

The authority of Ellen G. White:  
A critical evaluation

by

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## Commitment to avoid plagiarism

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## Clarification of key concepts and terms

Ministry Magazine	This is the official publication of the General Conference that is monthly provided for all SDA Pastors across the world. The magazine presents articles pertinent to the local church, beliefs of Adventism and issues facing pastors.
Scripture	Seventh-day Adventism follows the Protestant view of Scripture. Scripture is made up of the sixty-six books and excludes apocryphal writings
Seventh-day Adventism	This refers to the thinking, philosophy and views promoted as official views by the SDA Church. Also referred to as Adventism.
<i>Seventh-day Adventists Believe...</i>	The official publication of SDA doctrines revised only after a General Conference session.
<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	The view of Seventh-day Adventism regarding Scripture is summarised as follows: 'The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by the divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humankind the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of his will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history' (General Conference [Inst] 2005:11). From this summary, Adventism views Scripture without equal as only Scripture can fulfil these requirements. In this dissertation, the focus will rest on Scripture as a supreme authority in these matters.
The Biblical Research Institute	A department of the General Conference which seeks to answer theological questions that present

	challenges to the SDA Church.
The Ellen G. White Estate	An organisation established after the death of White to keep her writings in trust to preserve them for future generations. This organisation also assists in promoting, aiding in understanding White's work and dealing with questions in regards to White.
The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church	The organisation of the SDA Church begins with groupings of local churches that fall under a Conference. The Conference employs pastors, manages their placements with churches and deals with other administrative matters. Conferences are governed by a Union Conference that ensures the Conferences maintain the necessary standards and serves as a link to the higher governing bodies. Union Conferences are governed by Divisions. The Division organisation make up the General Conference who governs the Church across the world.
The General Conference (in) Session	Every five years representatives from across the world are chosen to attend, represent and vote at the General Conference in Session. At such sessions, changes can be made to doctrines, Church practices and various aspects of the church are planned. These sessions are viewed as the highest authority within the SDA Church. Commonly referred to as the General Conference Session.
The Great Controversy	All teachings and views of the SDA Church is seen within the context of the conflict between Satan and Christ. This conflict is termed the Great Controversy and serves as the framework for all doctrines, interpretations of Scripture and practises.
The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary	This Commentary, edited by F.D. Nichol, is the official commentary on Scripture within the Seventh Day Adventism.

## Abbreviations

BRI	Biblical Research Institute
EGW Estate	Ellen G. White Estate
GC	General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist world Church
SDA	Seventh-Day Adventist, also referred to as Adventism or simply Adventist

## Abbreviations of Biblical books

All the references to the Bible refer to the English Standard Version (ESV) or are personal translations.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Book</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
<b>Genesis</b>	Gn	<b>Nahum</b>	Nah
<b>Exodus</b>	Ex	<b>Habakkuk</b>	Hab
<b>Leviticus</b>	Lev	<b>Zephaniah</b>	Zeph
<b>Numbers</b>	Num	<b>Haggai</b>	Hag
<b>Deuteronomy</b>	Dt	<b>Zechariah</b>	Zech
<b>Joshua</b>	Jos	<b>Malachi</b>	Mal
<b>Judges</b>	Jdg	<b>Matthew</b>	Mt
<b>Ruth</b>	Ruth	<b>Mark</b>	Mk
<b>1 Samuel</b>	1 Sam	<b>Luke</b>	Lk
<b>2 Samuel</b>	2 Sam	<b>John</b>	Jn
<b>1 Kings</b>	1 Ki	<b>Acts</b>	Ac
<b>2 Kings</b>	2 Ki	<b>Romans</b>	Rm
<b>1 Chronicles</b>	1 Chr	<b>1 Corinthians</b>	1 Cor
<b>2 Chronicles</b>	2 Chr	<b>2 Corinthians</b>	2 Cor
<b>Ezra</b>	Ezra	<b>Galatians</b>	Gal
<b>Nehemiah</b>	Neh	<b>Ephesians</b>	Eph
<b>Esther</b>	Esther	<b>Philippians</b>	Php
<b>Job</b>	Job	<b>Colossians</b>	Col
<b>Psalms</b>	Ps	<b>1 Thessalonians</b>	1 Th
<b>Proverbs</b>	Pr	<b>2 Thessalonians</b>	2 Th
<b>Ecclesiastes</b>	Ecc	<b>1 Timothy</b>	1 Tim
<b>Song of Songs</b>	SS	<b>2 Timothy</b>	2 Tim
<b>Isaiah</b>	Is	<b>Titus</b>	Tit
<b>Jeremiah</b>	Jer	<b>Philemon</b>	Phm
<b>Lamentations</b>	Lam	<b>Hebrews</b>	Heb
<b>Ezekiel</b>	Ez	<b>James</b>	Jas
<b>Daniel</b>	Dn	<b>1 Peter</b>	1 Pt
<b>Hosea</b>	Hos	<b>2 Peter</b>	2 Pt
<b>Joel</b>	Joel	<b>1 John</b>	1 Jn
<b>Amos</b>	Amos	<b>2 John</b>	2 Jn
<b>Obadiah</b>	Ob	<b>3 John</b>	3 Jn
<b>Jonah</b>	Jonah	<b>Jude</b>	Jude
<b>Micah</b>	Micah	<b>Revelation</b>	Rev

## Summary

The name Ellen G. White<sup>1</sup>, as a founding member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>2</sup> and as an author, currently still being read, evokes a great deal of discussion. The various views that are to be found within the discussion cover a wide range of views, either promoting or criticising White's authority. By comparing the works of Canright, Nichol, Bradford, and Knight, we gain a wide perspective on three critical views in this discussion.

This dissertation will consider the issues regarding White's authority, the historical development of her authority and consideration of her authority in comparison to Scriptural authority. The dissertation seeks to offer the development of White's authority and the changes that contributed to the various views around her authority, and presents a critical evaluation regarding her authority for today.

After the different authors were compared, and having provided my critical evaluation, I came to the conclusion that a moderate view of White as presented by Bradford and Knight presents the view that allows for the following:

- Retaining the principle of *Sola Scriptura*.
- Managing White's authority.
- Providing theological freedom.

As such, White's authority can be a positive influence in Seventh-day Adventist theology, promoting theological growth and not impeding it. The critical evaluation makes it evident that there is a lack of a paradigm to evaluate White, especially her authority. The need for a paradigm from which to evaluate White requires further study.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point forward, the reference will simply be 'White'.

<sup>2</sup> From this point forward, the reference will only be 'Church'.

## Opsomming

Die naam Ellen G. White, 'n stigterslid van die Sewende Dag Adventiste Kerk en ook 'n outeur wie se boeke tans nog gelees word, ontlok baie bespreking. Hierin vind ons 'n verskeidenheid van geleerdes wat White hetsy voorstaan of kritiseer. 'n Vergelyking van die werke van Canright, Nichol, Bradford en Knight bied 'n wye perspektief oor drie kritiese beskouings in hierdie debat.

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die kwessies rondom White se gesag, die historiese ontwikkeling van haar gesag en 'n beoordeling van haar gesag in vergelyking met die Skrif se gesag. Die verhandeling bespreek die ontwikkeling van White se gesag, die veranderings wat bygedra het tot die verskillende sienings rondom haar gesag, asook 'n kritiese beoordeling van haar gesag vir vandag.

Nadat ek die verskillende outeurs vergelyk het en my kritiese beoordeling gegee het, kom ek tot die slotsom dat die gematigde siening van Bradford en Knight oor White die volgende bevorder:

- Behoud van die beginsel van *Sola Scriptura*.
- Hantering van White se gesag.
- Voorsiening vir teologiese vryheid.

As sodanig kan White se gesag as 'n positiewe invloed op die Kerk se teologie dien deur teologiese groei aan te moedig in plaas daarvan om dit te strem. Die kritiese beoordeling dui op die gebrek aan 'n paradigma om White, veral haar gesag, mee te beoordeel. Die behoefte aan so 'n paradigma vereis verdere studie.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction to the Focal point of this Dissertation

### 1.1 Orientation

The first doctrinal belief of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church<sup>3</sup> asserts the primacy of the principle *Sola Scriptura*, and views Scripture as the written 'Word of God' and the 'authoritative revealer of doctrines' (General Conference [Inst] 2005:11)<sup>4</sup>. This doctrinal statement seeks to retain the Protestant identity of the Church and adhere to the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. The Church also recognises the works of Ellen G. White<sup>5</sup> as a continuing and authoritative source of truth (General Conference [Inst] 2005:247). Although White's work has authority, it does not equal or exceed that of Scripture. Yet the exact position of her authority remains unclear.

I was raised in the home of a Minister of the Church and I remember that the first time I heard of White, I was walking with my father on the Helderberg College Campus. I was still too young to fully understand what my father explained to me. What I do remember is that I was impressed by the significance of this woman. As I grew older, and during my own studies for the ministry as well as in my occupation as minister, two issues touched me: First, I came to realise how big the influence of White is even nowadays. This influence applies not only to the organisation as a whole but also in the life of individual members; second, I came to realise how much dissonance exists between the two doctrines of the Church. While people in the Church claim to uphold Scripture as the highest authority, this is very often not done in practice. As a pastor I started to fear the words, 'Ellen White says', for whatever then followed was often a matter of personal interpretation and not the actual words of White. The authority of White at the one hand supersedes the authority of

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<sup>3</sup> From this point onward, the terms 'Church' or 'SDA' are used to refer to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> The term '*Sola Scriptura*' would warrant a great deal of discussion, but for the sake of this dissertation I will reference *Sola Scriptura* on the following view within the Church: Scripture is the final authority particularly in the area of doctrinal formulation (Davidson 2000:60-64).

<sup>5</sup> From this point onward, the term 'White' is used to refer to Ellen G. White and it indicates other members of the White family by adding their initials.

Scripture, but on the other it is non-existent. What I have experienced is by no means unique but something that has existed since the origin of the Church.

White's authority has been a point of discussion since 1844. As minister in the Church, Canright was a contemporary and close friend of the Whites. There was a temporary breakdown of this friendship when the two families were on holiday together, as Canright and J. White, husband of White, got involved in an argument that alienated the two families. White wrote a letter stating that in one of her visions she was shown the character defects of both her husband and Canright as being strong-willed and independent (White 1875:303-329)<sup>6</sup>. Canright felt offended and left the Church for a short while, although he later returned to continue his ministry in the Church. Canright's final break with the Church came in 1887 when he was in agreement with Smith and Butler, who believed that obedience to the Law<sup>7</sup> was a requirement for salvation. In the 1880s, Wagoner and Jones had presented alternative views promoting righteousness by faith alone, but their views contradicted the views of Butler, Smith, and Canright. This contradiction created two camps, with White supporting the Wagoner and Jones camp. Canright, realising that the position that he shared with Smith and Butler was not defensible, left the Church (Knight 2013b:337-338). After he left the Church, he wrote several works in which he criticised both the Church and White. Two of his most prominent works are *Adventism Renounced* (1914) and *The Life of Ellen White* (1919).

Originally White's critics came from outside the Church, although questions about her authority became an issue when Church members began to question her authority (Knight 2000:184). The criticism of Canright is still held in high esteem, as others have relied upon him as the source for their criticism of White's authority (Nichol 1951:26). He also accused White of plagiarism and mental instability in her work. Numbers<sup>8</sup> wrote the book, *Prophetess of Health*, but left the Church shortly after its publication (Byrd 2015). In this book, Numbers makes the same charges of plagiarism and mental instability specifically on White's writings on health (Numbers 1976:xiv, 212). He claims that White merely borrowed ideas from other writers and that her visions were the result of mental health issues. Both Numbers and Canright

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<sup>6</sup> The letter itself does not reveal the individuals by name, however, the circumstances and timing confirm this letter to have been written to Canright (Johnson 1971:38).

<sup>7</sup> The Law specifically refers to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 6.

<sup>8</sup> A professor of the history of science and medicine at the University of Wisconsin.

deny the divine elements in White's work and focus on her human aspects. Numbers' criticism happened while he was a Church member and not after he left, as was the case with Canright.

Nichol has responded to Canright's criticism of White by writing a book which sought to negate Canright's criticism extensively. He may arguably be the leading apologist of White in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, having written extensively in promoting White's authority (cf. Knott 2013:476). Nichol often cites Canright as a source of criticism in *Ellen G. White and her Critics*, as he views Canright as the first critic (Nichol 1951:16-17). As editor of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953-1957), his ideas promoting White's authority continue to shape thinking within the Church (Knott 2013:476). Advocates of White wishing to uphold her authority, such as Nichol and McMahon, who view her authority as infallible, place the focus on the positive results and the divine aspect of White's work (Nichol 1951:15, 25). Although Nichol was commended for his defence of White, it is later criticised for being weak because it presented White's teachings as inerrant (Bradford 2006:170). Nichol responded to Canright in taking up an extreme opposite position.

In promoting White, Knight<sup>9</sup> differs from Nichol in his view of White, maintaining the divine and positive, as well as the human and negative element in her work and life. This clearly puts Knight's views on White between Canright's views as critic and Nichol's views as an advocate. Knight has also written about White, specifically focusing on a correct understanding of her work and the times in which it was developed (Knight 1997:21)<sup>10</sup>.

The view of Bradford<sup>11</sup>, promoting White in the same vein as Knight, is influenced by recent scholarly articles which provide a foundation for a new view (Bradford 2006:13). This allows White to be viewed in both positive and divine terms and in human and negative terms. Second, in consideration of criticism in recent times, such as those of Numbers and Rea, Bradford responds from a Scriptural basis in defining a prophet (Bradford 2006:13). While working from a Scriptural basis, he seeks to move away from the extreme position of critic or advocate of White.

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<sup>9</sup> A retired professor of Church History.

<sup>10</sup> See also Knight's *Myths in Adventism* (2009:17) and *A search for Identity* (2000:141).

<sup>11</sup> A professor of Theology at Avondale College.

Although both Bradford and Knight are promoting White, they differ from Nichol in that they are willing to admit that the divine elements of a prophet do not negate human failures (Bradford 2006:215; Knight 1999b:86).

The position of both Bradford and Knight could be summarised by a quote that Bradford took from an interview with Heppenstall: 'Let her writings be our guide but not our jailer, our shield not our straightjacket' (Bradford 2006:177).

Despite the two doctrines cited in the first paragraph under this heading, various cases can be found where White's authority could be accepted or rejected in a single conversation. In one instance, I visited a woman who was clearly an advocate of White. When she criticised the celebration of Christmas due to its non-Christian origin, I informed her that White promoted Christmas celebrations (cf. White 1952:482). The woman responded by stating that we should not listen to all of White's writings. There are also people who claim that White did not believe in the Trinity (Pfandl 1999:6). Others would go so far as to claim that White promoted the keeping of the Levitical feasts (Anonymous 2011). Yet, none of these claims are found in her work. Conversation with Adventist pastors from other parts of the world revealed that this tendency was not unique. Various Adventist pastors have related similar experiences. On the one hand, the Church seeks to maintain Scripture as the highest authority, but at the same time recognise the authority of White. There seems to be a lack of clarity in this matter that has resulted in a discussion of criticisms and defences. This process has continued for such a length of time that this discussion is now between Church members where the process of criticism and defence continues.

I have briefly introduced the situation which I wish to address in this dissertation as I feel it is necessary to provide a broader perspective on the events that have led to this point. This discussion has a long history of the Church and has been influenced by several actions and documents, both past and present.

When one considers that spiritual gifts, inspiration, and prophets are not unique to Adventism, then this issue is also relevant to the greater theological world. This brief orientation has highlighted the key factors, while the following section will elaborate on the historical development and changes that have taken place. It is important to

take note that certain quotes and terminology are cited there that are unique to the language and times of White. Where possible, contextual clarification is provided.

## **1.2 Approach and Relevance**

The previous section introduced the views promoted by Canright, Nichol, Bradford, and Knight regarding the authority of White. Discussing White's authority is no simple matter as it is intertwined with the history of the Church and the unique culture from which the Church developed. When one considers the historical events prior, during, and after the life of White, it adds clarity to the current discussion and the issues that surround it. Although the historical events are of importance, it is equally important not to lose sight of White as a person in this discussion. She was a product of her time and circumstances and to ignore this, would create an incorrect perception of her authority (Knight 1997:78). White is not some impersonal object of study but was a human being who incorporated both positive and negative aspects of her work and life.

Adventism views all historical events relating to Scriptural truth as significant to the history of the Church. Adventism, therefore, adopts all history as well as Scripture as part of Church History (Anonymous 1960:79, 128-129). This is based on the view that God is active in history and acts within time (Canale 2001:39). Since God acts in time, the inspiration of White and the rise of her authority, are examples of God's activity in time in the life of an individual.

History prior to White is filled with several events that affected not only the politics and people of the day but also the Christian world views of early Adventism. There are three events, namely, the French Revolution, the fall of the Papacy, and physical signs that were regarded as the fulfilment of prophecy. These events were interpreted by various expositors of Scripture as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy of the return of Christ in the immediate future (Knight 1998:14). This mindset would form the foundation from which the Church would grow, and White would become a figure of authority (Strayer 2013:827-828; Smith 1944:540).

The French Revolution signified a definitive and drastic change in the world (Maxwell 1985:284). For many Christians including White, it was not only a political revolution, but a rejection of Christianity (White 1911:269). According to Strayer, White's point of

view is reflected by other authors (such as Scott, Wylie, Thiers, D'Aubigné, de Felice, and Alison) as conservative, anti-Papal, anti-revolutionary, and pro-democracy (Strayer 2013:828). Although an event motivated by economics and politics, one finds that some religious significance was attached to the French Revolution.

In 1798, Napoleon's General, Berthier, entered the Vatican, organised the Roman republic and took Pope Pius VI captive. During the difficult journey to France, Pius VI died. This signalled the end of Papal power and held a deep religious significance to Protestantism. Many of the settlers in North America had left their countries of origin to avoid the persecution by Papal power (Walker 1959:430). Various religious leaders and even laymen considered this historical event as a fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy (Smith 1944:144).

Several phenomena in nature were considered as out of the ordinary and were taken to be signs attested to in Scripture. For example, first, in 1755, the Lisbon earthquake struck Europe; second, in 1780 there was an eclipse of the sun seen in New England; and third, in 1833 the Leonid star shower took place (Maxwell 1985:194-198). These events were interpreted as the fulfilment of prophecy. When the 19<sup>th</sup> century dawned, Protestantism experienced an Evangelical awakening, both in Europe and North America (Walker 1959:507).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by emotional revivalism and people calling themselves Adventists, referring to those who awaited the Advent or coming of Christ. A Baptist farmer, Miller, began in 1831 to preach the soon return of Christ (Walker 1959:515). Though not at first, but closer to 1840, Miller proclaimed that 22 October 1844 would see the return of Christ (Knight 1998:14). Large numbers awaited the return of Christ on 22 October 1844 only to have their hopes betrayed (White, A.L. 1985:53). Miller's failed prediction led some Adventists to review his teachings. Everything had to be based on Scripture (Knight 2000:60). These studies were influenced by the following philosophies:

- Restorationism, seeking to complete the work begun by the Reformation. It sought to restore all the New Testament teachings and continue reforming to remove all the traditions from religion. Restorationism also held a philosophy – anti-trinitarianism – and the concept of *Sola Scriptura*.

- Methodism, providing the pioneers with concepts such as free will and the perfection of character.
- Deism was another foundational philosophy; although early pioneers relied on Scripture, they did so from an intellectual reasoning approach.
- Puritanism, emphasising the authority of Scripture and obedience to the Law (The 10 Commandments) (Knight 2000:31, 32, 34, 35).

From small groups, studying Scripture and guided by these views, the Church would grow and be organised in 1863.

Although pioneers of the Church viewed White as being inspired by God, she was not viewed as having the same authority as Scripture (Knight 2000:59). When the writings of Church pioneers are considered, it can be found that White's work was not seen as the only ministry inspired by God. She was but one person ministering, in her way, among many others who relied on the authority of Scripture (Knight 2000:59). White herself promoted the study of Scripture (White 1923b:384). She frequently referred to the Scripture as sacred (White 1855:38) and even though she recognised translation errors, she did not see them as hampering the purpose of Scripture (White 1958b:15-16). White's writings offer a view that places the authority of Scripture in a superior position to her work. Although she held her work as guiding and essential for the Church (White 1876:390), she never viewed her writings as being equal to or above Scripture (White 1946:256). In comparing her work, it can be observed that at times White expected people to heed to her words (White 1958b:46), while at other times, she refused to settle matters such as theological questions (Knight 2000:96). For example, in 1888, the issue arose in relation to the 'law' in Galatians 3:23, whether it referred to the Ten Commandments or the ceremonial law. White was asked to settle the matter, but she refused, although it did appear that she had an opinion on the matter (White 1958b:233). At other times she clearly indicated that her writings were not her opinion but the voice of God speaking through her writings (White 1980:81).

White wrote on many relevant topics which influenced the thinking of the Church, such as health issues, as it was a point of concern for the society at large (Knight 1998:30), e.g. health issues such as sterilisation, antiseptics (Evans 1931:53), and poor public hygiene were addressed by White (Knight 1998:30). One finds that White

as a person, a woman living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, addressed concerns relevant to her situation. In looking at various promotions made by critics of White's personality, such as Canright, and advocates, such as Nichol, it can be observed that various aspects of her being a person are often neglected. She is frequently treated as an object and not as a female living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

White did not consider divine inspiration as limited solely to herself. She saw the influence of God not only resting on her work but also on the work of others (White 1892:51). According to Jones, White's authority was of such a nature that it required absolute adherence to her without questioning her views. During the 1890s, according to Knight, Jones went to the extreme of promoting the authority of White, of absolute perfection and free of human errors (Knight 2000:99). This view would become prominent during and after the 1919 Bible Conference (Lindsay 2013:658). An example is found in missionaries who took White's authority to the extreme. They came to work in Solusi, in Zimbabwe, during 1898, but did not take Malaria medication. This was based on a rigid and extreme reading of White. The result was that by 1894, four people died, two were hospitalised and the one who took Malaria medication was alive (Knight 1997:98).

