quote all these sources or to necessarily agree with their perspectives; but to simply ignore them throughout the book suggests a bias, especially from someone who considers himself a specialist in Ellen White (172).

Similar omissions with inaccuracies can be detected in the way Steve Daily handles primary sources. For example, after suggesting that White fled to Australia largely because of her problems with plagiarism, he states that “on March 20, 1889, the first public charge or accusation of plagiarism against Ellen White to appear in the press was published in the *Healdsburg Enterprise*” and that it was a “five-page article” (186–187).²⁸ Daily refers to this as “the first public charge” without mentioning that it was D. M. Canright who was the mentor of all these charges, which he had already raised in his lectures in the Truitt’s Theater, Healdsburg, California (February 9–17, 1889) and which were already being advocated by him and the Pastors’ Union of Healdsburg in that newspaper.²⁹ The March 20 article was merely

²⁴ E.g., John J. Robertson, *The White Truth* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1981); Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, American University Studies, Series VII – Theology and Religion 12 (New York: Peter Lang, 1985); Jerry A. Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship Between the Prophet and Her Son*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 19 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993); Rolando Rizzo, *L’eredità di un profeta* (Florence: Villa Aurora – Istituto avventista di cultura biblica, 2001); Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics: A Striking New Analysis Refutes the Charges that Ellen G. White “Borrowed” the Health Message* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005); E. Marcella Anderson King and Kevin L. Morgan, *More Than Works: A Study of Inspiration and Ellen White’s Use of Sources in The Desire of Ages* (Millers Creek, NC: Honor Him Publishers, 2009); William Fagal, *101 Questions About Ellen White and Her Writings* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010); Jud Lake, *Ellen White Under Fire* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010); Kevin L. Morgan, *White Lie Soap: For Removal of Lingered Stains on Ellen White’s Integrity as an Inspired Writer* (Millers Creek, NC: Honor Him Publishers, 2013); Merlin D. Burt, ed., *Understanding Ellen White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015); Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond, eds., *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015); Theodore N. Levterov, *Accepting Ellen White: Early Seventh-day Adventists and the Gift of Prophecy Dilemma* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016); Jean Carlos Zukowski, Adolfo S. Suárez, and Reinaldo W. Siqueira, eds., *Ellen G. White: Seu impacto hoje. Artigos teológicos apresentados no XI Simpósio Bíblico-Teológico Sul-Americano* (Engenheiro Coelho, Brazil: Unaspress, 2017); Anna Galeniece, ed., *The Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Church* (Nairobi: Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, Adventist University of Africa, 2017); Anna M. Galeniece and Super Moesi, eds., *The Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and Contemporary Issues* (Pretoria: Ellen G. White Research Centre, 2019); and Denis Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History* (St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2019).

²⁵ *Ellen White and Current Issues Symposium* (renamed in 2012 to *Ellen White Issues Symposium*), vol. 1 (2005); vol. 2 (2006); vol. 3 (2007); vol. 4 (2008); vol. 5 (2009); vol. 6 (2010); vol. 7 (2011); vol. 8 (2012); vol. 9 (2013); vol. 10 (2014); vol. 11 (replaced by the book *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History* [2015], listed in n. 21); vol. 12 (2016); vol. 13 (2017).

²⁶ Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013).

²⁷ George R. Knight, quoted in the *Encyclopedia* advertisement, *Ministry*, December 2013, 2.

²⁸ Cf. Ron Graybill, “D. M. Canright in Healdsburg, 1889: The Genesis of the Plagiarism Charge,” *Insight*, October 21, 1980, 7–10; Tim Poirier, “Ellen White and Sources: The Plagiarism Debate,” in *Understanding Ellen White*, ed. Merlin D. Burt (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 145–165; Poirier, “Ellen White and Sources: The Plagiarism Debate—125 Years Later,” <https://whiteestate.org/about/issues/egw-sources/> (accessed April 25, 2021).

