

# The Church's Prophetic Prism

## Helping Students Find Meaning in the Writings of Ellen G. White

By Joe Engelkemier

**A** young Waldensian "student missionary" picked up a stone and held it toward his judges. "It will be as easy for you to squeeze water from this stone," he told them, "as to get me to give up my hope in Jesus." He sang one of the psalms of David as he went to his death.

Today the severest test youth face is not martyrdom. Very often it is peer pressure. When students from your classes face pressure from other youth, do they stand firm? On a loyalty-to-Christ scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the average Seventh-day Adventist young person of today?

### An Abundance of Help

Never in the history of the Great Controversy have a people had so much help in the training of their children and youth. We have the Bible and a clear understanding of its doctrines. We have the records of history and God's dealings with all the nations and religious movements of the past. And we now have in print more than 80 books that contain the Spirit-filled guidance given through Ellen White.

In this article our focus is primarily on the Ellen G. White books. Do the children and youth in your classes realize how much help these 80 books contain? The

following paragraph suggests a way you can help them see the relationship between the Bible and the Ellen White books, and at the same time impress upon them the abundant help found in these books:

I took the precious Bible and surrounded it with the several *Testimonies for the Church*, given for the people of God. Here, said I, the cases of nearly all are met. The sins they are to shun are pointed out. The counsel that they desire can be found here, given for other cases situated similarly to themselves. God has been pleased to give you line upon line and precept upon precept.<sup>1</sup>

I like to expand the above description to include all 80-plus Ellen White books currently in print. I first divide the books into such groups as the Conflict of the Ages set, health books, education books, family life books, the *Testimonies*, morning watch books, books that deal with Christian service, *Review* and *Signs* reprints, et cetera. Next, I place these groups between bookends in a semicircle on a large desk or table with the Bible in the center. I then explain the relationship between these books and the Bible. To do this, I secure a road atlas and a Mt. Whitney trail map. I ask students to imagine that they live in Richmond, Virginia, and that they have decided to make a trip out west to climb Mount Whitney. I tell them:

"This atlas contains all you need to know to get to Mount Whitney. Once you arrive at Whitney Portal, however, there's another map that

will be helpful. That's a trail map detailing the route up Mount Whitney. It will give details not found in your atlas.

"The Bible is our comprehensive road map. It will take us safely right down to the close of time. Once there, however, a more detailed local trail map could be very helpful.

"Revelation 13, for example, devotes eight verses to the United States in prophecy (verses 11-18). These eight verses help us to identify the United States and reveal the crisis that will come to God's people when governments, first in the United States and then elsewhere, pass laws that forbid them to buy or sell.

"*The Great Controversy*, on the other hand, contains several pages about the United States in prophecy and dozens of pages about the time of trouble and other closing events in Earth's history. While these added details are not absolutely essential, they help us see more clearly what to expect and how to prepare for final events."

I further illustrate the above relationship with two or three additional examples. I mention the health books and say:

"Although the principles of healthful living are clearly given in Scripture, books like *The Ministry of Healing* and *Counsels on Health* give hundreds of details that can help us apply these basic principles to daily life."

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The books about family life and various other groups can be presented as possessing a similar relationship to the Bible.

I then briefly describe each group of books and, if time permits, I read an interesting sentence or two from a selected health book, a family life book, a morning watch book, et cetera.

### Personal Study Helps

In my personal study of these books, I generally underline or mark ideas that are helpful or reveal a new insight. As I underline, I select statements I especially want to remember, and write page references and key words on the inside front and back covers. Here are two examples from my personal copy of *In Heavenly Places*:

P. 71—Educate yourself to have unlimited confidence in God.

P. 227—If you are right with God today, you are ready if He

should come today.<sup>2</sup>

I explain the above reading method, then open *In Heavenly Places* to the inside cover pages and show students how many rich and helpful ideas I have found in just that one book. According to my estimate, the 80 books total around 34,000 pages—and it is not hard to average one excellent idea or insight per page. That totals at least 34,000 helpful discoveries a person could make!