Shortly after White's death, there was a major shift in how the Church viewed her authority. White was not considered an authority on areas such as theology or history by people that knew her personally (Bradford 2006:153). Between 1920 and 1950 it can be observed that the generation after White extended her authority to areas such as history and theology, making her statements on these areas unquestionable (Knight 2000:138). This extension and elevation of White's authority grew from the 1919 Bible Conference. Changes made to White's authority were first, motivated by a perception of White's authority that neglected the human factor and focused on the divine aspects; and second, social influences such as demythologising theology resulted in the Church leadership leaning to a fundamentalist view (Knight 2000:129-131, 134). These historical events illustrate that the perception of White's authority has not remained static but has been subject to change depending on the prominent view at a given time (Knight 2000:184). Andreason, a prominent Church minister, promoted the view that White was authoritative in theology and history, and an unquestionable figure of authority (Andreason 1943:268). Heppenstall began writing in the 1950s, and his works made

Christ and Scripture central to Adventist doctrines (Heppenstall 1972:21). The view that was prominent during 1920 to 1950, made White central to Adventism and an unquestionable source of authority. By centralising Christ and Scripture, Heppenstall moved away from White as an unquestionable source of authority.

Nichol, as an advocate of White, places the focus on the divine and positive aspects of the life of White<sup>12</sup> in order to promote her authority (Nichol 1951:20). He has put several of White's ideas<sup>13</sup> into *The SDA Bible Commentary* (Numbers 1976:227). He also relied on White to formulate *The SDA Bible Commentary*, to ensure it would not contradict White's ideas (Nichol 1980:303-306). This is in complete contrast to Canright as a critic who focuses solely on White's human and negative aspects<sup>14</sup> (Canright 1914:32). Nichol's mindset, being reflected in his writing, corresponds to the 1920 to 1950 mindset which made White an unquestionable source of authority.

Both critic and advocate have relied on a modernist mindset in their approach to White (Douty 1962:170). The modernist mindset maintains that criticism comes from outside the Church and advocacy from inside the Church. Postmodernism has altered this, and advocates of White's authority find that members of the Church are criticising White's authority, for example, the argument brought forward by Rea that White committed plagiarism: Although Rea's plagiarism argument was originally used by Canright (1919:69-77), Rea revealed that White has borrowed considerably more than originally thought (Rea & Ford 1982). Numbers claims that White made extensive use of other's work on health, and therefore he rejected White's authority (Numbers 1976:xiv-xvi).

The issue of health is still a point of contention in the Church today. This is an area where difference in opinions arise. White promotes a moderate plan of healthy living, but in practice within the Church there are many who ignore this or take it to the extreme point of fanaticism. Very often White's advice on health issues are ignored

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<sup>12</sup> Nichol focuses on elements such as her personality (Nichol 1951:28), sacrifices she made, holy living, and others (Nichol 1951:50).

<sup>13</sup> These are ideas such as 'John the Baptist who was vegetarian' (Nichol 1980:303-306). The commentary of every chapter is backed by reference to White's writings (Nichol 1978b:15) and a superficial commentary on Zechariah 12 which is dealt with later in this dissertation (Nichol 1977:1112-1114).

<sup>14</sup> Canright's criticism ranges from the Church making White a test of faith (Canright 1919:9), her honesty (Canright 1919:36, 52), and her health, mental, and physical condition (Canright 1919:63, 66).

because of an individual's personal views, with the result that White is quoted out of context (Seibold 2015).

Responding to the criticism from within, the Church has taken steps to clarify the issue. One such example is the *Ten Affirmations and Denials* made by the Church with consideration to White, Scripture, and authority (Ellen G. White Estate 2015). The *Ten Affirmations and Denials* are an attempt to prevent the eclectic use of White's authority for personal views. These affirmations and denials still fail to address the true position and demarcation of White's authority as they neglect to define a precise position of authority for White, for example on health issues (Knight 2000:188). When other publications<sup>15</sup> are considered, then it becomes clear that the issue on White's authority is not resolved and that further study of her authority is warranted. One finds that the view promoted by Andreason during 1920 to 1950 runs contradictory to a view that seeks to question White and even criticise her as did Rea and Numbers.

Since the 1980s, this has created a theological tension between the two views, and it still continues within Church circles (Knight 2000:195-196). Attempts have been made to solve this theological tension by recognising White's human weaknesses (Van Bemmelen 2000:34-35). Centralising Christ in Adventism has moved away from White as an unquestionable authority, allowing people to have a more balanced view between the positive and divine elements as well as the human and negative elements in her life and work. The exact position of her authority remains contentious.

According to McMahon, White did not read any of the health reformers' books before 1863<sup>16</sup>, and thus her work was unique, despite being similar (McMahon 2002:8, 42). Numbers argues that White simply borrowed from others such as Coles, and denies any divine aspect in her work. McMahon argues that White did not borrow, promoting the idea that her work was divinely inspired and was wholly original. Consequently, Numbers rejects White's authority while McMahon promotes her authority. The situation becomes more complex when one considers individuals such as Du Preez

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Bradford (2006:188), Canright (1914:39), and Knight (2000:197).

<sup>16</sup> McMahon lists health reformers such as Graham, Alcott, Coles, Trall, and Kellogg (McMahon 2002:8).

and Veith. Veith has in public lectures promoted the view that the KJV/NKJV<sup>17</sup> is the most accurate translation of Scripture (2011). Du Preez shares this view in one of his books, *No Fear for the Future* (Du Preez 2006:73). Both Du Preez and Veith promote White's authority, but their view of the KJV/NKJV that it is the most accurate translation, contradicts White's view (White 1958b:17). It can be observed that Du Preez and Veith use White selectively by using her work only when it accords with their personal views. Moreover, it can be found that despite documents such as the *Ten Affirmation and Ten Denials*, it does not prevent criticism and rejection of White by scholars such as Numbers and Rea. Neither do official statements by the Church prevent individuals from using White selectively to promote personal views.

*Seventh-day Adventist Believe...* highlights several positive results that arise from the influence of White (General Conference [Inst] 2005:258). Critics, on the other hand, are pointing out negative results originating from White's influence (Canright 1919:30). To retain a balance in looking at White as a figure of authority, it is essential to consider the positive and negative results. There are other religious groups that utilise White as a figure of authority, namely the Davidians (CRI 2009) as well as the Reformed Adventists (Ferrel 1998:39). Their lack of success despite claiming adherence to White as a figure of authority, reveals the importance of a foundational view from which to evaluate White (Knight 1997:43, 46, 71, 99).

Bradford recognises that on both sides unrealistic views of White's authority have been held to promote their individual views (Bradford 2006:14). Bradford also points out that the Church's rigid thinking on White's authority prevents a change in areas of Church practice (Bradford 2006:203) – this also underscores why the mindset from 1920 to 1950 still lingers in the Church. The sole focus on White's spiritual gifts exalts the gift of an individual at the expense of other spiritual gifts of other individuals (Bradford 2006:217). Canright argues that, after White's death, her spiritual gift is no longer existent in the Church. He neglects other spiritual gifts of other individuals due to his sole focus on White (cf. Canright 1919:33). Both critic and advocate focus on White's spiritual gifts to either promote or deny her authority, so that the spiritual gifts of others are not considered.

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<sup>17</sup> KJV = King James Version; NKJV = New King James Version.

During the past thirty years, there has been a great deal of publications attempting to clarify the issue of White's authority. Douglas (1998:296) and Pfandl (2013:627), for example, relate the idea of authority to White's inspiration. Canright also links White's authority to her inspiration but seeks to criticise her inspiration to deny her authority (Canright 1919:2). When White's inspiration is equal to Scripture, the argument can be made that her authority is also equal to Scripture (Douglas 1998:296). White, though, does not claim any form of equality between her work and Scripture (Knight 2013a:649). The opposite view promoted by Canright also becomes valid that, if White's inspiration is not equal to Scripture, her authority should be rejected. While Pfandl does recognise that White functioned within the limitations of time and scope, he does not apply these limitations to her authority (Pfandl 2013:627).

Gordon, on behalf of the Ellen G. White Estate<sup>18</sup>, has described three types of authority, namely imperial, delegated, and veracious, applying them to White's authority (Gordon 2013:1). First, imperial authority is based on the position of authority; second, delegated authority is derived from others giving authority to a specific person; and third, veracious authority is based on the ability to influence people. The White Estate promotes these categories of authority in order to clarify the authority of White.

Despite attempts to clarify this issue, there are two authors presenting opposing views on White's authority. Douglas presents a view that is reminiscent of the 1920 to 1950 mindset, while A.L. White presents a view that would be in cohesion with the time White was alive. The marked difference between the two authors, and where they place White's authority in relation to Scripture, reflects the prominence of two mindsets that are still prevalent in the Church.

Having been raised as an Adventist and even during my pastoral studies, I noted that Nichol's view is promoted as an Adventist view. Despite Canright and even questions raised by Rea and Numbers who criticised White, this view has not spread to South Africa. Prior to the internet, the criticism against White remained local to a single Church or a single governing body within the Church. The arrival of the internet has allowed both advocating and critical views to be presented worldwide.

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<sup>18</sup> From this point onward, this will be referred to as 'the EGW Estate'.

During the literature review above, Nichol, Canright, Knight, and Bradford are critically reviewed. Following this review, I cannot follow Canright to reject White completely, but at the same time, I cannot follow Nichol and ignore White's failings. The views of Knight and Bradford, nonetheless, provide me with the foundation from which to view both White's positive and negative elements, which provides a wide perspective in studying White and also greater freedom to evaluate her work. From a theological perspective, the views of Knight and Bradford also allow for a better discussion, rather than advocating or criticising White. As such it can be postulated that Bradford and Knight will be the best option from which one can build a structure to study the area in which White's authority should function.

When considering various criticisms of White's authority alongside the attempts to promote her authority, the issue of authority remains unresolved. The discussion of White's authority revolves around criticism and advocating White while lacking clarity as to the definition of her authority. The lack of a clear definition of White's authority allows for arguments on both sides to be repeated, instead of gaining greater insight into her authority. The next step would then be to identify the specific questions that underscore this matter. The next section deals with the research interests of this dissertation to clearly define the question to be addressed.

### **1.3 Research Interest**

In the above section, several historical events that laid the foundation for the acceptance of the divine aspects in White's life are indicated. These events also served to create a historic view that would accept White as a figure of authority. History reveals that White's authority did not remain static and has fluctuated due to external influences (Knight 2000:184). Having briefly sketched the history, it is clear that White's authority did not appear neither did it remain static. The fluctuation of her authority is linked to the focus on the divine and positive elements (Nichol) or the human and negative elements (Canright).

Some publications directly address the issue of White's authority by either affirming or denying it. Canright directly criticises her and denies her authority (Canright 1914:32) while Nichol promotes her to affirm her authority (Nichol 1951:20). Numbers and McMahon, as shown, address her writings on health, although Numbers indirectly criticises her authority while McMahon promotes it.

To retain the Church belief that the authority of Scripture is supreme, but also to recognise the authority of White, it is necessary to consider the question pertaining to her authority. In conducting research on the issue of authority, Knight and Bradford provide a more balanced view of White. The last section of the dissertation deals with this in more depth.

To narrow this question, since authority can be widely defined, the area of White's authority must be considered specifically. This dissertation will also consider a critical evaluation of White's authority, specifically the area in which her authority is meant to function. This exercise is necessitated by the lack of a clearly defined area for White's authority.

Following the formulation of the research problem, one could state that this interest would spark new and fresh discussions on White's authority. The next section will clarify the research aims explaining how these aspects will be addressed and approached.

#### **1.4 Research Aims**

In describing the research interest, it has been made clear that the question of White's authority will be examined, specifically the area in which this authority should function. This line of argumentation will be followed by investigating the following questions:

- First, what was the area of White's authority during her lifetime?
- Second, how did the area of White's authority change over time?
- Third, what should the area of White's authority be?
- Fourth, a critical evaluation will be done on the debate of White's authority.

I do hope that the critical evaluation done in this dissertation will clarify aspects of White's authority as mentioned in the research aims. The research methodology being used in this study will now be discussed.

#### **1.5 Research Methodology**

The nature of the sources and the methodology to be employed designate that the research should utilise a qualitative approach. The method that is utilised, is document analysis, where information will be gathered from various sources in order

to structure coherent themes. The themes will then reveal certain patterns inherent to the views of Canright, Nichol, Bradford, and Knight. This discussion is of a complex nature as various views have to be compared in order to arrive at a more comprehensive view of the discussion (DeFranzo 2011).

Canright will be utilised as a critic, as his arguments serve as a foundation of criticism used by various other critics. He focuses on the human and negative elements of White. His purpose in doing so is to deny her authority. Two works authored by Canright will be focused on, namely *Adventism Renounced* and *The Life of Ellen White* (Canright 1914; 1919).

As an advocate of White, Nichol's arguments contradict Canright's in that he focuses on the divine and positive elements of White. His purpose by highlighting White's divine and positive elements is to promote her authority. Nichol's work, *Ellen G. White and her Critics* (Nichol 1951), will act as his main source. Nichol is not the sole advocate, but due to his position in the history of the Church, he became the leading apologist for White (Knott 2013:476).

Bradford presents a third view that considers the divine and positive elements as well as the human and negative. In his book, *More than a Prophet* (Bradford 2006), he allows for a more moderate view which will be utilised to seek a balance between the critics and advocates. His view is supported by Knight, who also allows for the divine and positive elements as well as the human and negative elements of White to be considered. Knight has authored several books dealing with White, such as *Reading Ellen White* (1997), *Ellen White's World* (1998), *Walking with Ellen White* (1999b), *A Search for Identity* (2000), and *Myths Adventism* (2009). Although Bradford and Knight wrote independently, their views demonstrate various points of agreement.

The material available on the Ellen G. White Estate website (2013) will also be used. The Ellen G. White Estate is an organisation entrusted with the preservation of the writings of White<sup>19</sup>. Since their primary focus is on White and her works it would be

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<sup>19</sup> This website serves as a medium through which articles on various matters in relation to White are posted in order to promote the official view of her works. It is very important to take note that the people responsible for this site are really knowledgeable on her works.

logical to utilise the material available. Other authors who do not directly address White's authority, but address aspects referenced in this dissertation will also be utilised. Examples are McMahon (2002), the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Fortin & Moon 2013), Numbers (1976), and Rea (2004). As such there will be various quotes from relevant sources throughout the discussions. White will also be referenced directly in considering her views on the questions that are raised.

Utilising the qualitative methodology and document analysis method in reviewing the literature, this dissertation will seek to clarify the issue and arrive at the stated research aims. The following section provides a consideration of the way forward.

## **1.6 The Way Forward**

Having discussed the methodology and specific method, the points to be investigated in the chapters of the dissertation are indexed below. This will serve as a guide to the process that will be followed to find possible answers to the research question.

Chapter 2 will deal with the issues concerning White's authority. Different statements and publications will be compared to show the incongruencies in thinking and practice. This Chapter will highlight the problem of rigid thinking within the Church, which prevents necessary change (Bradford 2006:203).

Chapter 3 takes cognisance of the historical development of White's authority. By tracking events prior to White and historical aspects during her time, it allows one to see how her authority has developed. The events after her death serve as indication how the perception and application of her authority changed. With the change of perception and application of White's authority, it moved her authority into areas not intended for, such as theology and history. The historical section clarifies why there is currently an issue with White's authority.

Chapter 4 investigates the authority of Scripture and the authority of White. This Chapter investigates how White viewed her work in relation to Scripture on the matter of authority. It further investigates the relationship between Scripture and the work of White.

Chapter 5 provides my critical evaluation allowing me to present my view on some of the points in the debate on White's authority. My critical evaluation will seek to show the failures of both the critics and advocates of White. I will also expand on why I lean toward Knight and Bradford in this critical evaluation.

With the foundation laid for the rest of the document, Chapter 2 will investigate examples of various authors and publications that reveal a lack of clarity on White's authority.

## CHAPTER 2

### Issues of Authority: White

#### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 deals with the issues concerning White's authority. When considering her authority, it is clear that it is addressed directly or indirectly among her critics and advocates. Different statements and publications are compared to show the incongruencies in differing views and practices. This Chapter also highlights rigid thinking which prevents change within the Church (Bradford 2006:203).

When the proponents of the various views are considered, it is found that there are individuals who played important roles in how White's authority is viewed, and in so doing also promoted their own unique views. For example, one factor that motivates the discussion between Canright and Nichol is that White's authority is viewed as important and central to the authority of the Church (Nichol 1951:15). Therefore, to criticise White is to criticise the Church (Canright 1914:228) and to advocate White is to advocate the Church (Nichol 1951:23). Bradford has aptly summarised the question of discussion as, 'How then shall we judge a true prophet from a false prophet?' (Bradford 2006:51).

Canright, an example of a critic of White's authority, was a friend of the Whites and even attended White's funeral and wept at the loss of a 'noble Christian woman' (Knight 2013b:337-338). Nonetheless, he later wrote a book, *The Life of Ellen White*, presenting White in a negative way and claiming that she was 'self-centred' and 'boastful' (Canright 1919:30). Canright further claims that, '[t]he mere word of Mrs White, an uneducated woman, is accepted as the voice of God to them [Church] dictating in everything' (Canright 1914:32).

In his criticism, Canright attempts to denounce White as a prophet in order to negate her authority and in turn the authority of the Church (Canright 1919:2). The statement serves as evidence that Canright (also Nichol) views White's authority as central to the Church. Canright's discussion of White is therefore at the same time a

discussion of the Church. When White's human and negative elements are criticised, it results in negative views of the Church.

Canright's views are significant in that he serves as a foundation for other critics (Nichol 1951:26). It can be observed that the duplication of Canright's views on White's authority are used by present-day critics as an echo of his arguments (Canright 1919:20, 30, 65; Douty 1962:170; Neumann 2016:61)<sup>20</sup>.

Within the ranks of the advocates, a similar pattern presents itself in Nichol's views of White's authority. Although Nichol maintains that critics have attempted to place White in a position that is impossible for any human being to maintain (Nichol 1951:531), he is guilty of the same error in that he puts White in a position which no human being could attain (Bradford 2006:170), therefore placing her exactly where the critics have, but only in a positive light (Nichol 1951:50). In defence of White, he states that 'indeed there was manifested in her life the great power of God' (Nichol 1951:20).

Nichol focusses on both the divine and positive elements of White. He seeks to promote her authority as a prophet, arguing that both she and the Church have authority (Nichol 1951:61). His prominence in the Church is, first, based on his position as a leading apologist, second, as editor of the *SDA Bible Commentary*, which is still in use today, his ideas are still prominent among Adventists. He is viewed as a lifelong advocate of both White and the Church (Knott 2013:476). Although Nichol was not the first to defend White's authority, he remains an authoritative figure on her authority.

Current authors such as Bradford and Knight promote a third view. They have identified the problematic approach of Canright and Nichol regarding White's authority. They view the problem by focusing on White's divine and positive elements that promote her authority and in turn the authority of the Church (cf. e.g. Nichol 1951:55). The Church seeks to maintain the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura* in

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of this repetition of Canright's arguments can be found on the internet. For example, Challies, like Canright, also criticises White and the Church in a single argument. Challies specifically criticises White's views on Scripture to denounce her as false, similar to Canright (Challies 2014). This non-SDA website also repeats several of Canright's arguments such as the issue of the shut door and copying from other authors (Anonymous 2012a).

order to retain its Protestant identity (General Conference [Inst] 2005:258). The problem arises when the Church is willing to discuss the authority of White in *isolation*, but not *in conjunction or relation with Scripture*. The result of this process is that the Church has not progressed in their understanding of White's authority or her work (Knight 1997:70; 1999a:17; Bradford 2006:199).

Bradford's work is an attempt to view White from a position that allows the positive and divine aspects to be balanced out with the human and negative aspects of her life. He argues that White sometimes writes in extremes and overstates certain ideas (Bradford 2006:104). He contests that not only the critics but also the advocates have held an unrealistic view of White (Bradford 2006:14). In his approach, he links Nichol's views to the events of the 1919 Bible Conference (this event is discussed in Chapter 3), the subsequent fundamentalist approach that the Church followed afterwards, and the thought pattern that would remain prevalent until 1950 (Bradford 2006:151-164).

Although he advocates White, Bradford deviates from Nichol's thinking. In the closing chapter of his book, *More than a Prophet*, he motivates his reasons for being a Church member, none of which includes being an advocate of White (Bradford 2006:228-232). He discusses White as part of the Church, not as the Church itself. With this approach, Bradford deviates from Nichol and Canright, in that neither his advocacy nor his critique on White is applied on the Church. He therefore removes White from a position of absolutes where her authority is based on her correctness or error in absolute terms only (Bradford 2006:47).

Knight likewise points out that White's advocates often put extreme emphasis on certain matters (Knight 1999a:17). He contends that although White attempted to balance her work, that same balance is very often lacking from those who read and quote her work (Knight 1997:71)<sup>21</sup>. These works are the beginning of a new view that arose from questioning in the nineties of various aspects of White including her authority (Knight 2000:184).

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<sup>21</sup> Knight has written several books: *Myths in Adventism* (2009); *Meeting Ellen White* (1996); *Reading Ellen White* (1997); *Ellen White's World* (1998), and *Walking with Ellen White* (1999b). These books strive to promote a clearer view of White that encapsulates both her inspiration and her humanity (Knight 1999b:43).

This new view presented by Bradford and Knight provides a third perspective on White's authority. The rest of the dissertation will compare the three views of Canright, Nichol, Bradford, and Knight in order to come to a better perception of White's authority in the Church in both past and present.

## **2.2 What is a Theory of Authority?**

In order to facilitate the investigation of White's authority, the concept of a theory of authority will be discussed. Specific focus is placed within the context of Christian thinking as this is relevant to the topic of this dissertation. The *Oxford Dictionary* (2018) describes a theory as being one of the following:

1. A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained:
  - 1.1 A set of principles on which the practice of an activity is based.
  - 1.2 An idea used to account for a situation or justify a course of action.
  - 1.3 A collection of propositions to illustrate the principles of a subject.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2018) explains the definition in the following way: 'A formal statement of the rules on which a subject of study is based or of ideas that are suggested to explain a fact or event or, more generally, an opinion or explanation'. Deist (1987:173) describes a theory as a scholarly explanation of the interrelationships among a series of phenomena. A theory seeks to first justify principles of individuals actions or the foundation for those principles. Second, it seeks to illustrate the principles of a subject to explain the facts or opinions. Third, it illustrates the principles between related events or people.

Considered these and other definitions of authority, the following observations can be made: Deist states that Scriptural authority is the 'confessed source of norms governing daily life and ecclesiastical dogma' (Deist 1987:19). He describes authority as the agreed-upon principles that a group of people choose to govern their life. These agreed-upon principles are put forward as the norm and are considered authoritative. Deist, however, only deals with Scriptural authority and does not attempt to explain additional authority outside of Scripture. Erickson views authority as the right to command belief and/or action (Erickson 1998:268). He describes authority as a justified source to direct belief and action. The *New Bible Dictionary*

(Douglas & Hillyer 1992:108) views authority as having at its source God himself, while all other objects or people of authority derive it from God.