²⁹ See, e.g., Committee, “Seventh Day Adventism Renounced,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, January 9, 1889, 2; E. J. Waggoner, “Eld. D. M. Canright. His Opinion of Mrs. White and the Adventist People,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, January 23, 1889, 2; Committee, “Rev. D. M. Canright,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, January 23, 1889, 3; Committee, “Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, January 30, 1889, 2; Committee, “Seventh Day Adventism Renounced,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 6, 1889, 2; D. M. Canright, “Reply to Elder Waggoner,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 13, 1889, 2; “Adventism Renounced by Elder D. M. Canright,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 13, 1889, 3; J. N. Loughborough, “Ready for a Debate,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 13, 1889, 3; “Adventism Renounced by Eld. D. M. Canright,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 20, 1889, 1, 3; “The Minutes,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 20, 1889, 2; H. B. McBride, et.al., “Lectures on Seventh Day Adventism by Rev. D. M. Canright,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 20, 1889, 2; “A Partial Review of D. M. Canright’s Discourses on Mistakes of Adventists. By Eld. W. M. Healey at S. D. Adventist Church, Healdsburg, Cal. Feb. 18, 1889,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 27, 1889, 2; E. J. Waggoner, “Waggoner’s Reply,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, February 27, 1889, 3; “Some of Mrs. White’s Revelations,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 6, 1889, 1; W. E. Towson, “An Expression of Esteem,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 6, 1889, 2; “Mrs. White on Herod,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 6, 1889, 2; John N. Bailhache and H. B. McBride, “The Committee Report,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 6, 1889, 2; [336 signatures], “A Testimonial to Eld. Canright,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 6, 1889, 3; Moses, “Chronicles,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 13, 1889, 1; L., “False Charges Refuted,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 13, 1889, 2; and L. N. Nowbridge, “A Testimonial Letter,” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 13, 1889, 3. Some of these articles provide the name of the author, other ones are signed as “Committee,” and other ones are anonymous. The spelling of “Day” in uppercase appears in the originals.

another short article signed by the “Pastors’ Union.”³⁰ And more, how could that two-column article become a “five-page article” if the newspaper had only four pages? Nor should we overlook the fact that almost two years earlier, in 1887, Canright had already raised similar public accusations in the *Michigan Christian Advocate*.³¹ This lack of historical precision and historical reliability clouds much of Daily’s research.

Unfortunately, this historical inaccuracy is not an exception. Elsewhere, Daily affirms, “It is no wonder that Adventists do not publish or reference Ellen’s will in their literature, for it is just another embarrassment” (285). This false statement is easily disclaimed by the facts. The “Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White” was published entirely in F. D. Nichol’s *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*³² and H. E. Douglass’ *Messenger of the Lord* (1998),³³ and partially in A. L. White’s *Ellen G. White* (1982).³⁴ Daily cannot claim ignorance about this matter, because he lists these three sources in the bibliography of his book (312, 316, 320). Furthermore, the complete will is available on the White Estate’s website as well as in the Adventist Digital Library.³⁵ Similar carelessness is revealed when Daily misleadingly makes Ellen White the author of a book edited by James White and suggests that she borrowed (and even “attributed to God”) what James White simply reprinted from another properly identified author (94, 342 [n. 62]).³⁶

Surprising as it may sound, Daily has no difficulty in making Ellen White to advocate exactly what she was condemning. In 1850 Joseph Bates published a sixteen-page pamphlet entitled *An Explanation of the Typical and Anti-Typical Sanctuary, by the Scriptures*, suggesting that Christ would return “seven years” after 1844—that is, in October 1851.³⁷ In November 1850, White warned, “The Lord showed me that time had not been a test since 1844, and that time will never again be a test.”³⁸ In July 1851, she stated in the same tone, “The Lord has shown me that the message of the third angel must go, . . . and that it should not be hung on time; for time will never be a test again. . . . I saw that some were making everything bend to the time of this next fall—that is, making their calculations in reference to that time.”³⁹ Nonetheless, Daily repeatedly speaks of White as the great promoter of this theory and even as having been shamefully disappointed by it (51–53, 58, 64, 66, 69, 80, 82, 85, 86, 91, 101, 105, 119, 128–129, 142).

One of the most recurrent themes of the book is White as a plagiarist. After qualifying her as “the most successful plagiarist and con artist of all time” (188), he asserts, “The reality was that if proper attribution had occurred, there would have been nothing significant contributed by the author. Ellen was taking virtually all of her history, theology, thoughts, and other content from other authors without attribution” (189). For the sake of record, in 1986 the Ellen G. White Estate produced an important document entitled, “Ellen White’s Literary Sources: How Much Borrowing Is There?” This document has been updated over the years to reflect known literary borrowings by White identified by both her supporters and her critics.⁴⁰ This document demonstrates a much lower percentages of borrowing than Steve Daily claims. His conclusions do not reflect the latest available research on this question.