### Use Scripture First

Here's an important principle to keep in mind as we use the Ellen White books in our classrooms: *Use Scripture first and then use the Ellen G. White books for commentary, insights, and practical application of Bible principles to daily life.*

As the revision editor for all of the grade 9-12 religion books except the first two grade 9 books,

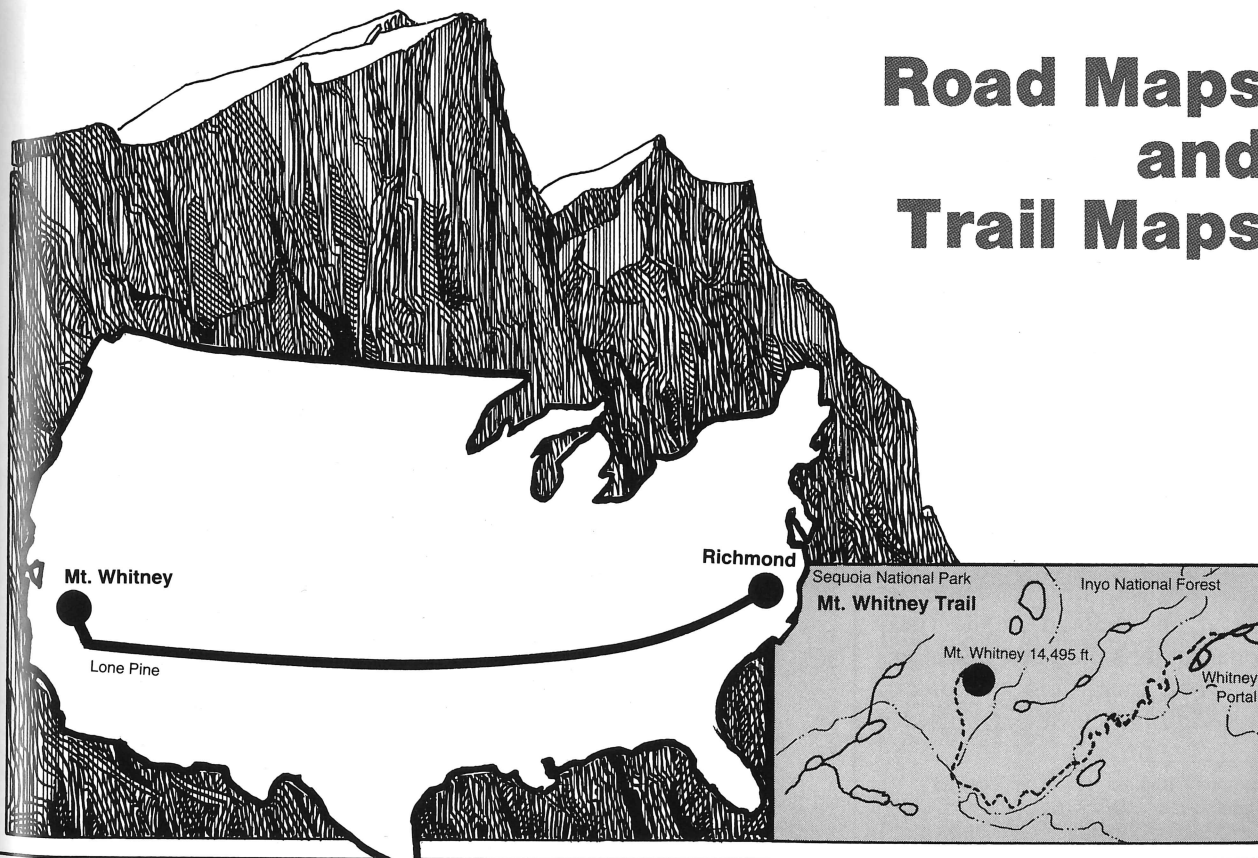
I have almost always followed the above principle both in the lead-ins and the written exercises. While Ellen White statements are used in many of these locations, Scripture almost always is used first.