The *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (Martin & Davids 1997) make the following statements on authority:

- Authority is not based on succession but transmission of doctrine (Martin & Davids 1997:105).
- The authority of the twelve Apostles over the church or new Israel was a prophetic authority based on their Spirit-filled proclamation of the gospel (Martin & Davids 1997:106).
- Authority in the early church was a combination of the Spirit uniting with the Church leaders (Martin & Davids 1997:106).
- Organisational leadership and leadership of a charismatic nature was the norm (Martin & Davids 1997:224).

What can be gleaned from authority in the early church as it is laid out in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*, is that this concept was linked to the Old Testament and to what Jesus has taught. The expounding of the Apostles, as well as their guidance in the development of early church organisation, was taken as authoritative. The authority was not based on position, but since the Spirit spoke and worked through the Apostles as well as other church leaders, they were placed in a position of authority.

Bruce, in an article on the canon of the Bible, states that the authority of God comes first, and canonicity follows (Bruce 1954:19). He views authority as having its source in God. Designating the canon is a recognition of the connection and ascribing the relevant authority to the object in question (Bruce 1954:22).

Carrol points out that authority is relational in character and that no individual exercises authority in isolation from a group which recognises that authority (Carrol 2011:28). To function properly, authority requires that there are others who agree to that authority. It can therefore be seen as being linked to the individual who has authority and to the larger group who agrees to that authority.

These statements define the Protestant view of authority in general and relating specifically to Scripture. These views do not deal with sources of authority outside of Scripture. They do not negate the concept of sources of authority outside of Scripture, as these sources of authority would be dependent upon the choice made by a group of people.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, Scripture and the tradition hold an equal authority (Roman Catholic Church 1994:50). This church has the authority to alter Scriptural practices or demands, as the interpretation of Scripture lies solely with the Pope and the Bishops (Roman Catholic Church 1994:53). Roman Catholicism is willing to acknowledge that there are other sources of authority they hold equal to Scripture. In comparing Protestant views on authority to Roman Catholic views, it is clear that there are two foundations which are used. Roman Catholicism ascribes authority from succession and position (Roman Catholic Church 1994:49), while Protestantism ascribes authority from the proclamation of the gospel and the empowerment of God the Spirit (Bruce 1954:19; Martin & Davids 1997:105).

When the concept of theory and authority is combined, the theory of authority within the Roman Catholic view is based on apostolic succession and the position of the Pope and Bishops of that church. Within Protestant circles, the theory of authority is based on correct doctrine and the empowerment through the Holy Spirit. These two approaches to the theory of authority provide an important clarity when the desire of Adventism to retain a Protestant identity is considered.

### **2.3 Adventism's View on Authority**

The theory of authority that governs the thinking in Adventism employs Protestant principles. The first fundamental belief of Adventism, namely the supreme position of Scripture as authority, is utilised, together with the principles applied in the governing policies of the Church. These two principles are applied since they operate on a daily basis and are strictly adhered to in both theological thinking and practical aspects of Church operations. To state it very simply, these two principles underscore the daily activities in the Church and thus provide a current and active example of the theory of authority within Adventism.

The Church views Scripture as the authoritative revelation of God's will for Christians (General Conference [Inst] 2005:19) and therefore considers Scripture as the highest authority. Furthermore, the Church developed in a time when anti-Roman Catholicism sentiments were very strong and has retained that attitude to this very day (Knight 1998:65). For this reason, the Church seeks to avoid equating any source with Scripture. To retain a Protestant identity, a great emphasis is observed on Scripture as supreme in authority, as stated in the outlay of the basic Church doctrines (General Conference [Inst] 2005:188). This would also entail that the Church bases authority on correct doctrine and empowerment by the Holy Spirit rather than position or succession (cf. the previous section on the theory of authority). This highlights the desire to retain a Protestant identity for the Church.

The Church also recognises the priesthood of all believers and thus seeks to retain a representative form of governance (General Conference [Inst] 2005:172). Within the Church, the expressed will of the members, as represented by the General Conference<sup>22</sup>, is within its proper jurisdiction and not in conflict with the Church's interpretation of Scripture as the highest governing authority (General Conference [Inst] 2000:1-2). At the General Conference sessions, this authority is officially recognised to include new doctrines or change existing doctrines<sup>23</sup>. Only the authority of Scripture as understood in the mainstream SDA theological view has higher authority. For this reason, the Church has included the words 'not in conflict with Scripture', to endeavour that Scripture remains the authoritative foundation for all beliefs and practices in the Church. The representative nature of this body speaks directly to the view held by the Church concerning authority in general. Authority in the Church is representative in nature, in other words, the authority rests within the membership, subject to Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2000:26).

The structure of the Church is organised in such a manner to ensure that Biblical ethics and practices are protected and maintained in the Church (General Conference [Inst] 2000:18). The Church seeks to maintain, not only in preaching but at every level of Church governance, the authority of Scripture as supreme. What is

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<sup>22</sup> The General Conference in the Church is the governing body that works on a global level. The General Conference is divided into divisions, which are again divided into Union Conferences. The Union Conferences are made up of several local Conferences which assign ministers to various churches.

<sup>23</sup> The General Conference sessions are made up of representatives from all over the world, chosen by church members as well as from the various leadership organisations across the world. In this manner, the highest authority in the Church is representative of the entire Church body.

relevant to the theme of this dissertation is that the key factor is the authority of Scripture and at no point is the authority of Scripture supplemented with a secondary source of authority. The Church seeks to remain in line with the principle of *Sola Scriptura* even at the highest levels of Church governance. As much as possible, every individual who belongs to the Church as a member participates in this process of governance; they are not an addition to the supreme authority of Scripture. Although White is viewed as authoritative, the Church administration and organisation do not allow for her work to be an addition to the authority of Scripture.

Any theory that would seek to equate White's authority in any way to Scripture would be in conflict with the structure of the Church. Any proponents of a theory of such a nature must explain: How can one equate White's authority to Scripture and still remain in harmony with the Church's policies and principles of governance? Even though the Church organisation seeks to maintain the authority of Scripture, it does not prevent questions arising on White's authority in the Church. The next heading will provide an attempt by Gordon to explain the authority of White.

When the term 'theory' is used in connection with White's authority, it relates to the theory of the relationship between White's authority, Scripture, and the Church. In this Chapter, statements and publications of various theories that seek to explain aspects of White's authority are considered. First, the theories underscore the practice of quoting and adhering to White as authoritative. Second, the theories determine how certain aspects of White's authority is accounted for, and third, the theories seek to provide propositions to explain White's authority. When Canright and Nichol are considered, it is clear that their respective theories seek to account for White in such a manner as to justify their respective rejection or acceptance of her authority. The goals of Bradford and Knight are not so much acceptance or rejection, but rather understanding. Theories on White's authority promoted by the Church are now discussed.

#### **2.4 Theories of Authority Promoted by the Church**

The following discussion is based on an article by Gordon in which he describes three types of authority namely imperial, delegated, and veracious authority.

### 2.4.1 Imperial Authority

According to Gordon 'imperial authority' is based on position: People with authority based on their position can exercise authority on others (Gordon 2013:1). He fails to recognise that this type of authority is limited to the scope of one's position. For example, when White was approached to settle a matter of Scriptural exegesis, she encouraged people to consult Scripture as she felt it was outside the scope of her authority (Knight 2000:127). Thus, although White was sought as an authority, she denied applying authority beyond the limitations of her position. Bradford contends that the role of prophets has changed, affecting their position of authority. He asserts that the prophetic role in the New Testament is not limited to a few individuals but extends to all Christians (Bradford 2006:69). According to him, one finds that the Apostles occupied a higher position than that of the Prophets (Bradford 2006:71). These issues highlighted by Bradford as well as the *Ten Affirmation and Ten Denials*<sup>24</sup> are not addressed in Gordon's article. White is accredited to have authority as a non-canonical prophet, but no consideration is given to the changes in the prophetic role throughout history (Pfandl 2013:629).

An example of White's imperial authority shows in a letter of her to Butler and Haskell, who were working as leaders of the Church at the time, stating

I have been shown that yourself and Elder Haskell must at your age be laying the burdens on others. Attend fewer camp meetings, speak and work less at the camp meetings you attend, and this will force others to the front to be obtaining an experience which is essential for them. In order to do this, you must do less and others must do more...This is not the voice of Sister White but it is the message to you from God (White 1985:44)<sup>25</sup>.

Despite the lack of holding an official position in the Church, White's imperial authority allowed her to guide leadership in making changes concerning the structure of the Church.

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<sup>24</sup> The *Ten Affirmations and Ten Denials* will be discussed later as they attempt to address the issue of White's authority.

<sup>25</sup> These two men had taken on the leadership of the entire Church. White addresses these two men, stating that they need to find others to share the burden of leadership. The result was the restructuring of the Church and a larger number of men in leadership positions.

Another factor that enhanced her position of authority in the Church immensely, was the physical signs that were present when she received visions. Nichol (1951:52) recounts a description that her husband, J. White, documented on one such occasion:

- White was unaware of what was happening around her; she recounted in her own testimony that she viewed herself as removed from the world. To dispel any doubt as to the authenticity of these visions, rigorous testing was done as described under the next bullets.
- Whilst experiencing a vision, White did not breathe and that could last from fifteen minutes to three hours. Her husband testified that others have tested this condition by pressing on her chest or closing her mouth and nose and placing a mirror in front of her face without any vapour showing.
- Whilst in a vision, she could freely move around but no one else could force her to move.
- After recovering from a vision, she would testify that she was surrounded by darkness and unable to make out objects for up to three hours. She believed that this happened due to the brightness that exists in heaven as opposed to the darkness on earth. Despite this experience of brightness in her visions, her eyesight was never impaired.

Butler claims that hundreds of people witnessed some of these visions happening, stating: 'There are none of the disgusting grimaces or contortions which usually attend spiritualist mediums, but calm, dignified, and impressive, her very appearance strikes the beholder with reverence and solemnity' (Nichol 1951:53-54).

The following Scriptural passages are linked to the visions of White: Daniel 10:7-11 was taken as a reflection of White's loss of strength followed by her supernatural strength. The Scriptural passage, Numbers 12:6, recounts of both dreams and visions which were considered as parallel with White's experiences. Numbers 24:2-4 records Balaam who would prophesy with his eyes open – similar to the case of White. In Revelation 1:7 John states that he was 'as one who was dead' which is also compared to White's condition while in vision (Nichol 1951:52-60). By associating White's visions with that of Scriptural prophet, it placed her in a position similar to that of a prophet of God.

Canright, in his book *Adventism Renounced*, reviews several individuals who also claimed to have had visions, the first being a man by the name of Swedenborg. The second, Lee, who was part of the Shaker movement, Canright points out that her visions were also referred to as testimonies (Boyko 2014). Third, he speaks of Southcoat, who joined the Methodists, and who also had visions and many ministers believed her. The last is Joseph Smith who started the Mormon movement (Canright 1919:56-57). Canright groups White with these individuals as false prophets. He states that White's visions were the result of 'nervous diseases, a complication of hysteria, catalepsy and ecstasy' (Canright 1919:65). He criticises White's visions in order to equate her to a false prophet (Canright 1914:71). Therefore, if White's visions were not from a divine source but the results of a mental disorder, then White could not have been placed in a position of imperial authority.

The Church officially avoids allowing White's work to inform their doctrines and claims that Church doctrines are based solely on the Church's interpretation of Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2005:11). Nichol, being in accord with the Church position, despite a high regard for her work, does not claim White's work as an addition to Scripture (Nichol 1951:87). Even in her writings, White avoids claiming that her work has the same authority as Scripture. She states: 'The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word...Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God' (White 1946:256).

Although Nichol relies on White's visions as a foundation for her imperial authority, he does not consider these visions as giving her the authority to formulate doctrines. He does, conversely, allow White to influence his views which he promotes in *The SDA Bible Commentary* (this matter will be considered in Chapter 4). He argues that the uniqueness of White's visions places her in a position of imperial authority, unique to anyone else. Since her visions are connected to Scriptural examples, White's imperial authority exceeds that of others who do not have similar experiences.

Bradford (2006:52-53) contends that White's distinguishing physical manifestations while experiencing a vision are not unique to Christianity but can also be found in other religions. He does not rely on White's physical manifestations during a vision

as proof of her imperial authority (Bradford 2006:53-54). This contradicts strong Church tradition, as opposed to Nichol (1951:61) and Fortin (2013b:1249). What can be established from White's physical state during a vision is that something happened, as to the underlying reason one would need to go beyond the visions to find proof. This break in the methodology of Bradford with Nichol appears to be an attempt to move away from the methodology of relying solely on miraculous or divine elements in advocating White. Although Bradford recognises that White had visions, he does not rely on them as foundational in his thinking. Bradford does not view White's visions as motivation for ascribing imperial authority to her.

#### **2.4.2 Delegated Authority**

White's delegated authority has grown from her imperial authority. Delegated authority is the authority that is granted to a person. Delegated authority proves its position from imperial authority, in other words, White could act and compel action from her position of imperial authority. Nichol, who researched her visions, the prophecies she made, her inspiration, and other factors in order to affirm the imperial authority of White (Nichol 1951:61, 111, 459), argues from the position of White's imperial authority for her delegated authority. This does raise the question that if White was tested by Church leaders according to Scripture, then would this not imply that Church leadership had higher authority than she had? Bruce claims that the books of Scripture formed the canon because they had authority. The books of Scripture were not placed in the canon to afford them authority (Bruce 1954:19). Bruce argues that imperial authority follows delegated authority. When Bruce's argument on the canon is applied to White, the question is raised of whether her delegated or her imperial authority was primary? Church leadership has delegated authority to White, which served as the foundation for her imperial authority, hence it appears that delegated authority precedes imperial authority. Furthermore, Bradford (2006:71) claims that in the New Testament, Paul has greater authority than the prophets. He contends that in the New Testament, prophets are subject to the authority of Church leadership. It can, therefore, be asked: If Church leaders made the tests, then would it imply that they had to have been in a higher position of authority to test White and delegate her position? The question must be asked if Gordon's argument is not similar to the Roman Catholic theory of authority rather than the Protestant Theory, which bases White's authority primarily on her position? This issue will be resolved in the final Chapter.

Knight points out that the delegation of authority very often goes to extremes. He recounts a story of seven missionaries who came to the present-day Zimbabwe to the Solusi University in 1894. During 1898, there was a severe malaria breakout. The result was that of the original seven, only three were alive. Of the three, two were in the Cape recovering and one was still active. The reason for this was that the active missionary had taken quinine while the other six had refused, believing they were following White's advice to not take drug medication (Knight 1997:98)<sup>26</sup>. The result is that when Church members delegate authority of an imperial nature, common sense is often lost in the process (Knight 1997:99). White's original position was delegated authority beyond its original limitations and, in this case, resulted in negative outcomes.

When authority is delegated to White and her work, it must be done to provide freedom and not captivity (Bradford 2006:177). The reality is that too often common sense is exchanged for what is thought to be authoritative. It is with good reason that Knight wrote 'Use Common Sense' when giving guidelines as to how one should read White's work (Knight 1997:95). Knight describes two cases: First, a man who was undernourished, believed that his lack of eating would result in the perfection of character; second, another man did not partake in communion for fear of eating between meals (Knight 2001:89).

The reality is that it becomes impossible to follow White's counsel either fully or for extended periods of time. Knight addresses this matter in his book, *Myths in Adventism*, arguing that taking the extreme view of White's counsel, creates a dichotomy between Church and society at large (Knight 1999a:127). This causes Canright to state that '[h]er teachings make her people narrow, bigoted, and gloomy. Thus she blasts the peace of thousands of souls' (Canright 1914:69).

In her writings, White expressed the following ideal: 'Heaven is all joy; and if we gather to our souls the joys of heaven and, as far as possible, express them in our

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<sup>26</sup> White regularly counselled against the use of drug remedies to cure illness (White 1923a:30; 1989:284). Looking back, one realises that the drugs White referred to were alcohol, opium, strychnine, and calomel (Knight 1998: 33, 113). The problem is the case of a degenerating lack of understanding the original setting. The further the reader moves from the original setting the greater the lack of understanding, and the greater the chance becomes that White may be misapplied or abused to suit individual views.

words and deportment, we shall be more pleasing to our heavenly Father than if we were gloomy and sad' (White 1952:430).

White had no intention that her readers become as Canright describes them above; though, when she is delegated authority exceeding that of common sense, this seems to be the result. The repetitive stating that White is not used for doctrine is an attempt to avoid the problem of White's authority exceeding that of Scripture and common sense. The further danger of this process of delegating White's authority from an unnatural imperial position is that in exalting one person and their gifts, it ignores and inhibits the gifts of other individuals (Bradford 2006:217).

### **2.4.3 Veracious Authority**

Veracious authority is based on the truth it contains or its aid to discovering truth (Gordon 2013:1). Bradford points out that both Christ and Paul quoted from other authors too (Bradford 2006:33). Thus, the original sources should contain some authority if they helped those who quoted them to arrive at the truth. If one considers Bradford's argument that in the New Testament the prophetic role is spread to the Church, then all Christians have some authority in their relationship to the truth (Bradford 2006:73). Knight states that the *Three Angels' Message* (Rev 14:6-13) which is central to Adventism, is also a prophetic message (Knight 2000:107). This, in turn, implies that as far as Church members proclaim a prophetic message, they share to some extent in the prophetic position.

Veracious authority is based on the source of authority either containing truth and/or leading to truth. There will be different responses to the question, whether White was and remains a source of veracious authority. The Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University in Berrien Springs published a study concerning the effects of reading White's works on a regular basis. These results are summarised in *Seventh-day Adventist Believe...* stating: '[T]he readers had a closer relationship to Christ, more likely to have identified their spiritual gifts, contribute more to missionary projects, they are more likely to pray and study their Scripture daily, they see the church more positively and win more converts' (General Conference [Inst] 2005:258).

This study reveals positive outcomes from regularly reading White's works. Nevertheless, it is also true, that negative results can occur from misinterpreting White's authority as with the seven missionaries at Solusi. It is for this reason that Knight states the need for reading White with a positive and healthy outlook (Knight 1997:43-45). The concept of a 'positive and healthy outlook' is not specific and remains open to both interpretation and even abuse.

#### **2.4.4 The Basis for White's Authority**

According to Gordon, White's authority is based upon imperial, delegated and veracious authority. As for the imperial and veracious authority, both are confirmed by White's position in the history of the Church and the veracity of the work she had done (Gordon 2013:2). Gordon, despite his attempts to advocate for White's authority, fails to answer three questions: First, taking into account White's imperial authority, *What is her exact position from which her authority is derived?* This was brought out by Bradford stating that the prophetic position and authority has changed over time (Bradford 2006:69, 71). Second, if her imperial position of authority is unclear, then *how can the limits of White's delegated authority be defined?* The incident of the seven missionaries at Solusi cited by Knight is an example of White's delegated authority exceeding healthy limits (Knight 1997:98). Third, concerning veracious authority, *how much of a role does the interpretation of the individual play?* Knight's advice to use common sense and to have a healthy outlook when reading White raises the question of the individual's delegation to White's authority. Using either the Nichol or Canright or Bradford/Knight view as a starting point will affect White's veracious authority. These questions will be answered in the final Chapter. At this point, greater clarification is needed on the understanding of White's authority. Having considered the attempt to clarify her authority, the next section will consider issues pertaining to her authority.

#### **2.5 Issues Pertaining to Authority**

This section considers the issue of authority particularly concerning White and the Church. Scripture is considered authoritative since God communicates through Scripture, as a combination of the Holy Spirit and the writers (General Conference [Inst] 2005:18). This statement on its own poses no issue of authority for Adventist theology or practice. When White's authority (which remains unspecified) is introduced, inconsistencies in statements that have theological implications can be

observed. White's authority in practice, contradicting theological statements on her authority, can also be observed. These inconsistencies and contradictions are now explored.

### **2.5.1 Issues with White's Authority**

In discussing White's authority, Gordon relies on the Webster Dictionary, which defines authority as the right to command or act from a position of power. This argument is in line with the Roman Catholic argument on authority, but not with Protestant arguments. Gordon relies on a secondary definition that views authority as the 'right' to command or act and account responsible for the power that is held (Gordon 2013:1). The second reference is taken from Ramm, an evangelical scholar and apologist. Fortin, an Adventist scholar, also quotes Ramm dealing with White's authority (Fortin 2006:slides 5, 7, 8). This gives rise to two issues. First, Ramm specifically discusses Scriptural authority; yet his definition is applied to explain White's authority. No explanation is given by Gordon on how he arrives at a supposed theory of White's authority, while relying on theories of authority that deal solely with Scripture. Second, Reid, an Adventist scholar, rejects the Evangelical approach of Ramm to Scriptural inspiration, as it minimises the human aspect (Reid 1990). A statement used by Ramm, which downplays the human aspect in inspiration, is applied to White. This is a reflection of Nichol's view, which elevates the divine and positive aspects at the neglect of the human and negative aspects of White.

*The Ellen G. White Encyclopaedia*, in defining White's authority, presents an article by Pfandl, claiming that White held the authority of a non-canonical prophet (Pfandl 2013:629). Pfandl does not define the authority of a non-canonical prophet in this article, as he has already referred to it almost ten years before that, stating: 'However, what the non-canonical prophets said or wrote was just as authoritative and binding for the people of their time as were the books of Moses and Isaiah' (Pfandl 2004:1).

According to Pfandl (2004:1), White is not part of the canon, because the canon has been closed, but in effect White holds the same authority. It is clear that the Church views White as having authority, but there lacks a clearly a defined paradigm to deal with this (General Conference [Inst] 2005:247). Officially, White's authority is not

extended to the formulation of doctrine within the Church and scholars agree with this position (General Conference [Inst] 2005:11, 258). The problem is that in comparison to official Church views and Pfandl, contradictory statements are found. If White has the authority to govern the norms of 'daily life' but not the doctrines of the Church, then it contradicts Pfandl's view that she held similar authority to Scriptural prophets.

Within the Church, further examples of the lack of a clear definition of White's authority can be found, giving rise to problematic views. Knight deals with some of these problematic views in his book *Myths in Adventism*. One chapter deals with the idea that White was inflexible and that her adherents would be the same. Knight sees the root of this problem as losing the relationship between prophetic authority and the divine gift of human reason (Knight 1999a:17). This serves as an example where, unofficially, White has become the source of doctrine, not officially supported by the Church but by members in their daily practice of Adventism<sup>27</sup>. The overemphasis of prophetic authority is established at the loss of the divine gift of human reason. This reflects the overemphasis on White's divine and positive elements at the neglect of the human and negative elements. As the human and negative elements are neglected in White, they are also neglected by White's adherents.