Steve Daily not only labels White and her husband but also those who do not see things from his perspective and who disagree with his conclusions. He states in unambiguous terms, “Any fair-minded person who is exposed to the evidence is forced to conclude that Ellen was guilty of illegal acts, immoral acts, lying, deception, and fraud, along with some serious psychological pathology” (112). In other words, if you do not agree with this assessment, you are most likely not a “fair-minded person.” Those who accept her prophetic gift are labeled as “disciples blindly following” her

³⁰ Pastors’ Union, “Is Mrs. E. G. White a Plagiarist?” *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 20, 1889, 1.

³¹ D. M. Canright, “Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced,” thirteen-part series in *Michigan Christian Advocate*: July 16, 1887, 2; July 30, 1887, 2; August 6, 1887, 2; August 13, 1887, 2; August 20, 1887, 2; August 27, 1887, 2; September 3, 1887, 2–3; September 10, 1887, 2; September 17, 1887, 2; September 24, 1887, 2; October 1, 1887, 2; October 8, 1887, 2; October 15, 1887, 2.

³² Nichol, 674–678 (appendix Q).

³³ Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 569–572 (appendix N).

³⁴ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 6 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981–1986), 6:453–459 (appendix B).

³⁵ “Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Ellen G. White” (1912), <https://ellenwhite.org/media/document/7574> (accessed May 3, 2021) and <https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/adl%3A22250984> (uploaded June 1, 2018).

³⁶ James White, ed., *A Solemn Appeal Relative to Solitary Vice, and the Abuses and Excesses of the Marriage Relation* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870), 200. On p. 181, James White identifies pp. 181–272 of this book as extracted from O. S. Fowler’s “Amativeness.”

³⁷ Joseph Bates, *An Explanation of the Typical and Anti-typical Sanctuary, by the Scriptures* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1850), 10–11. Cf. George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 156–157.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth*, November 1850, 87.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren,” *Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald* Extra, July 21, 1851, 4.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White Estate, “Ellen White’s Literary Sources: How Much Borrowing Is There?” (1986, updated October 7, 2019), <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-parallel-html/> (accessed April 25, 2021).

(113), and those who try to justify her statements are regarded as trying “to put blinders on where their religious icon is concerned” (125). For him, it seems not to be an ethical problem to insinuate that people who accept White’s prophetic gift are lower-class con artists following “the most successful con artist in history” (261). Those who try to defend White from his criticisms are already labeled as “hard-core apologists (contortionists)” (262).

If Daily’s arguments are as convincing and conclusive as he proposes they are, they should fairly reflect the available evidence. But as has been shown, this unfortunately is not always the case. Is that the reason why he needs to use so much labeling in his arguments? Why does he not simply present his case and then allow the readers to evaluate its validity? His rhetorical techniques seem manipulative and unfair. This same style was not used (at least to this extent) in his previous books. Others may even wonder if this is the typical language of psychobiography. Not necessarily. William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White point out, “When you overstate, readers will be instantly on guard, and everything that has preceded your overstatement as well as everything that follows it will be suspect in their minds because they have lost confidence in your judgment or your poise.”⁴¹

Daily wants “the reader [to] draw his or her own conclusions” (258), and even adds, “I strongly encourage the reader to carefully evaluate this material and make your own judgment. . . . My prayer is that you will weigh the evidence for yourselves, and draw your own conclusions” (301). But these final concessions are preceded by continuous attempts to persuade the readers to see things from his perspective. This is evident in the little quizzes (questions) at the end of each chapter, in which the answer is already suggested based on his own conclusions. For example, at the end of the introduction he asks, “After reading this book, where would you put Ellen White on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being healthy religion?” (14). At the end of chapter 14, he asks, “What is more disturbing, the fraud and plagiarism of Ellen White, or the continuing cover-up of this fraud and plagiarism by SDA leaders who orchestrated the death of prophecy?” (296).

Daily’s book is not just a mere attempt to discredit the character and prophetic ministry of White. It is indeed an appeal for Adventists to reject all their “cultic” doctrines (including the sanctuary, the investigative judgment, the law and the Sabbath, the dead sleep, etc.) and to experience the “relief and joy” felt by Daily after “leaving Adventist subculture” (12, 193) and by Herbert Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God after deciding in 1997 “to shed its Old Covenant and cultic teachings and embrace mainline orthodox Christianity” (294–295).⁴²