This, I believe, is the way the Ellen White books should be used. Let's draw the principles we want to teach from Scripture, then use Mrs. White's statements for helpful insights and practical application of those principles to our daily lives.

### Additional Suggestions

The grade 11 book *Anchored* contains three lessons that deal with inspiration and the gift of prophecy. The third of these lessons, titled "Sailing, Love Letters, and \_\_\_\_\_," contains seven suggestions for ways youth can gain much help from the Ellen White books. Here are the first

(To page 41)



## Road Maps and Trail Maps

## The Church's Prophetic Prism

(Continued from page 15)

two of these suggestions, with comments as given in *Anchored*:

1. *Pray before you begin.*

Spiritual things "are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Prayer helps open the heart to the things you read.

2. *Think of what you read as the voice of Jesus.*

"The testimony of Jesus," John writes, "is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The reverse is also true: The spirit of prophecy is the testimony—not of Ellen White—but of Jesus.

See pages 40 and 41 of *Anchored* for other suggestions. On page 43 there is a list of things we *should not* do as we use Spirit of Prophecy books:

1. Do not use as a basis for doctrine (*Evangelism*, p. 256).

2. Do not quote to unbelievers (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 119, 120).

3. Do not use as a club or whip (*Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 122).

4. Do not use to support extremes (*Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 669, 670).

5. Do not become conscience for others (*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 636).

6. Do not mix in your own statements when quoting Ellen White statements (*Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 122, 123).

7. Do not quote statements out of context (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 44).

8. Do not dissect and find fault with the messages given (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 691).

### How to Develop Appreciation for the EGW Books

The Bible invitation to "taste and see" (Psalm 34:8) suggests how youth can develop a growing appreciation for the Ellen White books. Lisel, now 18, who is from

a Catholic background, was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church at age 16. Recently she decided to read *The Ministry of Healing*. After she had finished the first chapter she exclaimed, "This chapter really draws me to Jesus!"

Her experience suggests an important truth: If you want your students to appreciate the books God has given through Ellen White, encourage them to prayerfully read these books. They, too, will be drawn to Jesus.

The grade 11 Bible textbook *A Saviour to Share* helps students put together 20 Bible studies, one of which is about the gift of prophecy. The lead-in to the lesson where students prepare a gift of prophecy study says:

"As with every other Bible topic, you share best that which you are personally enthusiastic about. Are you enthusiastic about the writings of Ellen White? When you pray do you ever thank God for her books?"

The lead-in then suggests five reasons why we can praise God for the books given through Ellen White:

1. They increase appreciation for the Bible.

2. Christ is lifted up and made attractive.

3. Her writings are practical and up-to-date.

4. She encourages you to think.

5. Her writings promote physical fitness.<sup>3</sup>

Similar applications could be made at any grade level. Put a sampling of these God-given books on your desk, make a few comments similar to the above, and then ask your students to suggest reasons why we should be enthusiastic about these books. Their suggestions may fill a chalkboard!

### Ellen White and History Class

Books given through Ellen

White can add much interest and enjoyment to a history class. Here are several suggestions:

1. Call attention to the Spirit of Prophecy books that are primarily history.

These include all five of the Conflict of the Ages set. The biographical books *Life Sketches* and *Christian Experiences and Teachings* are also history. Portions of the *Testimonies for the Church* are historical—as for example, the short message in volume one entitled "Our Denominational Name" (page 223) and the three messages about the Civil War (pp. 253-260; 264-268; 355-368). In this context you could turn to pages 266 and 267 of volume one and read about the intervention of an angel in the Civil War battle of Manassas. This could lead into a discussion of other times when God may have used angels to intervene in the affairs of nations. For further discussion, see also the context of this statement: "Time and time again have they [angels] been the leaders of armies."<sup>4</sup>

2. Point out the way Mrs. White draws spiritual truths from discussions of historical events.

The chapter in *Patriarchs and Prophets* titled "The Creation" takes us back as far as the history of Planet Earth can reach. As Ellen White tells the story of Creation, she frequently draws lessons such as this:

The beauty that clothes the earth is a token of God's love. We may behold it in the everlasting hills, in the lofty trees, in the opening buds and the delicate flowers. All speak to us of God.<sup>5</sup>

3. Call attention to the Great Controversy that pervades all of human history.

The book *Education* suggests that the students of history "should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life

he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.”<sup>6</sup>

4. Show the relationship between history and prophecy.

Since history is prophecy fulfilled, you can use this fact to strengthen confidence in God’s Word. For numerous suggestions about teaching history combined with a study of prophecy, see the chapters in *Education* titled “History and Prophecy” (pages 173-184).

### A Decided “Yes”!

The last generation of Adventist youth will possess “the faith of Jesus.” They will respect and obey God’s law, love Jesus with their heart and soul, live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” love their neighbor as themselves, and in everything they do they will seek to bring glory to God. Can Adventist homes, schools, and churches produce that type of young person today?

The answer is a decided “yes”! The gospel produces “young men” (and young women) who have “overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:13). It produces youth who are “strong” and in whom the Word of God “abides” (verse 14). Ellen White describes how this strength is developed:

Those who study the Bible, counsel with God, and rely upon Christ will be enabled to act wisely at all times and under all circumstances. Good principles will be illustrated in actual life. Only let the truth for this time be cordially received and become the basis of character, and it will produce steadfastness of purpose, which the allurements of pleasure, the fickleness of custom, the contempt of the world-loving, and the heart’s own clamors for self-indulgence are powerless to influence.<sup>7</sup>

In your personal life and the lives of your students, may “the truth for this time be cordially received”! That truth, as stated in

Scripture and applied to practical life in the writings of Ellen White, helps produce young people of principle who “will eschew pleasure, defy pain, and brave even the lions’ den and the heated fiery furnace rather than be found untrue to God.”<sup>8</sup> □

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 5, pp. 664, 665.

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1976).

<sup>3</sup> See pages 140, 141, of *A Saviour to Share* for comments about each of these five reasons.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1955), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1958), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

## Boring Worships . . . Restless Worshippers

(Continued from page 34)

scenes for a set of guidelines.

Of 30 artists in a conference room in Takoma Park, two abstain. The “teacher” allows their behavior. Why?

For one thing, no coercion is possible. She can’t withhold grades, recess, or lunch.

For another thing, these people are worthy of treatment equal to their dignity.

Other reasons come to mind: Perhaps they didn’t hear the directions; perhaps they are inhibited or distracted by more urgent problems; maybe they are embarrassed by their drawing skills.

Pupils in your classroom, of course, can be denied recess or lunch, and their grades can suffer—sometimes there’s even a hold-over from worship that affects their grades.

But your students are also people worthy of treatment equal to

their dignity—a dignity equal to that accorded all of God’s children.

Moreover, they may also be inhibited, distracted, troubled, or embarrassed. Even at their age, this is a serious consideration and should exempt them from pursuing such an exercise. Your regard for their personal dignity will likely result in a willingness to share in future exercises. Climate is all-important in establishing true spiritual response. Give it time to warm. While this is occurring, and throughout your relationship with the children, observe *Guideline 1: Allow pupils to choose to abstain from personal sharing in worship.*

*Seize the opportunity  
to encourage every  
child to feel competent  
and worthy during  
your worship and Bible  
classes.*

As their teacher, the first response is yours. This is no accident. You should be willing to share a spiritual insight anytime you ask your students for one. Pupils often feel very relieved to hear their teacher admit that she, too, needs God’s help. Here is an opportunity to illustrate the truth of our brotherhood in Christ. *Guideline 2: Be willing to respond to any questions you pose for sharing in worship.*

One child seems to be an unbeliever. His response is ambiguous. Does he mean he can’t draw an angel? The teacher mustn’t swoop down at this point and insist, “But of course you can draw an angel! I’ve already told you that you won’t be graded on this,” or “Of course you have an angel! Everyone has an angel.” Nor does she