Erickson's definition raises the question that, if White is not used for formulating doctrine, can she still command belief? As stated in the previous section (Adventism's view on Authority), Scripture is viewed as the highest authority in the Church. As much as members participate in Church governance through representation, the highest authority resting with the General Conference in session, may not conflict with Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2000:1-2). The General Conference sessions allow for authority to include new doctrines or even alter existing ones, as long as they do not contradict the foundational teachings from Scripture. Thus, the Church seeks to be governed by Scripture as the highest authority. With such strong governing principles, it may seem strange that White's authority can be an issue in the Church. When, however, one considers other

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<sup>27</sup> Other examples include the view of Knight that White was against the accreditation of Church schools – that parents should be teachers to children (Knight 1999a:37, 72), and the view of Bradford that everything that White wrote was the truth and had to be believed (Bradford 2006:20).

publications, it becomes clear that White's authority is indeed an issue within the Church.

### **2.5.2 Selective Quotes of White as a Figure of Authority**

The lack of a clearly defined point of departure for this issue of authority becomes more apparent in the following cases where two Church members who are advocates of White, are using her work selectively in order to strengthen their arguments about her authority.

Du Preez, in his book, *No fear for the Future*, attempts to argue that the KJV and NKJV translations are better than modern translations such as the RSV and NASB, which, according to him, diminish the divinity of Christ (Du Preez 2006:73). The differences that originate from the source documents of the *Textus Receptus* and the *Nestlé Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* are portrayed as purposeful attempts to reduce the divinity of Christ. He then turns to White's writings, choosing selected passages such as 'a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages' (White 1889:25).

Du Preez argues that when other translations stated something more clearly, White relied on these translations, but in proving the divinity of Christ, she apparently stayed with the KJV (Du Preez 2006:81). The implication of his argument is that the divinity of Christ is better presented in the KJV and NKJV and that this view is supported by White.

In the same vein, Veith<sup>28</sup> argues in his presentation, *The Disagreement of the Scriptures*, that the KJV and NKJV are more reliable than other translations based on *Nestlé Aland Greek Bible* (Veith 2011). He therefore promotes the KJV-only view, despite being a Church member. In an article posted on the Biblical Research Institute website, Kovar mentions Veith by name in renouncing his KJV-only message and denies this view as being in line with SDA thinking (Kovar 2008:1). During a lengthy correspondence between Veith and Mueller, Mueller pointed out that, although Veith no longer publicly proclaims his view, there are digital video

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<sup>28</sup> Veith is a former atheist and professor in Zoology who became an evangelist. He has travelled to several parts of the world preaching his version of Adventism. Certain of the points which he promoted were in contradiction to the Church and this has resulted in problems for members and church leaders.

discs (DVDs) that are widespread, which still promote his KJV-only view (Veith 2008:6). Veith, in another publication, similar to Du Preez, clearly demonstrates his support of White as a prophet and figure of authority (Veith 1997:384).

What should be of interest is that neither the Biblical Research Institute nor the EGW Estate holds a KJV-only view in any official capacity<sup>29</sup>. Kovar points out that during 1930/1931 and in 1954, the Church considered the use of different Bible translations by members. The agreement in both instances was to promote the use of different Bible translations (Kovar 2008:5). Another article compiled by the Biblical Research Institute concludes that despite the difference between modern translations and the KJV, there is no danger of doctrinal error (Biblical Research Institute 1997:13). Thus, Veith and Du Preez both share a view that is in contradiction to the official view of the Church and of White.

Considering the view held by the EGW Estate, an article penned by A.L. White, which recounts the words of W. White, her son, written in 1931, states:

I do not know of anything in the E. G. White writings, nor can I remember of anything in Sister White's conversations, that would intimate that she felt that there was any evil in the use of the Revised Version...We cannot find in any of Sister White's writings, nor do I find in my memory, any condemnation of the American Revised Version of the Holy Scriptures (White, A.L. 1953:7).

White remained with the KJV because it was well known to most members and would not unsettle them. Moreover, the following quote states:

Before the revised version was published, there leaked out from the committee, statements regarding changes which they intended to make. Some of these I brought to Mother's attention, and she gave me very surprising information regarding these Scriptures. This led me to believe that the revision, when it came to hand, would be a matter of great service to us (White, A.L. 1953:2).

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<sup>29</sup> The Biblical Research Institute is the official voice for the Church in respect to issues that deal with faith, religion or theology.

When one returns to the definitions by Deist and Erickson on the concept of authority, one finds that, with reference to White's authority, arguments are made that rely on an eclectic use of her work. White's authority is utilised to command belief and action, but that belief and action did not reflect her view. This is not an isolated incident where White is utilised to lend authority to personal views<sup>30</sup>. Despite official statements by the General Conference, it can be observed that individuals rely on selected passages of White as authority for personal views and practice.

When White's position as a prophet and a figure of authority serves as a foundation for arguments, it contradicts the Adventist theory of authority. As with the case of Du Preez and Veith, White is selectively quoted to prove personal views. Not only is White's position relied upon but there are also arguments of succession: The argument of an individual is supported by the eclectic quoting of White, as the individual then has the authority to claim that his/her argument is a succession of White's argument. When this method is used, it is similar to the theory of authority that is utilised by the Roman Catholic Church, hence the authority presented is no longer Protestant. Furthermore, this method is not representative of the Church's theory of authority that seeks to maintain Scripture as supreme and be representative of Adventism.

Based on the above, we find examples of what was stated before, that White is selectively quoted to gain authority for personal views. In effect this removes White's authority from its proper area of functioning. As in the case of Du Preez and Veith, the utilised statements of White now represent their views, and not White's views anymore. This provides a challenge to maintaining a unique Church identity<sup>31</sup>. When White's authority is used in this manner, she inadvertently supersedes Scripture in authority and the Church begins to lose its Protestant identity.

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<sup>30</sup> There are other similar abuses such as an article by Manu indicating clearly that she misunderstood White and promoted the idea that non-vegetarians would not go to heaven. Despite the fact that she later realised her mistake, she claimed that such errors are still present in the Church (Manu 2005).

<sup>31</sup> It may appear strange to an outsider that members in the Church can quote White as such an authoritative source. This problem actually arose shortly after White's death when so-called Adventist traditionalists succeeded in promoting the view that, '[t]his group emphasised that the Scripture and White's writings had equal authority, and thus both were "verbally inspired"' (Campbell 2010). The exact process of how the traditionalists gained the preference in Church theological circles are dealt with in the next section. At this point it suffices to point out that, despite official claims, there is a long-standing view that contradicts what the official view of the Church states.

The various governing bodies in the Church such as the General Conference, local Church Boards, the EGW estate, among others, within their various duties are to ensure that the government of Church matters remain representative (General Conference [Inst] 2000:xx). This is not an isolated instance either, as Knight, in his book, *Myths in Adventism*, deals with various instances where White was misrepresented. In an interview with *Spectrum Magazine*, Knight states, ‘She’s [White] the best thing that ever happened to the Adventist Church and she’s the worst thing that ever happened to the Adventist Church’ (Carpenter 2009).

Knight reflects on the value that she added to the Church resulting in a positive outcome. He also recognises, though, the negative impact that the use of selected quotes taken out of context has produced. Quoting White out of context ensures that ideas and statements, made under the apparent support of White, render the statement or action unrepresentative of White’s work. This process gives credibility to the arguments of critics not only against White, but also against the Church (Canright 1914:30). The next section discusses an attempt by the Church to address the issue of White’s authority.

### **2.5.3 The Ten Affirmations and Ten Denials**

This section discusses a document on the authority of White, referred to as the *Ten Affirmation and Ten Denials*<sup>32</sup>. An *ad hoc* committee of the General Conference formulated this document to reflect the view of the Church. The document was presented after a period when several foundational doctrines of the Church were questioned (Knight 2000:176). It therefore serves as an attempt to answer questions about doctrines, as well as an attempt to create a foundation for White’s authority. The document begins by quoting the fundamental beliefs of the Church in respect to the Scripture as the only canon and secondly the belief in the spiritual gifts of White.

#### **AFFIRMATIONS**

1. We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.

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<sup>32</sup> This document appears in *The Adventist Review* (Anonymous 1982:9) and *Ministry* (Anonymous 1983) and is currently available on the EGW Estate website (2018).

3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.
4. We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language.
5. We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times.
6. We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy.
7. We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative, especially to Seventh-day Adventists.
8. We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life.
9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
10. We believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Scripture (Ellen G. White Estate 2015).

The first two affirmations are repetitions of basic Church doctrine and simply clarify further what is seen as Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2005:18). Affirmation three confirms that Adventism relies on Scripture and holds it to be the final authority. The fourth affirmation reflects the Church's position of viewing Scripture as divinely inspired while still allowing for human errors (General Conference [Inst] 2005:18). The fifth affirmation follows the establishment of the authority of Scripture and uses that foundation to motivate faith in White's authority and her work. The sixth affirmation places White's authority above mere human invention, and this assumes that everything done by White was prophetic, therefore negating her human aspects or failures.

Affirmation seven explains that White's work is inspired, and as such, the inspiration that guided her writings serves as the foundation for the authority attributed to her and her work. The understanding of this affirmation rests upon affirmation eight stating that White's writings provide guidance in specifically aiding understanding of Scripture and applying Scripture in regard to prophecy, spirituality, and morality. The ninth affirmation touches on a pivotal point, which is that White has become central

to the unity of the Church. It also implies that the criticism and defence of White are related to the unity within the Church.

The tenth and final affirmation is a statement which is only a reflection of the process that White used in her writing methodology. Once again, White is supported by Scripture to sustain her authority. When one considers the amount of time that has been used to state the supremacy of Scripture (as an accepted doctrine of the Church), then it begs the question as to the purpose of this methodology. In the first instance, it has been demonstrated that Bradford and Knight recognise that White is used for theological purposes when according to the eighth affirmation, this was not the purpose of White's work. The second reason requires a return to the comment on the fifth affirmation that both the affirmation and Nichol use the process of reaffirming the primacy of Scripture when dealing with White's work. The EGW estate promotes the view that White was inspired in the same way as the prophets of Scripture (Pfandl 2013:628). Knight, on the other hand, clearly states that White saw her authority as derived from the authority of Scripture (Knight 2013a:649). What can be observed here is that despite documented statements, the Scriptural authority may easily fall second to the authority of White.

The denials of White's authority are presented next, followed by a discussion on the position that they promote.

## DENIALS

1. We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.
2. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture.
3. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.
4. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.
5. We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.
6. We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.

7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.
8. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.
9. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.
10. We do not believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.

We conclude, therefore, that a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White will avoid two extremes: (1) regarding these writings as functioning on a scriptural level identical with Scripture, or (2) considering them as ordinary Christian literature (Ellen G. White Estate 2015).

First, the Church does not recognise degrees of inspiration, but considers all inspiration to be equal (Van Bemmelen 2000:40). This viewpoint does not take into consideration inspiration outside of the canon, for if White is inspired to the same degree as Scripture, then what would this entail for her authority? Bradford states that at times, although individuals are not prophets, the possibility exists whereby an individual can speak under the guidance of the Spirit and make a prophetic statement (Bradford 2006:71). This raises a question for the first denial, which allows for divine inspiration only for Scripture and White, yet nothing beyond that. This issue will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 4.

The second denial indicates that White is not part of the canon. When relating this point to the previous paragraph, this creates the question that if the inspiration of White and Scripture is the same, then why is she not added to the canon? Pfandl states that the canon was compiled by the guidance of God to serve as a measuring tool. He differentiates between White's work that is limited to a particular people and time, as opposed to Scripture, which is not limited to any area (Pfandl 2013:627). This raises the question that if White is limited and Scripture is not, then how can they bear the same authority? This point will be considered more fully in Chapter 5.

The third denial brings about another question: If White's writings are not the final authority for faith, then what authority does she hold? Although these denials attempt to answer various elements, there are critical issues such as the specific definition of White's authority that remain unclear.

The fourth denial agrees with what has been previously stated, that White's writings do not serve to create doctrine. In the previous section, the work of Gordon was used to clarify the issue. In both instances, the doctrines of the Church, as well as White's authority require clarification. As indicated earlier, this does not prevent White from influencing doctrines or from individuals to use her works on a theological level.

The fifth denial makes it clear that the study of White cannot replace the study of Scripture. White herself states that if Church members have studied Scripture with the correct motivation, then they would not have needed her work (White 1946:257). This argument suggests that the Church needs Scripture, but it only needs White in as much as the Scripture is neglected.

Denials six and seven counter the idea that White is the only source that can be used to study, explain, and understand Scripture. This idea originated in the late 1880s and during White's lifetime, yet nearly a hundred years later it is still prevalent to the point that it must be denied (Knight 2000:99). The question as to how this issue still lingers will be dealt with in section 3.

Denial eight falls back on the idea that White is limited to the people she addresses and the period which she covers. It also implies that her work is rather meant to be in-house to the Church.

The ninth denial places White's writings above normal Christian literature, and links to the final statement. This denial, in conjunction with the first four affirmations, presents the true problem: if White is below Scripture and above mere pious Christian literature, then where does her authority lie? Between Scripture and pious writing lies a great area of varying degrees of authority, especially in the Church with various individuals who are willing to quote White selectively. If the authority of her writings is below Scripture and above 'Christian piety', it still leaves a great area

which remains unspecified. Her writings could be treated as 99% authoritative, 75% authoritative, or even 10% authoritative. Bradford explains that although members may affirm that White was inspired by God, it does not prevent them from quoting her selectively (Bradford 2006:18). As with the examples – Du Preez and Veith – cited above, it becomes clearer that there exists a need to define the limits and the precise area in which White’s authority functions. Denial ten is similar to affirmation ten and one can draw the same conclusion from both.

The extremes to which Church members will take White, as well as examples cited where her work serves personal agendas, are indicative of the unspecified area of White’s authority. *The Ten Affirmations and Denials* is a response to both criticism and abuse of White as a figure of authority; though it fails to address the true position of the authority under question. The next section will discuss how postmodernism has affected the Church in respect to authority.

## **2.6 Postmodernism and the Church**

Postmodernism can elicit a wide-ranging discussion, and while it is not really discussed in Church publications, its effect on Adventism cannot be denied. This section focusses on a single aspect of postmodernism within the wider discussion, which is postmodernism’s denial of absolute truth – an issue that is relevant. The denial of absolute truth presents the greatest problem for the Church, which relies on Scripture as absolute truth (Zwaagstra 2013). Nichol works from a position of observing the evidence relying on a modernist mindset (Nichol 1951:20). Canright functions from a similar position of observing evidence also in line with modernist thinking (Canright 1919:8). The greatest effect of postmodernism is that it has opened the door for White to be criticised from within the Church. Rea’s criticism that White committed plagiarism serves as such an example. Another example of a scholar who criticises White is Numbers, who was not an outsider but a member of the Church<sup>33</sup>.

Ratsara and Davidson (2013:23) wrote an article in *Ministry Magazine*, promoting the idea of the universal authoritative nature of Church theology. The reasoning behind the article is to maintain the authority of the Church in a world influenced by

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<sup>33</sup> The criticism of Rea and Numbers were not new, for Canright levelled similar arguments against White (Canright 1919:71).

postmodernism and secularism. Postmodernism has been difficult for the Church, as it has relied on 'converting' people by proving that the Church is right (Moran 2010). In the article, there are recurring phrases such as 'binding authority' and 'Ellen G. White makes clear'. This is an attempt to maintain the authority of the Church in a situation where questions grow more prevalent. Knight refers to the period from 1950 to the present day as one of theological tension for the Church. What is evident to someone well versed in Church doctrine is that the list of theological topics of tension mentioned is not filled with new topics but comprises of past topics that have resurfaced (Knight 2000:195-196). The purpose of the article by Ratsara and Davidson is to calm the mentioned theological tension by promoting the authority of the Church. Knight mentions topics of theological tension, such as the Trinity, prophetic interpretation, and inspiration, which are topics on which White held clear views which are questioned in recent times (Knight 2000:195)<sup>34</sup>.

For several years, the Church has been wrestling with the question of ordination: 'Who would qualify?', 'What does it mean?', etc. (Morris 2013:5). The EGW Estate has written an article discussing White's view. They conclude that she was silent on the matter and they claim silence to either advocating or opposing this matter. What is contradictory though is that in that very same argument they claim that, ordaining women would be contradictory to the principle of the Bible and only the Bible followed by the Church (Coon 1986:8, 24). The result is that although the EGW Estate claims silence, they are still influencing the discussion. Another article written by Morris, states the following: 'Change isn't easy, even when initiated by God' (Morris 2013:5). These two statements should be taken in conjunction with the following quote from Bradford: 'Seventh-day Adventism was meant to be a free, open, living, dynamic movement. While Ellen White was alive she fought for this, but the church slipped into the narrowness of Fundamentalism after her death' (Bradford 2006:203).

The Church can claim that White has authority and is a prophet, yet it becomes difficult to consider that a woman may be ordained as a pastor. In light of the EGW Estate's statement that ordaining women as ministers will contradict Scripture, they are prepared to defend White's authority as a prophet. The article by Ratsara and

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<sup>34</sup> See also Moon (2013:843-844), Hasel (2013:1087-1088), and Damsteegt (2013b:1060).

Davidson deals with the postmodern mindset that rejects absolute truth in favour of individual truth (Bruinsma 2005).

Douty states that both White's traditional advocates and critics have worked from a modernist mindset (Douty 1962:170). Both sides have relied, and continue to rely, on the idea of the assurance of the trustworthiness of the observer. As in the case of White receiving visions, Nichol (1951:53) refers to witnesses, as does Canright (1919:62). Neither Bradford nor Knight relies on these physical manifestations as proof. Bradford (2006:54) recognises that other religions also have such manifestations, while Knight (1996:32) states that early SDA pioneers left the decision about White to the individual.

In his research, Rea discovered that White had borrowed greatly from other writers in her time without giving them credit (Rea 2004:7). The Church was aware of her literary borrowing; however, they have stated that White has relied more on literary sources than they previously had believed. This, though, is not a new argument, since Canright, in a lecture in 1889, used the same accusation against White (Ellen G. White Estate 1999:3).

Upon further investigation, one finds that White did obtain many of her ideas from other authors. The following serves as examples of this: In 1868 White wrote: 'Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind' (White 1868:347), while Coles has said almost the same thing more than a decade earlier: 'Whatever mars the healthy circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system, lessens the strength of the vital forces, and through them, deadens the native susceptibilities of the soul' (Coles 1854:266-267). While Rea views this as plagiarism by White, McMahon argues that it was by divine revelation that White received her information on health (McMahon 2002:44).

In another example on the same website (Ellen G. White Estate 1999:3), White has seemingly developed an idea, but with all probability after reading the work of Coles: 'The sympathy which exists between the mind and the body is very great. When one is affected, the other responds' (White 1876:60). Coles' words are: 'The sympathy

existing between the mind and the body is so great, that when one is affected, both are affected' (Coles 1954:127).

The next example comes from Rea's book, *The White Lie* (Rea 2004), referring to William Hanna who wrote his book, *The Life of Christ*, in 1863: 'Christ virtually says, On the bank of Jordan the heavens were opened before me, and the Spirit descended like a dove upon me'. Rea then quote from White's book, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (White 1870): 'You have heard...on the banks of the river, the heavens opened for a moment above my head, and the Spirit was seen coming down like a dove upon me'.

Rea (2004) points out another example from Hanna:

...will be ascending, bearing the prayers of the needy and distressed from the earth to the Father above, and descending, bringing blessings...for the children of men. The angels of God are ever moving up and down from earth to Heaven, and from Heaven to earth. All the miracles of Christ performed for the afflicted and suffering were, by the power of God, through the ministrations of angels.

He (Rea 2004) then refers to White's copy:

...and the angels of God...that carry on the blessed ministry of reconciliation between earth and heaven, between...believers below and the heavenly Father above...going up and bringing blessings innumerable down, ascending and descending upon the Son of man...You shall see me in that ladder of all gracious communication between earth and heaven, my humanity fixing firmly the one end of that ladder on earth, in my divinity the other end of that ladder lost amid the splendors of the throne.

Although the ideas are similar, White has given her own slant to the work. In 1981, Ramik, a lawyer who was approached by Johns to investigate Rea's accusations, made a public report. The conclusion of the report, based on 300 hours of research, claimed that there was no case and that White did not commit plagiarism (Fortin 2013a:1029).

During a TV programme, titled the *John Ankerberg Show*, the host interviewed Rea and Ford, both Adventists who had differing views on certain aspects of Church theology. The show ran for three episodes from September to October in 1982. During the show, Ford informs Rea that literary borrowing was not unique to White, but that in the Library of Congress one would find the same pattern of literary borrowing in all fields (The John Ankerberg Show 1982).

Fortin comments that Rea's critique helped to shift from Nichol's methodology to a more open discussion concerning White's use of literary sources (Fortin 2013a:1035). This more open mindset, as seen throughout this Chapter, has not extended to the area of White's authority. White was not original in many of her ideas: Knight indicates that White borrowed the concept of perfection from Wesley, which states that Christian perfection should be equated with compassion for others (Knight 1998:56). Fortin, likewise, shows that White borrowed her views on inspiration from Stowe, but altered it slightly to suit her theological view (Fortin 2013a:1034).

The critics have taken the view that White plagiarised and was therefore not divinely inspired. Canright was the first to level such arguments (Fortin 2013a:1029). Rea's accusations are in nature not unique. What he has contributed, is the way in which he demonstrated how much White actually did rely on other sources (Rea 2004:1).

The advocates view this charge as an attack on White's credibility as gifted with the prophetic gift and also her integrity and honesty as a person (Fortin 2013a:1029). What these accusations expose, is not that White was necessarily at fault and should be discounted completely, but the underlying argument is that White is more human than many believed. Nichol's view, together with other advocates, of an inerrant White, has placed White in a position of greater authority which she has never occupied (Bradford 2006:166-167, 170). Criticism from Rea reveals White's human and negative aspects that were ignored by many advocates.