By continually overstating and twisting the historical facts, one wonders if the book perhaps reveals more about Daily than about White. Too often “our philosophy becomes the history of our own heart and life; and according to what we ourselves are, do we conceive of man and his vocation.”⁴³ After reading this book, one ends up with the unavoidable question: to what extent has Daily’s psychobiography been conditioned by his own personal frustrations with White and the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Such a negative portrayal of White as he provides is disclaimed by the results of Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., with more than 8,200 Seventh-day Adventists.⁴⁴ This empirical study revealed that those who read White have a much stronger relationship with Jesus, assurance of salvation, personal Bible study, family worship, etc. Thus, as well expressed in Francis D. Nichol’s ironic words,

if such mental illness as Mrs. White is supposed to have suffered from will produce a life of sacrificial service and ardor, of far mission planning, of counsel to holy living and high standards, of selfless love for the needy, and all the other Christian graces that radiated from her life, then we would say solemnly, God give us more mentally maladjusted people.⁴⁵

The issues raised by Daily in his book are not new and have been addressed in previous publications.⁴⁶ Even so, it might be interesting to more closely compare the out-of-Adventism spiritual journeys of both Canright and Daily, paralleling Canright’s *The Life of Ellen G. White* (1919) and Daily’s *Ellen White: A Psychobiography*, and exploring their

⁴¹ William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (London: Pearson, 2009), 73.

⁴² Cf. William G. Johnsson, “A Church Self-Destructs,” *Adventist Review*, March 14, 1996, 4; Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Lessons From a Church Meltdown,” *Adventist Review*, April 1996, 25–28; and Kevin Eckstrom, “Worldwide Church of God Changes Name,” *Adventist Review*, April 24, 2009, <https://www.adventistreview.org/archive-2554> (accessed on April 25, 2021).

⁴³ Johann G. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. William Smith (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1931), 146.

⁴⁴ Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., “Who Reads Ellen White?” *Ministry*, October 1982, 10–12.

⁴⁵ Nichol, 50.

⁴⁶ See nn. 23–26, above.

levels of historical reliability⁴⁷ and rhetorical techniques.⁴⁸ But such assessments should always be ethically and legally responsible,⁴⁹ taking into consideration Christ's warning against judging the inner motives of others (Matt 7:1).

One should read and apply the writings of White first himself or herself before applying them to others. She declares,

Do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them. . . . We cannot read the heart. Ourselves faulty, we are not qualified to sit in judgment upon others. Finite men can judge only from outward appearance. To Him alone who knows the secret springs of action, and who deals tenderly and compassionately, is it given to decide the case of every soul.⁵⁰

You may be true to principle, you may be just, honest, and religious; but with it all you must cultivate true tenderness of heart, kindness, and courtesy. If a person is in error, be the more kind to him; if you are not courteous, you may drive him away from Christ. Let every word you speak, even the tones of your voice, express your interest in, and sympathy for, the souls that are in peril. If you are harsh, denunciatory, and impatient with them, you are doing the work of the enemy.⁵¹

Since we cannot read the heart of another, let us beware of ascribing wrong motives to any man, lest we find ourselves involved in guilt similar to that of Miriam—condemning those whom the Lord is teaching and guiding—and thus bring upon ourselves the rebuke of God.⁵²

Throughout the book there is a pervasive negative and even destructive spirit toward White that is voiced in a rather tendentious and biased manner. Even conflicting ideas and concepts should be discussed without becoming so judgmental. Unfortunately, this is not the case in this book. Furthermore, there is a repeated pattern discernable where historical evidence is not accurately dealt with or opposing opinions and alternative interpretations are not fairly presented or even listed. This is not good scholarship and puts a dark shadow over the credibility of the entire book. In this sense the book by Steve Daily reflects not the truth about Ellen White, but rather the truthiness⁵³ of his thinking.

Alberto R. Timm, Ph.D.
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⁴⁷ A critical analysis of the level of historical reliability could be done in light of David Hackett Fischer's *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logica of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

⁴⁸ Helpful to assess the rhetorical techniques of oral or written discourses is the classic work by Chaïm Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969). See also Timothy Borchers and Heather Hundley, *Rhetorical Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2018).

⁴⁹ Joseph G. Ponterrotto and Jason D. Reynolds, "Ethical and Legal Considerations in Psychobiography," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 5 (2017): 446–458.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1955), 124.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 150.

⁵² Ellen G. White, "'Judge Not,'" *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1892, 294.

⁵³ "Truthiness" is the "truthful or seemingly truthful quality that is claimed for something not because of supporting facts or evidence but because of a feeling that it is true or a desire for it to be true" (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "truthiness," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/truthiness> [accessed April 25, 2021]).