The quote above clearly indicates a challenge in Church theology relating to White's authority. Pfandl states that the authority of prophetic books lies in its inspiration and not the place of the book in the canon (Pfandl 2013:627). Van Bemmelen argues that

in Scripture there are no indications of degrees of inspiration (Van Bemmelen 2000:40). Rice views White's inspiration as identical to that of Scripture (Rice 2000:628). Should White's inspiration be equal to Scripture, without degrees of inspiration, and inspiration is the foundation of authority, the conclusion is that White has the same authority as Scripture. As much as these quotes reveal attempts to clarify the issue of White's authority, they all function without a clear demarcation of the area of White's authority. The end result is that both a cohesive theory on the area of White's authority and a view that contradicts Adventist theory on authority, cannot be found.

The official Church theology denies White's equal authority to Scripture, but the fragmented unofficial theology of Adventism creates the problem under discussion<sup>35</sup>. A further discrepancy can be found when comparing the following two quotes from the same publication, namely *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Fortin & Moon 2013). While Pfandl (2013:628). points out that White's writings continue to be a 'unifying' factor in the Church, Damsteegt states that to White, Scripture was 'the sole bond of union' in the Church (Damsteegt 2013a:647). Considering the previous three statements by Pfandl, Van Bemmelen, and Rice, White functions with the same authority as Scripture, but outside the canon. As much as this may be denied, the last two quotes by Pfandl and Damsteegt highlight the discrepancy that White is relied upon as source of unity, as opposed to her own view that Scripture should fulfil that aspect in the Church. Bradford points out that early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Church leaders, in theory, did not equate White's authority with Scripture. These leaders though did view White's work as indispensable to the Church, causing her work, in turn, to gain greater 'theological authority' (Bradford 2006:167). Thus, the problem that postmodernism has presented to the Church and specifically to White's authority is that her authority is no longer in an absolute position. Discoveries made by, for example, Rea, do not eradicate White, but they highlight a much more human side in questioning her authority.

Gulley views postmodernism in negative terms as a challenge to the SDA message and method (Gulley 1998:31). He also points out that, among other things,

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<sup>35</sup> The official Church theology would be the expressed and/or published standpoint like we have seen in the Ten Affirmations and Ten Denials. The unofficial Church theology would be the views of individuals quoting White but arriving at conclusion that are not supporting or contradicting official Church theology such as Du Preez and Veith.

postmodernity rejects scientific method and reason (Gulley 1998:30). As much as Gulley decries postmodernism, it is no longer sufficient enough to view White as either human and negative or as divine and positive. Criticism from Rea and Numbers, as well as the writings of Bradford and Knight, suggest a view of White that incorporates 'human and negative' as well as 'divine and positive'. The view presented by Bradford allows the individual to see White's failings without needing to reject her (Bradford 2006:92). The postmodern mindset seeks to move away from advocating White from opposing polar positions (Knight 2000:200). This thinking underlies the view promoted by Bradford and Knight which allows for more openness and individuality when approaching White.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Chapter 2 has highlighted that the lack of a unified view has given rise to the critics focusing on White's human and negative elements, while the advocates pointed out her divine and positive aspects. In discussing the issue of authority, there is a clear contradiction between official statements and personal views of the advocates of White. *The Ten Affirmations and Ten Denials* are an attempt to protect both White and the Church, but they do not deal with the actual issues and fail to clarify the area of White's authority. Gordon's article seeks to justify White's authority, but in fact raises more questions on her authority. The limits of relying on the physical manifestations of White's visions and also cases where her authority led to extremes in behaviour, were also considered. Last, the effect of postmodernism, which led to the questioning of White from inside the Church, was also considered. Chapter 2 has highlighted the following need and its importance: 'To find a consistent method of interpretation for these writings should not be thought of as merely an intriguing academic possibility; it is an essential and immediate task for the church' (Weiss & Branson 2015).

In Chapter 3, attention is given to historical events and aspects that led to the development of White's authority and considers the shift that took place in the history of the Church.

## Chapter 3

### The Historical Development of White's authority

#### 3.1 Introduction

It is both helpful and necessary to view the development of White's authority in conjunction with historical events and conditions. Her authority did not develop in a vacuum but was based on interpretations and responses to historical events. Events prior to White's era, during her lifetime, and after her death have played a part in the development and shaping of her authority. In this Chapter, historical events have been selected, not for their general historical importance but for the religious importance that was attached to these events. As a woman of her time and in her writings and experiences, White provided spiritual guidance in relation to events prior to and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These historical events, the religious significance attributed to the events, and White's writings, would combine in developing her authority. The question can be raised, 'Why are historical events and conditions so important in the development of White's authority?' The answer to this question lies in the Church's perception of history.

Church thinking places a great deal of importance on the Sabbath history and this emphasis allowed for the development of White's authority. When one considers the Church's perspective of history, it is important to note how the Sabbath has influenced the Church's interpretation of historical events. By keeping the seventh day, Saturday, holy according to the command of Scripture, the Church provides a view that puts greater religious importance on certain historical events<sup>36</sup>. One of the arguments for keeping the Sabbath is that God rested on the Sabbath after creation (Bacchiocchi 1998:20). The Sabbath dates back to creation and all historical events where others kept the Sabbath is adopted as Church history and identity. Anderson (1978:120) views the Sabbath as a golden thread that runs throughout history. He further states that obedience to the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, has

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<sup>36</sup> The Church keeps the Sabbath from Friday evening sunset to Saturday evening sunset. There are differences as to what people consider as 'holy' activity, but in general it is accepted that secular work is not done and worldly pursuits are avoided (General Conference [Inst] 2005:296).

resulted in persecution, stating: 'In every great crisis of history God has had faithful servants whose allegiance to Him was more precious than life' (Anderson 1978:120).

As stated, the concept of obedience to the Sabbath is linked to persecution in the past and will undergo similar persecution in the future because of the Sabbath (Anderson 1978:121). Anderson sees historical periods of persecution because of the Sabbath not only as Church history but also as the future history of the Church. Although the Church recognises 1844 as the date of its origin, it considers itself as part of a continuing history of people obedient to God's commandments in the past, the present, and the future. In the book, *The Story of Our Church* (Anonymous 1960:79, 128-129), which deals with Adventist history, chapters twelve to nineteen deal exclusively with history ranging from creation to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Church's origin and existence are seen as part of a long line of historical events with religious significance. The golden thread of the Sabbath connects historical events, and White is viewed as part of these historical events and in turn becomes herself significant as a historical figure in the Church's history.

The result of viewing history in this fashion is that the Church seeks constant evidence of God's activity in history and current events. Canale relates, 'This implies that real things, including God's being and activities, exist and occur in time and space' (Canale 2001:39).

The Church believes that what God did in the past, He will not only do in future but also in the present. This feeds into a second aspect, that the Bible is 'the non-negotiable, canonical foundation of our faith' (Canale 2001:29). Two concepts of the Church are linked here: First, that historical events are linked through the Sabbath, and second, White as actual evidence of God acting through an individual in history. These two concepts, when combined, result in seeing the activity of God in past and also in present events – both events supported by Scripture. Thus, the starting date of the Church can also be viewed as the starting date of Christ's intercessory judgement in the Heavenly Sanctuary (General Conference [Inst] 2005:347-348). The date presented has both historical and religious significance for the Church. The mindset of the Church allows for the combination of historical significance with religious significance to specific historical events.

The result is that when a historical event, involving an individual, people, or even the world, is aligned with the Scriptural narrative or interpretation, it is easy for the Adventist mindset to see it as the work of God. This event in history, when it is linked to Scripture, is taken to be part of Church history. White's connection to historical events and her Biblical interpretation of historical events would assist in the development of her authority. Events, such as the French Revolution, the fall of the Papacy (discussed later), and others combined with the view of God as active in history, serve as a foundation for White's authority. Historical events and the activity of God become a foundation for White's authority as being conferred upon her by God (General Conference [Inst] 2005:255).

The French Revolution, the fall of the papacy, and the meteorological signs which include the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, the 1780 eclipse of the sun, and the Leonid star shower of 1833, will be discussed in the following section. These events serve as examples of the Church adopting general historical events as part of specific Church history. They also reveal how White's Biblical interpretation of these events led to the development of her authority.

### **3.2 The Era before White**

The French Revolution, the fall of the Papacy, and specific events in nature are considered to be signs of prophetic fulfilment, particularly as interpreted by White and other authors. The scope is limited to these events as they held significant meaning, both historically and religiously, for the early Church. Currently, there is still a great significance attributed to these events within the Church, which further motivates their selection for discussion. The first event is the French Revolution and specifically the 'attack' on Scripture as perceived by Adventism<sup>37</sup>; second, the fall of the Papacy and its connection to prophecy as interpreted by the early Church; and last, three events are combined, namely, the Lisbon earthquake, an eclipse of the sun in New England, and the Leonid star shower. These events, despite their historical significance, were also attributed with religious significance, especially as prophetic fulfilments. The following section will discuss the French Revolution and the importance that is attached to it.

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<sup>37</sup> While the term 'attack' is not an academic term, in various writings (by proponents of the French Revolution) their attitude towards Scripture is described as an attack. Thus, this term is retained to remain true to the attitude reflected in Adventism and by the original authors, which will become more apparent in the following section.

### 3.2.1 The French Revolution

Juxtaposed to the historical and political significance of the French Revolution, one finds a religious significance linked to interpreting it as the fulfilment of prophecy by the Church: 'The French Revolution deserves a place in prophecy!' (Maxwell 1985:284). This quote reflects the importance that the Church's prophetic interpretation allots to this event. Early Church prophetic writings connects this event with the prophetic fulfilment of Revelation 11 (Smith 1944:531-547). Within Church thinking, a specific Scriptural prophecy is linked to a specific historical event and date, which in turn allows Church thinking to argue that God is active in history. As recently as 1960, Anderson describes the French Revolution as, 'when for the first time in more than 2000 years, a nation in her capacity as a kingdom "made war on the monarchy of heaven"' (Anderson 1960:109).

Loughborough claims that although the French revolution professed to war against the political and religious powers, it became, in fact, an attempt to exterminate Scripture and God (Loughborough 1972:80). The methodology of Church thinking gives religious meaning to a historical event, in connection with the Biblical prophetic interpretation, and at the same time forms a unique Church identity. Although the Church was not unique in their Protestant way of thinking, they are unique in that they have maintained these views for so long. Only recently, Paulien and Stefanovic, among others, have begun questioning the historical and traditional views of the Church's prophetic interpretation (Stefanovic 2002:11, 82; cf. Rodríguez 2012:8). This 'attack' on Scripture had a definitive influence on the early Church constituency, including White. She states the following:

According to the words of the prophet, then, a little before the year 1798 some power of Satanic origin and character would rise to make war upon the Bible. And in the land where the testimony of God's two witnesses should thus be silenced, there would be manifest the atheism of the Pharaoh, and the licentiousness of Sodom (White 1911:269).

Note that the events were ascribed to be from a 'Satanic origin'. This is the formation of the Church view, where history is the result of the acts of God or the counteracts of Satan. The excerpt above also states that this was according to a prophet (John in

Revelation) in Scripture, indicating clearly the viewing of all religious significant history as Church history.

The reference to 'atheism' is not White's creation but was also shared by many Britons who viewed French atheism as the breakdown of political structures and morality (Mortenson 2011). Thus, in White's writing, one finds that she reflects the common thinking. Both White and Smith, in writing about the French Revolution, rely upon sources that support their views and are conservative, anti-Papacy, anti-revolutionary, and pro-democracy (Strayer 2013:828).

Even though the SDA Church did not yet exist in 1798, White adds a spiritual element by reflecting the thinking of the time and views the Revolution as an attack on all who use Scripture as a foundation for faith (White 1911:285). Also important is the fact that during White's time the French Revolution still had a great significance for the Church. Other contemporaries such as Smith (1944:531-547) and Loughborough (1972:80) also expressed similar views.

Walker describes the 19<sup>th</sup> century as one in which Christianity experienced an awakening, which was marked by emotional conversions. Churches that employed the revival pattern grew significantly (Walker 1959:507, 510). Not only within a small group, but within all Christianity across North America and Europe, the environment was accepting of divine action in history. Amidst this religious fervour, White, similar to others before and during her lifetime, interpreted historical events through religious views.

In the publications by the early Church pioneers, including White, the view of Church thinking where history is interpreted as acts for or against God are obvious. Even in more current works, one can observe the attribution of religious significance and linking of historical events to prophecy as still being the norm (Gordon 2000:199; Stefanovic 2002:10). The following section will consider the Fall of the Papacy and the religious significance attached to it.

### **3.2.2 The Fall of the Papacy**

In 1798, Berthier, a general of Napoleon, entered the Vatican City and took the Pope captive. On their way to France, Pope Pius VI died in exile. Prior to this event Papal

power was of such magnitude that kings could be made to wait three days, barefoot and naked in the snow, only to seek an audience with the Pope to receive forgiveness (Smith 1944:145). Even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various authors were still writing about these events stating that according to prophecy, the Papal powers had ruled for 1,260 years, starting in 538 and that 1798 was the end of Papal supremacy (Loughborough 1972:79)<sup>38</sup>. White states: ‘This period, as stated in preceding chapters, began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 538, and terminated in 1798. At that time the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled’ (White 1911:439).

This negative view of Roman Catholicism was common in North America at the time. Knight points to two anti-Catholic publications namely *Six Months in a Convent* and *Awful Disclosure of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (Knight 1998:64-65). Violence against Roman Catholics was common, and when the Roman Catholic Irish settlers fought back in 1844, it resulted in 13 dead and 50 wounded bodies, and arson of two Roman Catholic Churches (Knight 1998:64-65).

As in the previous section, White was in line with the popular anti-Roman Catholic thinking of her day. Anti-Roman Catholic sentiments were of such strength in North American thinking, that even as late as 1915, with the resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan, racism from this group was directed at Blacks, Jews, and Roman Catholics (Byrne 2015). Smith reflects a similar attitude when he urges all Christians to break completely with the Papacy (Smith 1944:143)<sup>39</sup>. This urging of Smith reflects a thought pattern which viewed Adventism as an opposition to Papal influences. This

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<sup>38</sup> The prophecy of Daniel 7 refers to the little horn, or anti-Christ power, and the period it will reign. Adventist interpretation equates the little horn with the Papacy. The term ‘time’ is seen as years, supported by Daniel 4:25 where the term ‘times’ is used interchangeably with ‘year’. Using the year-day principle, the equation is thus worked out as ‘a time’ = 360 days/years, ‘times’ = 720 days/years and ‘half a time’ = 180 days/years, which ends up in 1260 days/years. 538 AD is calculated as the year the Papacy took power, and if one adds 1,260 years to that date, one arrives at 1798. In ancient times, it was the custom to have each month to be 30 days long, while the five and a quarter days were not numbered (Lanser 2018). SDA thinking also finds support for this reasoning in Scripture. Noah entered the ark on the seventeenth of the second month (Gn 7:11); a hundred and fifty days later (Gn 8:3), the ark rested on Mount Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month (Gn 8:4). Thus, five months passed in 150 days.

<sup>39</sup> One marked difference is that none of the Church writers who placed a negative view on the Roman Catholic Church ever advocated violence. White promotes the idea of conversion through peaceful means of Roman Catholics, and not violence (White 1946:574). Her criticism is directed to the Papacy, particularly as she claims that the Papacy changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday (White 1946:225). White appears to reject the Papal system without negative views on the Roman Catholic people.

view would not only grant authority to the Church, but to White as well, since Roman Catholicism was viewed as Anti-American.

White, like others, gives religious significance to past events. The impact of these events coupled with the addition of attaching religious significance to them, served in part to make White an authority. The following section will discuss the natural signs.

### **3.2.3 The Signs**

On 1 November 1755, the Lisbon earthquake struck, on 19 May 1780, there was an eclipse of the sun, followed by a red moon, and on 3 November 1833 there was the Leonid star shower (Maxwell 1985:194-198). In describing these events, Smith mentions that with the Lisbon earthquake an estimated 90,000 people died and that the earthquake stretched as far as Morocco in the south and Norway in the north. He continues to relate how most of Europe was struck by the earthquake and that even at places where the quake was not felt, the sea level was affected. When recounting the sudden darkening of the sun, Smith does admit that there is a lack of detailed information and that his report relies on the reports of others. In the case of the stars that fell, he argues that nobody could find something similar in nature (Smith 1944:439-440, 443, 445). First, a review of Smith's reports indicates that he describes these events in emotional language. This would be in part to express the importance attached to these events and also reflect the effect it had on people during that time. Second, there were limits for scientific knowledge to explain these events. Due to the lack of scientific knowledge at the time, these events were seen as a fulfilment of prophecy from Scripture (Mt 24:29) which led to widespread religious fervour throughout Christianity (Knight 1998:13, 14).

In the modern context, these events would not seem unique or particularly indicative of any great event. It must be kept in mind that in modern views education has reached a level in which such events can be understood through scientific explanation. To the people of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such knowledge was lacking<sup>40</sup>. Knight points out that the Lisbon earthquake, the French Revolution, and

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<sup>40</sup> There is a documented instance where White had visions of planets with several moons. This was interpreted by Bates as being Jupiter and Saturn. White's description of life on these planets she saw in her vision, were incorrectly interpreted as Jupiter and Saturn, due to limitations of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientific knowledge (cf. Nichol 1951:93). White herself only knew what she saw and Bates with his knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup>-century astronomy interpreted her vision within the knowledge he had. This demonstrates the lack of

the fall of the Papacy, among others, caused a revival of Christian apocalyptic thinking. As many as 65 expositors on four continents from 1800-1844 believed that the prophecy of Daniel 8 would be fulfilled between 1843 and 1847 (Knight 1998:13, 14). Neither White nor any other Church pioneers were unique with their views on the apocalyptic interpretation of events. These astronomical events were seen as divine markers and they added to the religious zeal that was emerging in many parts of the world. White would later reflect this thinking in her writings, thus staying in line with the norms of the time (White 1898:632).

Perhaps more important is that the mindset of the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed for the interpretation of physical signs in religious terms. This method of interpreting historical events as physical manifestations of God's activity would also be applied to individuals. With regard to the visible signs that White exhibited when in vision, these were interpreted as evidence that her visions were from God. It is only recently that these signs have begun to take second place to other evidence such as consistency of lifestyle and a call to worship God (Bradford 2006:59, 63). The mindset of the early Adventists must be taken into consideration, especially when considering their view of matters and how different it is from the current mindset.

What these three events have shown is that the time before White was marked with events that caused the masses to fear, being ignorant of many things. In politics, religion, and even in nature, these events disrupted daily life and thinking, which left many fearful, causing them to seek security in religious significance. This desire for security and significance in religion led to the *Second Great Awakening*, from which arose an expectation of Christ's return (Knight 1998:13, 14). Many aspects of life had been touched by these events, while attributing religious significance to them, gave security and peace of mind to many. The following section will consider how Miller, a mere farmer, became a preacher to large audiences. It will also discuss Miller's failed predictions, which led to a decline in religious fervour and how White emerged from this decline as a figure of authority. The events during White's life and the influence she exercised will also be discussed.

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knowledge that was considered factual and demonstrates how the people in that time could easily have considered the celestial signs as divine events.

### **3.3 The Era of White**

The pattern of attributing religious significance to past events continued and the events that took place during White's life were interpreted in a similar manner. There are various aspects of White that would warrant an investigation, but for the scope of this dissertation, these have been limited to three aspects, namely the *Great Disappointment*, health conditions, and White as a person. The reason for choosing these three is that they offer insight into the development of White's authority and are aspects that receive attention from both critics and advocates.

#### **3.3.1 The Great Disappointment**

The events considered in the previous section became a springboard for spiritual revivals. These events coupled with specific prophecies convinced many that the return of Christ was imminent. The *Second Great Awakening* stretched from 1790 to 1840 and was of such an effect that it made North America a Christian country (Knight 1998:20). Miller (1782-1849) was a Baptist farmer who became one of the prominent preachers toward the end of the *Second Great Awakening* promoting the second coming of Christ. The date, 22 October 1844, is of importance for the Church, as it is the date that was given as the return of Christ. Miller's simple and direct method of interpreting Daniel's prophecies gained widespread acceptance especially with White and other early Church pioneers. From 1831 onwards, he preached his message and in later stages of his ministry, he declared that the return of Christ would take place on 22 October 1844 (Knight 1998:15). He won thousands to his views until the predictions were proved to be wrong (Walker 1959:515). Various groups split off from the Millerite movement. The smallest group formed the SDA Church and, within a few years grew to exceed the numbers of all the other groups (Gordon 2000:12).

Of more significance is the effect that the failed prediction has left on the Church. Although a great deal has been written about the failed prediction of Christ's return, little consideration has been given to how this has shaped the Church's view. The impact that such a disappointment had on the people who would make up the founding members of the Church must be considered.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of 'Revivalism' where the preaching of an emotional and spectacular display led to renewed fervour among Christians. It was also the

introduction of the 'camp meeting', where many would congregate to listen to various preachers (Walker 1959:508). One of the reasons for the 'Revivalism' was that Deism had become an actual challenge. Before the French Revolution, it was an elitist movement confined to a select few. After the French Revolution publications such as *Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine (1807:4, 7) as well as the aggressiveness of Deistical societies became a real threat to Christianity. Students at college would call one another 'Rousseau' and 'Voltaire' – after the thinkers and heroes of the French Revolution. This trend indicated to Christian leaders that colleges were becoming Deistic and anti-religious. As indicated in the previous section, the French Revolution was seen as an attack on the Bible, among other things. When students praised one another by naming themselves after the heroes of the French Revolution, it caused fear of anti-Christian and anti-Scriptural threats. To counter this perceived Deistic, anti-religious threat, Christian leaders promoted revivalist preaching and many turned to Christianity seeking security and significance. In response, Christianity experienced an extreme growth, with the percentage of North Americans belonging to a church growing from five to ten to twenty-five per cent of the population. Church attendance grew from forty to seventy-five per cent (Knight 1998:19, 20).

Walker reports: 'The intensity and frequency of the revivals declined in the 1840's' (Walker 1959:508). He refers to the revival meetings that had become popular during the *Second Great Awakening* but does not give any explanation as to what contributed to their decline. When one considers that the 'camp meetings' would very often host as many as 10,000 participants whilst the largest city only housed 1,795 inhabitants, then one begins to understand the magnitude of the *Second Great Awakening* (Knight 1998:23) – added to this the fervour of expecting the Advent and then the failed prediction thereof, the *Great Disappointment* had a widespread effect on all of North America. A.L. White said: 'With bated breath the Adventists, no less than fifty thousand and probably nearer one hundred thousand scattered largely across the north eastern portion of North America, arose to greet the eventful day, Tuesday, October 22, 1844' (White, A.L. 1985:53).

White stated the following about the predictions of the coming of Christ:

At length William Miller raised his voice against the light from heaven...He leaned to human wisdom instead of divine, but being

broken with arduous labor in his Master's cause and by age, he was not as accountable as those who kept him from the truth. They are responsible; the sin rests upon them (White 1882:257).

Miller was faced with the fact that he had made a gross error and with that, the loss of credibility. His failed prediction, which coincided with the end of the *Second Great Awakening*, seems to have played a major part in the climactic decline to the religious fervour that was experienced in North America.

A.L. White quotes Edson, one of the founding members of the Church, as Edson recalls the aftermath of the *Great Disappointment*: 'Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept and wept, till the day dawn (White, A.L. 1985:53).

A.L. White states that White expressed her feelings in response to the disappointment: 'It was hard to take up the vexing cares of life that we thought had been laid down forever. It was a bitter disappointment that fell upon the little flock whose faith had been so strong and whose hope had been so high' (White, A.L. 1985:54).

It should be clear that Miller's failed predictions left a profound impact not only on White herself but also on followers of this message. This profound impact would influence White's thinking and all other founding members of the Church. This influence, in turn, would affect everything from the way the Church would view Scripture to their relation to the world up to the present day.

Shortly after Miller's failed predictions, the Church acknowledged that Miller was correct about the time of his interpretations of Daniel's prophecies but wrong in the event. Miller had assumed that when Daniel wrote about the cleansing of the sanctuary (Dn 8:14), it referred to the earthly and this would mean that Christ would return to earth. The argument was presented by the founding Church members that the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8 was not the earthly, but the Heavenly<sup>41</sup>. This

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<sup>41</sup> 'For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state' (Dn 8:14 – ESV). This extensive and uniquely SDA doctrine is not free from controversy even within the SDA Church.

perspective that Christ began a special ministration in the Heavenly Sanctuary was prompted by a vision given to Edson shortly after the *Great Disappointment* (General Conference [Inst] 1960:177). Significantly, even before the ministry of White, one can find visions guiding the Church in developing doctrines.

This, however, set the tone for the ministry of White, in guiding the development of doctrines that would follow. The resulting failure of predicting the return of Christ led a small group to carefully restudy the prophecies and attempt to avoid previous errors and find the truth (Anonymous 1960:177). The Church pioneers set forth to study and prove everything from the Scripture. White recounts the events in the following words:

In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times, it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point (White 1980:38).

Although the visions were not relied on for doctrine, one cannot neglect the influence that is presented here. In this situation, one must recognise the emotions that accompanied the early Church pioneers. Having experienced the *Great Disappointment* and attempted to build a foundation with limited resources in both finance and education, the visions were not only a source of guidance but a source of comfort. The fact that the physical and historical signs concurred with Scripture

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Therefore, to give an accurate understanding becomes difficult. The basic official understanding is that in 1844 Christ began a second ministration of His intercessory work in Heaven. Christ has begun judging all the cases of all people based upon the acceptance of His complete atonement at the cross and the reflection of that choice in their lives. This judgement testifies that Christ has not rejected anyone to join with Him in salvation, but that in all cases He has relented to reward or punish the individual according to their choice. The practical side to this is that when Christ does redeem His children from this earth (at an unknown date) no one could point a finger at God as being unfair. From the human perspective, this judgement is in favour of God's children since they have received salvation (at the cross) before they enter judgement.

and verified Scripture, provided something substantial for the Church pioneers. This process was not solely the establishment of doctrines or even a new church, but rather the forming of an identity for the Church.

Knight has identified several philosophical views that contributed to the methodology of early Church thinking and that shaped the new identity. First was the Restorationist movement, who influenced the early Church by seeking Scriptural evidence for everything they set forth, believing that many things such as the Sabbath were to be restored. Second, both J. White and Bates were anti-trinitarian – a view that would only be changed in 1888. Third, White was originally from the Methodist Church and much of the Wesleyan thinking influenced her own work. Fourth, the Deism view rejected miracles, relying on reason and even approaching religion on an intellectual level rather than an emotional. Last, Puritanism also influenced the early Church thinking in putting a heavy emphasis on obedience to the law of God (Knight 2000:31, 32, 34, 35).

If Restorationism and Deism influenced the early pioneers of the SDA, then one must ask, ‘How did the early pioneers accept the visions?’ and also, ‘Why did they accept the visions?’ It almost appears contradictory that a group, influenced by Restorationism and Deism would allow visions to provide guidance. To the former, the tests applied to White’s visions must be considered. When White went into the visions, a recurring physical phenomenon was witnessed on several occasions by different people present, as considered in Chapter 2. If one, however, turns to the aspect of why they were accepted, then a more complicated situation is found. The physical events during the French Revolution, the fall of the Papacy, and the various meteorological events considered in the previous section and interpreted as an act of God, created a view for the acceptance of White. If God could act in history on a larger scale, it would be easy to reason that God could do so also on a smaller scale like in the life of White.

This mindset was very prominent at the time which allowed for spiritual manifestation through physical events. One such example was the rise of modern spiritualism by Maggie and Katie Fox, who heard rapping noises in their house and claimed that it was spirits of the deceased to whom they could communicate (Knight 1998:61). In general, people were open to spiritual manifestations and this mindset allowed for

the acceptance of White's visions. Bradford rejects the testing of a prophet based on physical manifestations since similar manifestations can be found in other religions (Bradford 2006:55). He reflects a current mindset as opposed to the mindset that is witnessed in the pioneers of the Church. Thus, the historical events, the proofs of Scripture applied (cf. Chapter 2), and that fact that White was clarifying Scripture, made the acceptance of the visions attainable and made White a figure of authority.

One example of the role of Scripture and the visions is the controversy that raged over when the Sabbath should commence and end. Bates, who had pioneered the keeping of Sabbath, was of the opinion that it should be from six o'clock to six o'clock, while others believed from sunset to sunset and some even from sunrise to sunrise. The following guidelines were used to settle the matter:

When this request failed to yield fruit, he turned to John Andrews with the earnest request that he take his Scripture and bring evidence to settle the question. Andrews prepared a paper on the matter...From nine texts in the Old Testament and two from the New, Andrews demonstrated that 'even' and 'evening' of the Sabbath were identical with sunset (White, A.L. 1985:323).

The reality of this is that during the early times of the Church, visions played a guiding role and Scripture served as the foundation of doctrinal issues. The influence of the Restorationism and Deism allowed for the guidance from the visions but sought final authority from Scripture.

It should be noted that there is no singular aspect, but rather a combination of events and views that allowed White to rise as a figure of authority. As mentioned before (section 2.1), White's advocates focused on the divine aspects as evidence that White was a prophet like the prophets in Scripture (Nichol 1951:57). Currently, the visions are not taken as proof of their divine source, nonetheless, they do reflect the supernatural nature of the visions (Fortin 2013b:1249-1250). This shift also reflects the aspect of postmodernism's effect on Adventism, as discussed in Chapter 2 where Nichol's position has become less attainable. Fortin does not deny the physical manifestations completely and still views them as supernatural, as opposed to Bradford that breaks completely with any assumptions of the physical

manifestations (Bradford 2006:53-54). Bradford, though, does not follow Canright's route which discounts White's visions as mental problems (Canright 1919:62).

Returning to the effects of Restorationist and Deistic thinking on the Church, it can be observed that these two philosophies allowed for the visions but allocated the authority with Scripture. This mindset is still maintained in the Church as seen in Chapter 2. Next, the health conditions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century are discussed.

### **3.3.2 Health Conditions**

White is regularly quoted and referred to by both advocates and critics, on her views on health. The reason for this is that it was believed that the information White received on health was directly through visions. Bradford points to books such as *Prophet of Destiny* by Noorbergen and *The Story of Our Health Message* by Robinson which viewed White penning all health advice under inspiration (Bradford 2006:132).

Numbers (1976), however, indicates that White was not unique in her writings on health and had in fact borrowed many of her ideas from other health reformers. He centres on this fact and rejects completely that White was inspired and that she did not 'falsify', and he holds that any testimony by fellow believers is questionable (Numbers 1976:xiv-xvi).

In contrast, McMahon writes in a divergent line of thought that he has also considered White's sources in her writings. He lists several books that were in the White household with which White was acquainted. According to McMahon, White first authored her ideas on health before 1863, and when accused of plagiarising, she did read the works of other health reformers, but that was after 1863 (McMahon 2002:8, 42). Based on this argument, McMahon promotes White as having received her views on health from inspiration.

These arguments are typical of White's critics and advocates in discussing her authority. Numbers rejects White since not all her ideas are original, while McMahon argues that they are original since she had not read other authors before she authored her own ideas. Numbers shows that White wrote with reliance upon the work of other health reformers and that she was influenced by the thinking of her

time. One such example is phrenology, which used the contours of the human head to judge a person's character. This branch of psychology also spread into areas of health reform such as hydrotherapy, temperance, and chastity. White took her two sons, Willie and Edson, for a phrenological reading which was in line with the general practice of the day (Numbers 1976:70, 90-91). Numbers reveals a narrow view of inspiration since it requires all ideas to be original<sup>42</sup>. Since White's ideas on health are not all original, Numbers rejects her inspiration.

McMahon, on the other hand, presents a dangerous argument: Although White may not have read the books before she had written her own, it does not mean that she had not come across some of the ideas before she wrote them down. It is possible that in newspapers or magazines she would have come across articles discussing the methods and ideas of other health reformers. To view White as having no knowledge of other health reforms is to isolate her from the time period in which she lived and was part of.

The crucial matter in this argument should be: What was the result of White's writings on health? Early Church members suffered ill health due to lack of hygiene, unhealthy lifestyles, and ignorance in general, like the rest of society. The average life expectancy was only 32 years in 1800 and even in 1950 life expectancy was only 67 years (Knight 1998:30). These simple figures clearly indicate that low life expectancy was coupled with ignorance in health. A lack of knowledge even among doctors, who were trained for four to eight months, then graduated and qualified, contributed to the general ill health of the public (Knight 1998:34). In the early years of surgery, requirements such as sterilisation and antisepsis were unknown. Doctors operated with only hands washed and without sterilisation of instruments or the operating room (Evans 1931:53). The results of White's writings are: 'In light of this we find that Ellen White wrote a great deal in respect to health, despite her advice coming from the 19<sup>th</sup> century it has helped the SDA Church to be one of the healthiest groups of people in the modern world' (Buettner 2005a).

In light of this, McMahon has listed all of White's statements on health, and his conclusion is that in view of the modern medical science of the total, 66% can be

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<sup>42</sup> Numbers neglects important points such as that both Christ and Paul have been found to have taken ideas from other sources (Bradford 2006:33).

verified as correct. He further divides her statements in 'What's' and 'Why's': Of the 'What's' 87% are verified and of the 'Why's' 45% are verified (McMahon 2002:29)<sup>43</sup>. McMahon takes this process to great lengths in using the similar tool to compare White to other health reformers of the day. Although McMahon presents a very positive view that promotes the inspiration of White, he does not, however, consider statements made by her which have been proven wrong (McMahon 2002:142).

Numbers highlights White's mental condition. Unlike the usual critical response, he does not portray her as a lunatic but does claim that she suffered from anxiety and depression, which she dealt with by blaming others and using her 'poor health' for personal gain in a male-dominated society (Numbers 1976:218).

Not one of these authors reflect on their foundational view or how it affects the outcome of their arguments and the effect on their view of the evidence. Where Numbers only shows White's development in accordance with the times and similarities to other reformers, McMahon only focuses on the percentages that have been verified. Neither critic nor advocate is willing to consider the validity of the other side's viewpoints.

White has claimed that people wearing wigs caused sexual excitement, leading to strange behaviour and recklessness in morals (Coon 1996). A second consideration is in view of masturbation which will heighten animal passion, make children reject religion, and affect their mental ability (White 1870:391-392). McMahon's approach presents a dangerous element. By removing White from the time in which she lived, it removes her health advice from the context of time. Therefore, White's advice becomes timeless and is applied despite the advances in medical science. The above quote by White can then be used as authoritative, despite its invalidation by modern medical science, by utilising McMahon's methodology.

An interesting note that casts light on White's approach to health is reflected in her viewpoint on smallpox. It is estimated that this disease killed 60,000,000 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When inoculation against the disease began, various religious figures

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<sup>43</sup> The 'What's' refer to statements that point to what must be done, while the 'Why's' present the reasons behind the prescribed 'What's'. Considering the lack of medical knowledge, it is to be expected that the 'Why's' would show a lower number for verification.

denounced this practice as from the devil (Evans 1931:50, 52). In contrast to this, although White did not write about this in her books, according to Robinson (one of her secretaries), she did have herself inoculated and encouraged those who were connected with her to do the same (White 1958c:303). Although she rejected various medical practices of her day, she was not against the utilisation of advancements in medical practice and knowledge. Numbers' methodology gives no consideration to this point where White was not in alignment with others in their views on health. When one considers that White was inspired for a specific time and a specific people, it must inevitably put a limit on her health advice (Pfandl 2013:627).

It is clear that Numbers is correct in saying that White was not unique in her views on health. McMahon does, however, point out that White had a high rate of accuracy even in contrast to medical professionals. Both arguments fail to grasp the larger picture. The fact that White gave advice on health common to her time means that the common man understood and ensured that her authority grew. If she had presented health advice known to people living in 1860 (cf. White 1860) in medical terms of 2018, she would be outright rejected. The fact that her advice had such a high success rate even at the current time also plays to her authority. This reveals why White could become such an authoritative figure. Although this section deals only with the health issue, the trend is visible in other areas such as education (Knight 1999a:35). She wrote in line with the thinking of her time and also with a great degree of success, the result being that her authority developed due to these two factors. When considering the development of her authority, it is also necessary to consider the person to whom this authority was credited. The following section discusses White's personal aspects.

### **3.3.3 White as a Person**

It is obvious that the person of White would evoke mixed feelings from people. To some, she was a sick old woman (Van Zyl 1993:19), to others a tyrant (Numbers & Numbers 2013), while some saw her as a superwoman (Bradford 2006:19). Nevertheless, when White's life is examined, one finds that the picture is much more complex, as one is examining a real person and not a mythical figure.

The problem with attempting to ascertain the psychology of any historical figure is that one is at the mercy of what others chose to write and believe about that person.

Any attempt from a current position to determine definite psychological aspects is at best good guesswork. What is known is that White suffered periods of depression as is common for various Scriptural figures (Bradford 2006:119). Numbers postulates that she suffered from 'histrionic personality disorder' which requires constant reassurance, approval, and praise. According to him, people suffering from this disorder are uncomfortable in situations where they are not the centre of attention (Numbers 1976:213).

Knight makes the following assessments of her personality: He asserts that she was humorous, moderate, and kind (Knight 1999b:18, 40, 41). He also points out that despite a relatively happy marriage there were problems at times. In raising their son, Edson, White had made the mistake of comparing him to Willie, his younger brother, who was labelled as the good son, as Edson was the bad influence (Knight 1999b:72-76, 84-85). Knight recounts a speech by White where she condemned certain practices in the Battle Creek School, causing her audience, according to Knight, to 'quiver in their chairs' (Knight 1999a:32). However, he, also wrote that White was kindly by nature (Knight 1999b:41). These quotes display the complexity one encounters when researching White. The clearest understanding is that she was a human being with flaws no less or greater than any other religious leader.

Despite the Women's Rights movement that rose in 1840, women had very little power or authority in the society of the times (Knight 1998:48, 49). Canright accuses White of suffering from many mental disorders. Although the scope of this dissertation prevents an investigation into all the mental disorders, the accusation of hysteria will be discussed (Canright 1919:62). Hysteria is specifically chosen for discussion due to its discriminating nature and its relation to White's gender.

Hysteria has a history of discriminating against women as it was seen as an 'only female' disease until the time of Freud. This disease was approached from a scientific and magic-demonological viewpoint (Tasca, Rapetti, Carta & Fadda 2012). Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that women had no sexual urges and were merely receptacles for their husbands' urges. When women would complain about various symptoms, the doctor or midwife would massage the genitalia of the women to provide temporary relief. By 1880, electricity had made the first vibrator possible and these procedures continued until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Castleman

2013). When Canright accuses White of suffering from hysteria, he also implies that she was in need of a visit to the doctor. This displays at least in part some chauvinism on the part of Canright's criticism of White. This would seem to be supported by his public claim that he held a 'grudge' against her, and that his final break with the Church was due to a difference in views with White in 1888 (cf. White 1888), and that he fought against her for the rest of his life (Knight 2013b:337-338). Therefore, the question could be asked, Would White have been such a terrible person if she was a man? Considering that White lived in a male-dominated society and that Canright reflects this thinking in his documents, one can conclude that in part the criticism of White's personality is based on her gender. While one cannot claim that there are no female critics of White, though, the majority of her critics tend to be male. This raises the question whether White would have received the same amount of criticism should she be of the opposite gender. This question will receive more attention in Chapter 5.

The irony is that the EGW Estate has defend White as a prophet but were against the ordination of women as ministers in the Church. Herein lies a discrepancy with the advocates that, in defending White's divine elements, they ignore the human aspects, particularly her gender. Thus, the process started by Nichol and continued by the EGW Estate, allows for White as a prophet who was divinely inspired and authoritative, but her gender is ignored and has no influence on current issues such as the ordination of women. Thus, like the critics, the advocates provide a bias and a pseudo-White to serve personal agendas.

This point will become relevant as the events that had an effect on White's authority after her death are examined. The next section will deal with historical events and thinking from 1915 to the current day that changed the perception of White's authority and the area in which it functioned.

### **3.4 The Era after White**

#### **3.4.1 The 1919 Bible Conference**

The concept of White's authority that is found in the Church today developed after her death and not during her lifetime. The date 1919 is not a date that one finds with great frequency in historical Church publications. It was by accident that in 1974 Yost

found two packets of papers containing 2,400 pages of notes taken during the 1919 Bible Conference (Bradford 2006:152). These papers provide insight into the generation that came after White and how they perceived her authority. Bradford (2006), Knight (2000), and *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Fortin & Moon 2013) have mentioned this in 2013, highlighting the recent awareness of this important event in Church history. Ironically this event finds very little attention in other publications. Canright (1919) makes no mention of this other than recognising that, after her death, White and her writings were exalted more than before (Canright 1919:30). Nichol (1951) neither mentions this event even as late as the 1950s. The Bible Conference allows us to compare the two streams of thinkers present at the event. It is of particular interest that it was also during 1919 that Canright published his book, *The Life of Ellen White*. It can be argued that this book and the 1919 Bible Conference had a mutual effect on one another. The Conference consisted of those who knew White personally and those who believed that their thinking was to protect White and the Church.

One of the statements taken from the Conference gives us insight into the issues on White's authority that had arisen. Bradford quotes Wilcox who made the following statement in relation to White:

Well, now, as I understand it, Sister White never claimed to be an authority on history, and never claimed to be a dogmatic teacher on theology, like Mrs Eddy's book on teaching. She just gave out fragmentary statements, but left pastors and evangelists and preachers to work out all these problems of Scripture and of theology and of history (Bradford 2006:153).

It is important to note that Wilcox knew White personally, indicating the kind of thinking that was permeated by the group who knew her. For the sake of clarity, this group will be designated as the *progressive group*. White was not a theologian nor was she the foundation for Church theology. In line with this, Bradford further quotes Wilcox who states:

In our estimate of the spirit of prophecy, isn't its value to us more in the spiritual light it throws into our own hearts and lives than the intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters? Ought we not take those writings as the voice of the Spirit of our hearts, instead

of the voice of the teacher to our heads? And isn't the final proof of the spirit of prophecy its spiritual value rather than its historical accuracy? (Bradford 2006:153).

There are two points for consideration concerning this quote. First, it is clear that historical or theological accuracy was not a qualifying mark of White's writings. The fact that there were historical or theological inaccuracies did not diminish the position of authority that she had held in her lifetime. Second, the focus that is brought out concerned the effect it has on the reader on a spiritual level, not an intellectual level. The view that was held by the *progressive group* was more open to the humanity of White. There are other quotes that present the thinking from a more conservative viewpoint: 'Despite these views being held we also find word arising stating the opposite view point...our students are being sent out with the idea that the Testimonies are verbally inspired...Is it well to let our people in general go on holding to the verbal inspiration of the testimonies?' (Bradford 2006:153-154).

These statements reflect the opposite side where the proponents wanted to protect White and thus hold her and her work as verbally inspired and inerrant (Knight 2000:134). For the sake of clarity, this group is labelled as the *fundamentalist group*. First, White herself had denied this position, writing: 'It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired...The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God' (White 1958b:21).

Second, the differences between the *progressive* and *fundamentalist groups* were extreme, and Bradford also reveals that the leadership was not comfortable sharing their views with the laity (Bradford 2006:154). Widmer states that the Church has 'decided the authority and inspiration of White' at this event (Widmer 2009). Although White held authority before this point, the result of historical events and conditions led to a natural development of her authority. One finds a group of thinkers that created an artificial tradition of White as verbally inspired and inerrant. Timm discusses the need for a modern-day prophet, arguing that White served the purpose of freeing the Church from human traditions (Timm 2013). He fails to point out that White in turn also created human traditions and that various generations of Church leadership created human traditions to defend and promote White. In the

period between 1920 and 1950, human traditions were introduced that contradicted many of the traditions introduced by White (Knight 2000:150, 159). It is at the 1919 Bible Conference that the Church started to view White as without any fault (Knight 2000:134). Nichol (1897-1966) did a great deal of work in the time period between 1919 and 1950: His defence of White in 1951 presents a perception of her that is aligned with the thinking that created that view.

Holmes, of the *fundamentalist group*, was present at the Conference and, although he did not challenge Daniels<sup>44</sup> (of the *progressive group*) directly, he did oppose Daniels. Washburn wrote a book titled *The Startling Omega and Its True Genealogy* (Washburn 1920:4), in which he labelled the ideas of the *progressive group* as a new theology, claiming that these ideas, together with differing views held by Daniels about Daniel 8, were in disagreement with the original doctrines of the pioneers. Washburn, belonging to the *fundamentalist group*, wrote an open letter to Daniels, claiming that these ideas were part of the 'Omega Apostasy' that White wrote about (White 1958b:197)<sup>45</sup>. Those who had not been acquainted with White during her life, directed their attack at Daniels, for fear that what the *fundamentalist group* perceived as the destruction of Church beliefs. It should also be noted that it was less than two decades before the Conference, in 1903, that Kellogg presented his view that challenged Church beliefs. Kellogg, a doctor and originator of breakfast cereals, promoted a view of God with strong Pantheistic foundations. He was removed from Church membership in 1907 (Campbell 2013:437). Fearful of a similar repeat of false doctrine, the *fundamentalist group* overreacted to the views held by the *progressive group*, particularly on White's authority.

Washburn also claimed that this was the work of higher criticism. Bradford argues that with these claims, Washburn was playing on the fears of Church members. At the time, there was a liberal view in Christianity where scholars denied the supernatural origin of Scripture, deeming these as nothing more than myths. Evolution was accepted by Christians, as the reason, and not Scripture, acted as ground for authority (Bradford 2006:155). In contrast, there was the fundamentalist

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<sup>44</sup> Daniels was the then President of the General Conference and part of the group that knew White, holding to a more flexible position on her authority and work.

<sup>45</sup> White warned, 'In the book *The Living Temple* there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given' (White 1958b:200). The book White referred to, was written in 1903 by Kellogg, and included a pantheistic section which led to Kellogg leaving the Church (Campbell 2013:437).

Christian view which held to the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of Scripture, the substitutionary death of Christ, belief in miracles, and creation over evolution (Knight 2000:130). Another problem that arose from the 1920s was that there were only two streams: Liberalist or fundamentalist Christianity (Bradford 2006:158). Thus, when the *fundamentalist group*, in line with fundamentalist Christianity, differed with the views of the *progressive group*, the latter's ideas were summarily labelled as 'liberal Christianity'.

In correspondence between Holmes and Washburn, Holmes spoke of a 'dangerous doctrine', referring to the idea that White was not an authority on history, doctrine or health reform. In response to Daniels and others in the *progressive group*, the *fundamentalist group* promoted White's authority in absolutes in areas such as history and theology. The *progressive group* did not consider her to be an authority on history or theology, on the other hand, to the *fundamentalist group* this view was heresy, and White's authority was unquestionable in history and theology.

Bradford states that after 1919, leaders have put increased emphasis on White's prophetic gift, which in turn progressively increased her authority. Furthermore, she wrote to meet the needs of a reading public. After 1919, the General Conference produced a compilation of White's works for this purpose (Bradford 2006:167). White's authority became something to strengthen the position of the Church's authority, which led to her and the Church becoming inseparable. Making the defence of White focus specifically on her prophetic gifts, became essential to the authority of the Church. Bradford states: 'Now others were handling the formal authority Mrs. White had formerly employed for herself. Those who needed an objective authority had found one in her' (Bradford 2006:167).

The various socio-cultural events of the 1920s also influenced the Church. The origin of Darwinism began in 1850, but the full effects were felt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Darwinism was allegedly the fruit of the 1917 Russian Bolshevik revolution. Therefore, Darwinism and Communism were both enemies of North America and Christianity. Added to this was a large number of immigrants pouring into North America, many who were Catholic and Jewish. This demographic change gave rise to the fear that North America was losing its Protestant identity. In response, fundamentalist Christians attempted to make lists of fundamental doctrines; the

common points were inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, Christ's resurrection, and the second coming of Christ (Bradford 2006:157-158).

It is clear that some of these doctrines are not only accepted by the Church but have formed the pillars of many Church doctrines. What one must also realise is that the idea that Scripture is inerrant, can only exist if one believes in verbal inspiration. If God inspired Scripture and also White, the same idea of verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and absolute authority must be carried over to White as well as Scripture.

Liberalism was not an option, since the Church was defending the doctrine of creation, with other fundamentalists, against Darwinism. The First World War also gave rise to churches joining the rhetoric of war. To save civilisation and various fundamentalists the Church began to interpret the books of Daniel and Revelation in light of the events that took place at the time. North America entered into a stage of isolationism – fearing anything foreign and suppressing anything that appeared dissident was at the order of the day (Gonzalez 1984:372-373). In 1922, at a General Conference session, the *fundamentalist group* voted Daniels out as General Conference president (Bradford 2006:160). This was in response to the fears found in society and the Church that perceived liberal theology and other dangers, such as evolution, as threats to society and the Church. The Church could use White's authority to provide safety to members and regain authority for the Church. This process had enough power to suppress alternative ideas to what White had written (Bradford 2006:168-169).

Bradford mentions that Holmes wrote a tract in which he claimed that White had received her information directly from God; she was at all times absolutely accurate in fields such as astronomy, geology, dietetics, theology, medicine, and even history (Bradford 2006:161). The view promoted by Holmes helped to form the foundation for White's authority as inerrant in all fields.

Perhaps the worst effect from the ousting of Daniels as president was the decline in intellectual theological debates, which were the standard of Adventism that filled the pages of the *Review and Herald* (Bradford 2006:163). As demonstrated in Chapter 2, White's official statements are often neglected in favour of personal or unofficial

views. Knight (1999a:113) addresses the following idea: 'The idea that spirituality, humility, and other Christian virtues are related to ignorance is deeply entrenched in some segments of Christian Society'. This was written some two decades ago, indicating how the thinking of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century still lingers within the Church today. Referring to the earlier argument of the constant disagreement between the critics and advocates, it even becomes clearer. Although the criticism of White began during her life, there was never an entire book written to defend her or her work:

My words are so wrested and misinterpreted that I am coming to the conclusion that the Lord desires me to keep out of large assemblies and refuse private interviews. What I say is reported in such a perverted light that it is new and strange to me. It is mixed with words spoken by men to sustain their own theories (White 1980:82).

White was aware that her words were twisted to serve the purposes of others. Despite this she did not seem to consider the need to write a book to defend herself or her work. The reason for this is that when she was alive, her life could attest to the veracity of herself and her works. Knight states, 'Thus her positive attitude reflected her religious belief' (Knight 1999b:19). White also guided the Church in mission work, education, health, evangelism, organisation, and a host of other essential elements. One cannot deny that her influence had a great deal in shaping the Church. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, she was aware of the fact that she was not of primary importance: 'If you had made God's Word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies' (White 1991:92). It is also very clear that she regarded herself as nowhere close to the Scripture in respect to authority, stating, 'I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice' (White 1882:78).

What White is stating is fundamental to Protestantism, that all things must be measured by the Scripture and that in no way does White become a second authority. This, on the other hand, is not always the reality found within Adventism: Knight (1999a:17) speaks of people who 'isolate authoritative statements' from White's writings and use them rigidly in their life. The question then arises: 'How can one have such a divergence from what White wrote and the practice of those who

claim to adhere to her teachings?’ The answer is simple: The view that Knight addresses is the view that was promoted from 1919, not while White was alive.

Nichol (1951) sought to answer the critics and did extensive research in his book, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*. His view is continued by Douglas, who argues: ‘Ellen White was an exceptionally sensitive woman, open to all the human emotions’ (Douglas 1998:65). He even mentions negative aspects such as ‘discouragement’ and ‘loneliness’, but this is offset by overwhelming statements and paragraphs of her positive qualities (Douglas 1998:65-66). Like Nichol, Douglas underplays White’s human and negative aspects in favour of her divine and positive aspects.

It was only after 1950 that Heppenstall rose as a prominent theologian and began steering Adventism away from the fundamentalist route taken in 1919. In an interview, Heppenstall reflects that Andreason went overboard with sinless perfectionism (Bradford 2006:177). Andreason was a prominent Bible scholar in the 1930s and 1940s and even had an influence until the 1960s (Bradford 2006:187). Andreason claimed the following of White: ‘She wrote nothing that was cheap or questionable, but only the purest wheat, thoroughly winnowed. Mature counsel, earnest exhortation, pure morality, sound theology, correct and authoritative information, are all imparted in correct and beautiful English’ (Andreason 1943:268).

It can be seen that Andreason continued the thinking that was promulgated by Holmes and Washburn. When considering Nichol’s defence in his book, it is clear that his view of a perfect White was influenced by Andreason’s thinking (Nichol 1951:16). Andreason has also included other ideas in his work that went against Church doctrines:

Thus it shall be with the last generation of men living on earth. Through them God’s final demonstration of what he can do with humanity will be given. He will take the weakest of the weak, those bearing the sins of their forefathers, and in them show the power of God. They will be subjected to every temptation, but will not yield. They will demonstrate that it is possible to live without sin (Andreason 1947:302).

Andreason promoted the idea that those awaiting Christ's return will live without sinning before the Advent. This reflects the unnatural position of White's authority, where her writing could be used to promote the ideas of individuals even if it contradicted her own.

Heppenstall authored several books including *Our High Priest* (Heppenstall 1972), *Salvation Unlimited* (Heppenstall 1974), and *The Man who is God* (Heppenstall 1977). The outstanding characteristic of these books is that they focus on Christ, as the author repeatedly relies on phrases such as 'Christ crucified is central' (Heppenstall 1972:21); 'Salvation by the Righteousness of Christ means that man acknowledges and believes that God has revealed and affected in Christ alone a righteousness that is eternally all-sufficient for all men' (Heppenstall 1974:31); and 'There is no saving righteousness except that which comes directly from Christ' (Heppenstall 1977:149).

Heppenstall was presenting a view contrary to Andreason and attempting to create a mindset in the Church more in line with the mindset of the era in which White lived. Heppenstall clearly seeks to place the focus on Christ rather than White or even human sinlessness.

The original influence that moulded the thinking of Church pioneers still remains part of the view of modern Church thinking. Restorationist thinking is still prominent, relying on Scripture as the norm to test all other things (General Conference [Inst] 2005:20). Also, the idea of 'restoring the original faith' is still prominent in Church thinking (General Conference [Inst] 2005:145, 295, 316). The Wesleyan concept of an organisation is still applied in the Church (General Conference [Inst] 2000:xx). Deism's influence has left the Church with a very strong need to intellectually prove their views, whether by Scripture or logical arguments (Ratsara & Davidson 2013:6, 7). Added to this, the Puritan influence and the emphasis on the law of God also remains (Du Preez 2008:153). The thinking that became prominent from the 1919 Bible Conference did not alter the original influences, but rather changed the view from which these influences were applied. It placed White in a synthetic position of authority, to the extent that denials and affirmations have to be made to prevent misunderstanding. The next section will consider White as a whole person.

### 3.4.2 The Whole Person

Erickson presents the following categorisations of inspiration:

1. The intuition theory: Inspiration is largely a greater degree of insight, similar to someone with a specific talent in a certain field. Thus, certain people are gifted to understand religious truths.
2. The illumination theory: The Holy Spirit only heightens the author's natural abilities. In other words, the Holy Spirit makes a good writer a great writer.
3. The dynamic theory: It combines the divine and human elements whereby the Holy Spirit guides the minds of the authors but leaves the expression of these thoughts to the author.
4. The verbal theory: The Holy Spirit does not only influence the thoughts but also the selection of words used by an author.
5. The dictation theory: Through the Holy Spirit God actually dictates the precise words to the author (Erickson 1998:231-233).

According to the basic beliefs of the Church, the following view is held in regard to inspiration: 'God "breathed" truth into men's minds. They, in turn, expressed it in the words found in the Scriptures' (General Conference [Inst] 2005:14). From this statement, one can conclude that the Church view of inspiration can be labelled as dynamic. Van Bemmelen clarifies the Church view by raising two points: First, that the Scripture is in actual fact the creation of the Holy Spirit due to His work and influence, and second, that the authors used human words and sources within their context and were subject to human weakness (Van Bemmelen 2000:34-35). White promotes a similar view:

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men (White 1950:v).

During the 1919 Bible Conference, pastors and theologians were willing to discuss the matter of inspiration, but the members and even students in the seminaries were being taught that the inspiration was verbal (Bradford 2006:153-154). This directly contradicts the view of White and the Church on inspiration: 'It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the

man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts' (White 1958b:21).

The following question arises: How did it happen that the proponents of *fundamentalist group* who sought to protect White, would hold a view that was contradictory to hers? The decade after 1880 saw the rise of new leaders, namely Jones and Wagoner who, during the General Conference Session of 1888, presented new ideas, some of which White endorsed (Knight 2000:100)<sup>46</sup>. The ideas of Jones and Waggoner enjoyed attention from Church members and in turn gave prominence to these men. Jones would later become prominent leader and scholar in the Church (Knight 2000:98).

Jones developed a view of inspiration and interpretation that went directly against what the Church and White held. He referred to White's work as the 'Word', and that only her work could truly interpret Scripture. White was presented as an infallible commentator of Scripture which in turn subordinated Scripture to her authority. Furthermore, Jones claimed that White was verbally inspired and beyond factual error (Knight 2000:99). Considering that Jones rose to prominence from 1888 onwards, it is not difficult to see his influence in Andreason which would explain the views promoted by Andreason (Knight 2000:116). Jones promoted his views of White because she had endorsed him in some areas which increased his authority. As with Du Preez and Veith, by quoting and supporting White, even if personal views contradict her own, it appears to grant the individual or organisation superior authority.

Inspiration is an event that is not solely mental but includes the whole of the person. This includes both their strengths and weaknesses (Van Bemmelen 2000:35). When evaluating the process followed by Canright and Nichol we find that a pattern emerges. Canright views White only in negative terms and in turn seeks to invalidate

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<sup>46</sup> Wagoner and Jones were two young Church ministers and in 1888 they presented several new ideas with a greater emphasis on certain aspects of Church doctrines. In some instances, White supported them and in others she did not. Conflict arose between the likes of Jones and Wagoner and men such as Butler and Smith. Among the ideas that Jones presented was that White was similar in authority to the Scripture, that God's children must become sinless on earth and that Christ had a sinful human nature. Although White did not support these ideas, Andreason promoted it during the period from 1920-1950. In the 1940s, Wieland and Short promoted these ideas and during the sixties, also Brinsmead (Knight 2000:150, 171, 178-181). Despite the error in certain ideas, even rejected by White herself, there is regularly someone to pick them up again and promote them among members.

the Church by linking it to White. Canright's books reveal this pattern where criticism of White becomes criticism of the Church. Nichol deflects these accusations with arguments which construct a view of White as being perfect. Nichol goes to great lengths to disprove the accusations of Canright regarding White's weaknesses and in turn presents an infallible Church alongside an infallible White.

Furthermore, the surroundings of the prophet are also included in the process of inspiration. In other words, the prophet does not receive inspiration in a vacuum (Bradford 2006:133). As stated in this chapter, White was influenced by the events and thinking popular to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pfandl also points out that White's inspired work was limited in time and scope (Pfandl 2013:627). Some theological thought promulgates the idea that God is removed from time. Canale argues against this view, arguing that the acts of God, removed from time, require that God has to enter human history sporadically to act within time (Canale 2001:38)<sup>47</sup>. Canale's argument concerning God being removed from time finds a parallel in the treatment of White as a person. For instance, McMahon claims all of White's work as the product of inspiration, ignoring historical influences, which removes her from the historical setting making White an entity removed from time. White, removed from time, will be used to support the unofficial theological views of the individual as in the case of Jones, or would support the critics as with Canright (Knight 2013b:337). The issue then no longer revolves around authority, but rather the advocating or criticising of an idolised White removed from time.

In contrast, both Bradford and Knight recognise that White was a product of her time (Bradford 2006:47; Knight 1997:78). Knight, in conjunction with the gift of inspiration, refers to the 'divine gift of human reason' (Knight 1999a:17). The inspiration of White encompasses not only her mind but also the time and condition in which it took place. Failure to consider White as a real person affected by the world will result in idolising White at the cost of the divine gift of human reason. When individual reasoning is sacrificed, White can no longer be viewed as human and she must be viewed in only positive divine terms as promoted after 1919. Alternatively, White can only be viewed in negative human terms as Canright and other critics do. Neither these views allow for a realistic view of White.

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<sup>47</sup> I am aware that some scholars view God as timeless and others reject this view. I am not advocating either, but simply wish to show that in part the argument of Canale finds similarity in the treatment of White.

### 3.4.3 Only one Level of Inspiration

The *Handbook of SDA Theology* states that there are no hints in Scripture that would indicate that inspiration works in degrees (Van Bemmelen 2000:40). Erickson supports this view by referring to 2 Timothy 3:16 pointing out that Paul most likely was referring to all Scripture being inspired (Erickson 1998:235). One level of inspiration is essential to maintain the authority of Scripture, to avoid the eclectic choice of inspired Scripture and to ensure all of Scripture is viewed as inspired.

Within a closed system such as Scripture this argument is simple, but how should one consider inspiration outside the canon, in this case with White or even extended to preachers and writers? The EGW Estate makes the following statement: 'Seventh-day Adventists have believed for more than a century that Ellen White was inspired in the same manner and to the same degree as Biblical prophets. At the same time, they do not make her writings another Bible – her writings differ in function and scope, not in authority' (Douglas 1998:296).

Two concepts must be pointed out here: First, that the degree of inspiration between Scripture and White are considered the same, and second, that this view does not discern any difference in authority between Scripture and White. The problem with the first point is that, if White's level of inspiration is equal to that of the Scripture, why is she not now included in the Scripture? The issue is further complicated when reading the following quote on the same website from another author: 'We do not hold them [White's writings] to be superior to the Bible, or in one sense equal to it' (White, A.L. n.d.:57). Here is a clear contradiction in viewing White's work and in turn her inspiration. Ideally one finds that this view, which does not hold White's work as higher or equal to Scripture, was penned by her own son.

If one considers the second point that there is no difference in authority, then not only is there a clash with the last quote from A.L. White, but there is also a clash in the denial considered earlier in this dissertation, where Knight points out that the tendency to make White equal or even superior to the Scripture originated during the 1920s to 1950s. Thus, the view promoted by Douglas must be viewed as a development after White and not during her lifetime (Knight 2000:138). Bradford contends that at the 1919 Bible Conference those who had known White personally did not hold a view of her authority similar to Douglas', but more in line with that of

A.L. White (Bradford 2006:153). Douglas reflects the view of the *fundamentalist group* of the 1919 Bible Conference that viewed White's work as infallible and equal to Scripture (Campbell 2013:658). The Church's belief on Scripture states that the Scripture retains authority over other manifestations of spiritual gifts (General Conference [Inst] 2005:20). Thus, in respect to authority, White cannot be considered equal to Scripture.

If one returns to the question that relates to White and the exclusion from Scripture, then one observes that Church theology seeks to remain Protestant by recognising only the 66 books of Scripture as canonical. If there is no difference in inspiration between White and the authors of the Bible, what then is the reason for the exclusion? The official statement is that the canon was closed and therefore White's work is not included (General Conference [Inst] 2005:253). Thus, White is equal to Scripture, but not included, because she came after the closing of the canon.

Considering White's work, Canright states 'that Mrs. White is inspired as were the writers of the Bible; that the Bible must be interpreted to harmonise with her writings' (Canright 1914:27). If this process were to be followed, it would go against the Church's principle of maintaining Scripture as supreme authority. Considering the view presented by White, the criticism of Canright seems unjustified. However, if one considers that Canright finally separated from the Church in 1886, then it begins to clarify the issue. During 1888, a General Conference session was held in which two groups presented differing views that had resulted in several debates during the late 1880s. On the one side were Smith, Butler, and Canright and on the other were White, Jones, and Waggoner. One of the issues under discussion was righteousness by faith and the role of the Ten Commandments. The group consisting of Smith, Butler, and Canright held that one is saved by faith and remain so by works (Knight 2000:103), while the other group of White, Jones, and Waggoner promoted that salvation was solely by grace (Knight 2000:105, 110). Although White agreed with some of the views of Jones and Waggoner, she did not agree with all their views (Knight 2000:118). At the General Conference session in 1888, Butler and Smith clashed with Jones and Waggoner on their differing views. Two years prior to the Conference, Canright left the Church when he realised that the view he shared with Butler and Smith was not theologically sound (Knight 2013b:338). Jones, on the other hand, was the one to advance the view that White was inerrant, equal to

Scripture and that Scripture must be interpreted through White (Knight 2000:99). Therefore, Canright's criticism is in actual fact against Jones and a small group at that time. The criticism that White was inspired in the same way as the authors of the Bible, did not hold true for White or the Church at large prior to 1919.

When one considers what some of White's contemporaries had stated in view of her work, they did not place her authority above or equal to Scripture (Bradford 2006:153). Heppenstall and the establishment of the Biblical Research Institute countered the influence that began with Jones and was continued by Andreason (Knight 2000:162). In 1998, when Douglas has still reflected views that originated in the period of 1919-1950, the ideas of Jones, promoted by Andreason, were also still prominent. In this sense, the critics have valid arguments and the advocates need to reconsider their position.

One of the problems that the SDA is encumbered with, is their inadequate view of inspiration (Knight 2000:187). Considering the previous illustrations of how the current view of inspiration allows White to entertain the same level of authority as Scripture, demonstrates the reality of the problem (cf. Chapter 2). This means that the theory that White's inspiration is the same as that found in Scripture, needs to be revisited: In question is not only White's inspiration but also her authority (Bradford 2006:126).

### **3.5 The Inspiration and Authority of Non-canonical Prophets**

Both Nichol and Canright base their work on the assumption that the role and authority of the prophet have remained static (Nichol 1951:57; Canright 1919:2). While Canright frequently refers to Scriptural prophets in criticism of White (Canright 1919:13, 20, 88), Nichol refers to Scriptural examples in support of White (Nichol 1951:105, 109). Thus, both sides rely on similarity or discrepancy to prove their point, based on an oversimplified view of the prophetic role. Bradford, however, points out that there have been several shifts in the role of prophets throughout Scripture. In his first reference to Scripture (Gn 20:7), the term 'nabi' is used as someone who spoke on behalf of God; during the time of Samuel the term 'seer' was used, whilst 'nabi' came to refer to bands of wandering prophets. In the New Testament, the methodology of prophesying is similar, although there are differences in authority and scope. Prophecy is no longer restricted to a few, but the whole of the

apostolic church became part of the process (Bradford 2006:65-69). It is useful to compare White to Biblical prophets to better understand her gift. One is obliged to consider changes in the prophetic role, specifically as they relate to the authority of the prophet.

One particular change that Bradford notes is that in the New Testament the prophet no longer has unlimited authority (Bradford 2006:69). This touches on the key point of this dissertation and highlights an error by both Nichol and Canright. Nichol sees only the divine origin of White's visions, and in turn the divine authority that accompanies them (Nichol 1951:24). Douglas likewise puts White's authority on the same level as that of Scripture (Douglas 1998:296). Canright goes to the opposite extreme, denying any divine influence or authority of White and therefore denies any of White's authority (Canright 1919:111). Numbers also rejects White's authority, as her work does not confer with his concept of inspiration (Numbers 1976:xiv-xix). Strangely enough, this issue is not addressed in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, despite Bradford having raised a very pertinent issue to the change of the prophetic role and authority.

White's prophetic gift was tested by the leaders of the Church, which begs the question, 'Who then has the greater authority?' If the leadership applied the test and agreed with the results, then it reasons that Church leadership has the greater authority. These same tests were not applied to Scripture, since Scripture was seen as the source of authority, even in judging White.

In explaining the authority of the Church, the Adventist view is expressed in the Church Manual, stating first, that God is the only source of authority, and second, that He has delegated authority to the Church in order to ensure the transmission of the 'Word of God'. (General Conference [Inst] 2000:1). The Church structure gives the highest authority to the General Conference in session<sup>48</sup>. Quotations from White are referenced to support this point that the General Conference in session has the authority and should not be opposed by 'private independence' (General Conference [Inst] 2000:2).

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<sup>48</sup> This refers to a meeting of the General Conference and delegated representatives from the Church organisation across the world.

Considering the history of the Church, despite these statements, it would seem that the leadership has had the greatest influence on the authority of White. Daniels saw a danger in focusing on the miraculous in White's life and not her overall life contribution to the Church (Lindsay 2013:658). Focusing solely on White's divine and positive elements has extended the area of her authority beyond its natural limitation. White was elevated as an authority on history and theology, especially from 1920-1950.

At this point it becomes necessary to question both critics and advocates as to whether the discussion is truly about White or if she simply happens to be the visual point, while the actual argument deals with the Church. Canright states that he has left the Church because he believed it to be in error (Canright 1914:4). Nichol states that in defending White, the pioneers of the Church felt that they were defending aspects central to the movement (Nichol 1951:15). This would explain the confusion due to the exact nature of White's authority, while it is not really her authority that is in question, but that of the Church. If this is the case, the actual question would be, 'How vital is White to the Church?' Daniels believed in White's prophetic gift and sought her counsel and guidance (Ochs & Ochs 1974:115). Bradford, in recounting the materials from the 1919 Bible Conference, revealed that Daniels did not hold White as an absolute authority on all matters (Bradford 2006:153-156). Daniels' attitude from the two sources indicates an alignment with White's view as expressed in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Fortin & Moon 2013) where she stated that her work should not be placed before Scripture and that Scripture is the supreme authority (Pfandl 2013:628). It is necessary to separate White's authority from Church authority. The failure to do so has only confused a proper understanding of the discussion between the critics and advocates. If there are no clear line between the authority of Scripture, White's authority, and Church authority, it prevents demarcating their specific area of influence.

Both Nichol and Canright are mistaken on the point that prophets from Scripture can be used as typecast examples for or against White. Due to the change in the prophetic role, as Bradford pointed out, White must be dealt with in a unique manner. Examples from Scripture can serve as guides in this process, but one cannot unassumingly apply Scriptural prophetic roles in a modern-day context without considering the changes that exist.

The following examples of non-canonical prophets do not serve as a blueprint for White, since the prophetic role is different. They share similarities and in considering the examples from Scripture, it does allow one a glimpse into the treatment of a prophet's authority. First, the three prophets, Nathan, Elijah, and John the Baptist, were considered prophets in the same manner as White. Second, although they were prophets, they did not produce writings that became part of the canon. Last, in the cases of Elijah and John the Baptist, it can be observed that the prophet arose as a unique individual with no one else to share the office.

### **3.5.1 Nathan the Prophet**

Nathan served as a prophet during the time of David and Solomon. There are no writings of Nathan that exist, nor did he contribute to the canon. Canright also refers to Nathan as a counterexample to White when he claims that she was in error (Canright 1919:95). One story, in particular, is found in 2 Samuel 7 when David inquires whether he should build a house for the ark of God (2 Sam 7:2). Nathan informs him that he is to go ahead, for God is with him (2 Sam 7:3). Soon afterwards, God informs Nathan that David is not to build the Temple (2 Sam 7:5-13). It is argued that Nathan spoke too soon and made a mistake in giving David the advice to proceed.

The more prominent question is whether Nathan's error affected his authority as a prophet. Keil argues that Nathan has based his primary advice on a previous prophecy that David's throne would be established forever (Keil 1973a:339-340). If this argument is followed, then it would mean that Nathan's error was purely the result of a misunderstanding of the previous prophecy. This would mean that God's vision of Nathan was not so much a correction, but rather explanatory of the previous vision. The implication then is that even prophets at times speak guided by their own understanding of matters. Keil's argument is in line with Bradford's, as prophets are limited by their humanity (Bradford 2006:28).

A major area of discussion between the critics and advocates is the fulfilment of prophecies made by White. Canright shows several prophecies that White made that failed to come true (Canright 1919:87). Nichol's defence to this argument is that Biblical prophecies were not fulfilled since some prophecies are based upon conditions (Nichol 1951:110-111). In many prophecies in Scripture, one finds spoken

or unspoken conditions of a prophecy, which could alter the outcome of the prophecy (Nichol 1951:104-105). In light of Nathan's situation, a third option is presented, in which White could basically have interpreted events in light of what she understood and based her interpretations on other prophecies. Bradford recognises that conditions do exist that could change the outcome in some prophecies, also that God being dynamic may alter the outcome of the prophecy and that White interpreted prophetic events current to her time (Bradford 2006:58, 144). Like Nathan, however, White very likely made statements on her human understanding of divine messages.

### **3.5.2 Elijah the Prophet**

Elijah, in similarity to Nathan, was a recognised prophet and did not contribute to the Scripture. As he is well-known for the dramatic events in his life, attention is given here to the period shortly after Carmel (1 Ki 18), when Elijah is threatened by Jezebel and flees until he requests that God take his life (1 Ki 19:4). *The New Bible Commentary* referring to Elijah's state, calls it a deep depression (Guthrie 1970:344).

Canright quotes White saying that she feared becoming an 'infidel' and denies this being in line with a Scriptural prophet (Canright 1919:20). If one, however, reads the entire quote, then one finds that White did experience a period of melancholy<sup>49</sup> due to lack of apparent results (White 1855:596-598). Nichol neglects to address White's negative emotions and deals only with facts that can be proven and which place White in a positive light. Douglas mentions discouragement and temporal depression but eclipses the negative with positive attributes and tales of her overcoming these feelings (Douglas 1998:73-75). Bradford also points out that White did at times have negative feelings (Bradford 2006:90), with the difference being that he does not feel the need to defend White's negative emotions. White, as Elijah, suffered periods of negative emotions; despite the divine influence, it did not eclipse the humanity of the prophet.

### **3.5.3 John the Prophet**

John the Baptist is prominent for two reasons: First, that he announces the arrival of the Messiah, and second, he is in fact the last of the Old Testament prophets. From

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<sup>49</sup> Knight shows that White did experience a range of emotions including negative emotions (Knight 1999b:32, 43, 86).

the last prediction of Malachi (Mal 4:5) there were no prophets until the fulfilment by John of Malachi's prophecy (Keil 1973c:474).

#### **3.5.4 White as a non-canonical prophet**

Having discussed the role of non-canonical prophets above, we read that Pfandl claims that White has the same authority as they had (Pfandl 2013:628). Knight, however, mentions that White claimed equal inspiration to Biblical writers, but not equal authority (Knight 2013a:649). One can observe a strict adherence to basic Church doctrine, which seems to be in line with the thinking that was prominent before 1919<sup>50</sup>. Knight also claims that early Church thinking recognised that all spiritual gifts, including that of White, derived their authority from Scripture (Knight 2013a:649).

What Knight highlights is that although White was viewed as a prophet, her authority was not based on that fact. The tests were done according to Scripture when White was in vision. Her repeated insistence on the primacy of Scripture supports this point: 'The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears...The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be looked upon as an audience with the Infinite One' (White 2002:69).

White's attitude toward Scripture, and the early Church view that all authority was based on Scripture, question the assumption of whether a prophet's authority can be established based on their role as a prophet? When John the Baptist was questioned, he denied being a prophet (Jos 1:21). However, this did not prevent others from calling him a prophet (Mt 11:32; Lk 20:6). After the death of John the Baptist, Christ also confirmed that he was a prophet (Mt 11:9; Lk 7:26). White adopted a similar attitude by not claiming the title of prophet, yet not denying others to call her a prophet.

Coon highlights four reasons for her attitude: First, at the time, Kellogg had presented contradictory views in the Church and in defence he attacked White as a prophet who was governing the Church; second, others claimed to be prophets, and in order to separate herself from questionable individuals, she avoided the use of the

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<sup>50</sup> The written *Testimonies* are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed (White 1915b:198).

term 'prophet'; third, most people during her time expected a prophet to function mainly as a fortune teller in predicting future events; and fourth, she saw her work as going beyond the limitations of a traditional prophet. Thus, although she had 'no controversy' with those who called her a prophet, she did not use the term referring to herself (Coon 2013:1058-1059).

The attitude of John the Baptist and White suggest that holding the position of a prophet is not in itself authoritative. White did not deny that God spoke to her (Coon 2013:1058) and in her view her authority was based upon Scripture (Knight 2013a:649), also that God had given her messages with the final authority resting on Him (Pfandl 2013:627)<sup>51</sup>. Bradford also lists several factors that the early Church pioneers held, as proof of White's authenticity, none of which includes that she was a prophet (Bradford 2006:89-90). One aspect that Bradford does mention is that White's uplifting of Christ led to support for her gifts in the early Church (Bradford 2006:89). Coon's argument that White was more than a prophet can also be reversed if a prophet can be gifted to do more than prophesy (Coon 2013:1058), and it would entail that Christians also have access to spiritual gifts which would include prophecy (Bradford 2006:71). Thus, the position of the prophet is not one of imperial authority, and due to this position neither would delegate authority. Delegated authority creates a problem since, as history has shown, White's authority has changed due to a delegation of Church leadership. Thus, one is left with veracious authority, in view of whether White leads to truth or not. Bradford agrees when he points out that in the apostolic church prophets had their prophecies evaluated by apostolic church leaders. The evaluation of apostolic church leaders would be to verify the veracious nature of a prophecy (Bradford 2006:77).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Consideration has been given as to how the events before and during White's life helped to shape the development of her authority. The events after her death and how the Church leadership developed her authority were also investigated. The Church view that there exists only one level of inspiration and the implications that this has on White's authority was also examined. Considering the role of non-canonical prophets in Scripture and certain aspects of their life that could cast light on White's authority, the historical aspects and the concepts of inspiration, and the

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<sup>51</sup> This can also be understood in Scripture's warning of 'false prophets' (Mt 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mk 13:22).

relation to other non-canonical prophets provide clarity on the matter of White's authority. Simultaneously, these issues also highlight certain key aspects that require greater study and investigation. The next Chapter will focus on the relationship between Scripture and White, particularly relating to the matter of authority.

## Chapter 4

### The Authority of Scripture and the Authority of White

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter reflected on how historical events created the foundation and assisted in the development of White's authority. The manner in which the Church leadership influenced White's authority after her death, and until today, was also investigated. This Chapter explores how White relates to Scripture. First of all, it is necessary to consider how White relates to Scripture in order to maintain Scripture as supreme in authority, and second, it is necessary to understand her relation to Scripture in order to determine the area of her authority.

#### 4.2 The Source of Both

Scripture contains that which God inspired, and prescribes what God requires of Christians. Furthermore, Scripture is seen as God speaking to humanity through the Holy Spirit (General Conference [Inst] 2005:19). Canale supports this idea in the following quote: '[T]he entire text of Scripture reveals before our eyes the mind and ways of God' (Canale 2001:162). His view of Scripture concurs that Scripture is deemed as the main authority in the Church. Furthermore, White views Scripture as inspired and authoritative, as Scripture teaches the entire will of God for human beings to be saved (White 1923c:390).

White makes the following claims about herself and her work:

If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings (White 1868:605).

White personally states that her purpose in writing is to show the reader how to apply Scriptural teaching in a practical situation – a task which she claims was necessary only in as far as others did not read Scripture. White does not view her work as adding to Scripture or equalling it as a source of authority, but leading readers of her work back to the authority of Scripture. In response to an unknown source that claimed that all of White's works, as well as every verbal utterance made by her, were inspired on the same level as the Ten Commandments, she argues: 'My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause ever made such claims' (White 1958b:24).

This letter was penned in 1906 and reflects White's attempt to counter Jones' views that her authority was equal to that of Scripture. She opines that she did not write her own opinion, but recounted what God has shown her (White 1958b:27). In another instance, she states: '[B]ut let it be seen that you are inspired by the Spirit of Jesus Christ; and angels of God will put into your lips words that will reach the hearts of the opposers' (White 1915a:359). White therefore did not consider her work as mere opinion; she could also see inspiration in others, though she shies away from equating her authority with Scriptural authority. She rather views the purpose of her work to remind others to read and obey Scripture (White 1868:605).

With consideration to the other Church leaders of the time, it can be deduced that Smith did not view White's authority as equal to Scripture (Bradford 2006:108). When he was accused that White's work was used to formulate doctrine, he argued that White's visions never served as an authority and that the authority lay within Scripture (Knight 2000:59). Knight states that Gordon had found that Church members, after the passing of White, began leaning on White's works to support Church doctrines. This was not the practice of the pioneers of the Church (Knight 2000:59).

These quotes reflect that there are two views on White's authority within the Church. The earlier quote made by A.L. White. 'We do not hold them [White's writings] to be superior to the Scripture, or in one sense equal to it' (White, A.L. n.d.:57), together with the above reflect the thinking of the Church pioneers who found value in White's works but did not view her authority as equal to Scriptural authority.

Nichol states that even though he holds her works in high esteem, her works are not 'on par' with Scripture (Nichol 1951:87). Douglas equates White's inspiration with her authority, stating: 'Seventh-day Adventists have believed for more than a century that Ellen White was inspired in the same manner and to the same degree as Biblical prophets. At the same time, they do not make her writings another Bible – her writings differ in function and scope, not in authority' (Douglas 1998:296).

One can observe a marked delineation concerning the views held by early Church pioneers. The views of Douglas and A.L. White<sup>52</sup> represent two different views on both the Scriptural and White's authority. Neither source denies the origin of White's divine aspects, yet they arrive at different conclusions.

Canright states, that when he was part of the Church, he believed that leaving the Adventist faith would be to give up Scripture (Canright 1914:40). This statement reflects the mindset of the prominence of Scripture in early Church history. Canright also states:

[T]he writings of their prophetess, Mrs. E.G. White, are also given by inspiration of God; that these writings contain a fuller revelation of God's will to man, and that they are infallible. And, what is more, they make faith in these writings a test of faith and fellowship in their church (Canright 1919:9).

Neither White nor the Church pioneers equated her authority to Scriptural authority. Even though White's authority was not viewed as equal to Scriptural authority before 1880, later views have put her authority into an equal position to that of Scripture's authority. In the 1919 Bible Conference, the *progressive group* did not view White's authority as infallible, although the *fundamentalist group* viewed her authority as equal to that of Scripture (Lindsay 2013:658). This, though, was not White's views or the Church pioneers.

Knight agrees that White did not view her authority as equal to that of Scripture (Knight 1997:17). He also explains that although she saw her work as subservient to Scripture, she did not view her work as having 'no authority' (Knight 1997:20). White and early Church pioneers held her work as having authority due to its origin from

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<sup>52</sup> Chapter 3 section 3.4.3.

God, but since her authority derived from Scripture, it could not be equal to it (Knight 1997:24-25). Some who aligned themselves with the *progressive group's* views at the 1919 Bible Conference, claimed that Scripture was inerrant, but White was not (Lindsay 2013:658). Within the *progressive group*, one finds a variation on how they viewed White's inspiration and authority.

Bradford contends that White was a prophet regardless of her errors. He agrees with Martin, a non-Adventist, who recognises that White made mistakes, but he does not consider her to be a false prophet (Bradford 2006:92). Bradford does not let the source of her inspiration serve as a measure of her authority, but rather focuses on the overall contribution of her life (Bradford 2006:63). He points out that not all her counsel is relevant for today and that her authority cannot function as imperial authority but should rather function as veracious authority (Bradford 2006:215). Bradford strongly emphasises the need for Church doctrine to be based on Scripture, even if it were to go against White's authority (Bradford 2006:218). Bradford's motivation for being a Seventh-day Adventist is an attempt to point out to the reader that without White's authority the Church is still relevant (Bradford 2006:227-233). Thus, Bradford's views clearly separate White's authority from that of the Church.

Canright, in his criticism views White's authority and that of the Church as a single entity (Canright 1919:20). Although he deemed White to be a 'noble Christian Woman', he criticises her in the book, *The Life of Ellen White* in order to justify his leaving the Church (Knight 2013b:338). Canright, though, seems to address a subsection of Seventh-day Adventism and not the original mindset found with the pioneers of the Church. The original mindset was that, although White's inspiration and that of Scripture are similar, it does not grant her the same authority as Scripture. The original view of the Church pioneers removes White's authority from a position of absolutes, either positive or negative, viewing her in moderate perspective. When the Church pioneers' view is applied, advocates no longer have a 'divine superwoman' to hide behind, and critics cannot just deny White's divine aspects as an attack on the Church. The next section considers whether inspiration can be extended beyond the canon and even White.

### 4.3 The Continuation of Inspiration

Canale states that viewing God removed from time means that this removes God from active involvement in history (Canale 2001:38). This also results in the views that the acts of God are sporadic in history. Canale favours the idea of a God whose actions can be witnessed within time rather than a God which exists outside of time. If God is present in time it can be argued that the acts of God, in this case, inspiration, must also be present in time. Church fundamental doctrines also state that there is no Scriptural evidence for the cessation of spiritual gifts (General Conference [Inst] 2005:250). Therefore, in order to accommodate White's inspiration and authority, Church theology considers the activity of God, including inspiration, beyond the close of the canon.

Erickson states that inspiration is necessary to preserve revelation beyond its immediate time frame (Erickson 1998:225). This view harmonises with Canale's view that if God acts in history it would also imply that inspiration of individuals must be present in history. Canright does not state this, but his denial of White's as well as other modern prophets' inspiration, and his continued referral to Scriptural prophets would imply that denying White's inspiration and authority narrows the field for post-canonical inspiration considerably (Canright 1919:2-8, 25). Nichol, although inherently defending White's authority and inspiration, does not go beyond her inspiration as to how it relates to the Church as a whole.

The theological terms 'General Revelation' and 'Special Revelation' are well known in the theological world<sup>53</sup>. Could the argument be made that there are different kinds of inspiration for people in various situations? In viewing White's authority, it would appear that she would support this idea: '[T]he men who bear the message are not sanctified by the truths they preach. The Saviour withdraws his smiles, and the inspiration of his Spirit is not upon them' (White 1892:51).

White also acknowledged that inspiration can work through other ministers, with the condition that they and the content of their teaching are consecrated to God. She

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<sup>53</sup> 'General Revelation' is referring to God's communicating to all people at all times, while 'Special Revelation' refers to God's particular communication to individuals (Erickson 1998:178).

states: 'The reason why there is so little of the Spirit of God manifested is that ministers learn to do without it' (White 1995:21)<sup>54</sup>.

Here White differentiates between ministers who rely on the Spirit of God and those who do not. There is no indication that White expects ministers to also receive visions or perform miracles, but she does see the need for inspiration in the work of a minister.

Church doctrine states that White did not view inspiration as partial or in degrees. However, this is applicable to the immediate context of Scripture. She wanted to avoid a canon within a canon (Hasel 2013:897). This view, conversely, does not address the continuation of inspiration beyond the close of the canon. White states: 'Each heart-beat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life – the inspiration of the ever-present God, the Great I AM' (White 1958b:294).

White's use of the term 'inspiration', and what she means by that term is not clear at all. This is due to the various uses of the term. In another quote White states: 'The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands, to be channels of light, our means of doing good will never be exhausted' (White 1901:467).

Although this dissertation does not focus on inspiration, it is important to take notice that White expected all children of God to receive some form of inspiration. If Church doctrine holds true that inspiration did not cease after the close of the canon, then it would also hold true that inspiration was not only evident in White's life but also in that of other Christians. Bradford warns that one should not exalt White's gift of inspiration at the expense of the gifts of others (Bradford 2006:217).

Canright states that inspiration goes beyond Scripture, concluding that White was falsely inspired. His criticism of White prevents any allowance for examples of true inspiration (Canright 1919:8). The examples that he uses of false prophets to critique

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<sup>54</sup> This quote is was made in 1855 before the concept of the Trinity was fully developed in the Church for this reason White uses the word 'it' in reference to the Holy Spirit.

White results in denying other individuals from being inspired or having spiritual gifts (Canright 1919:3-8).

The advocates fail in a similar way by promoting White's divine authority at the expense of other gifts. Nichol's focus on White's gift is so limited that she is elevated above all others in the Church (Nichol 1951:23). He ascribes the success of the Church solely on White and at the expense of the contributions of others over the years (Nichol 1951:24). This emphasis on the achievements and gifts of White, in turn, results in an eclipse of the gifts and achievements of others. When speaking of White's divine inspiration, it should be noted that she did not view this as her sole possession. Critics and advocates, by their methodology, deny others to be inspired or to receive spiritual gifts. The next section will consider White's view of Scriptural authority.

#### **4.4 White's view of Scriptural Authority**

White held Scripture's authority in high regard. She made it clear that her writings or views would in no way exceed the authority of Scripture (Knight 1997:17). In interviews and in her writings, she promoted the supremacy of Scripture's authority: 'I do not ask you to take my words. Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Scripture' (White 1980:33).

The fact that White expected others to lay her work aside, reflects her view of the prominence of Scripture. Knight expresses White's view on her own work as merely leading people back to Scripture's authority (Knight 2013a:648). This view is reflected in the following quote by White: 'Little heed is given to the Scripture, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light' (White 2002:68)<sup>55</sup>.

Her work serves to bring people to Scripture. In light of the quote from A.L. White (referred to in the previous section) it shows a similarity in thinking that White ('lesser light') is in no way equal or superior to Scripture ('greater light'). After White refers to herself as the lesser light in her book, *A call to Stand Apart*, she focuses the rest of that chapter on the importance of Scripture (White 2002:68-70).

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<sup>55</sup> The Scripture is referred to as the greater light and White's work as the lesser light.

A.L. White's view of White's work is in line with the Protestant maxim, *Sola Scriptura*, which is promoted by the Church. Knight states that although White viewed her work as equally inspired as the writers of Scripture, she never claimed equal authority to Scripture (Knight 2013a:649). This deviates from Pfandl who connects White's inspiration to her authority (Pfandl 2013:627). Knight states that early Church pioneers held that all spiritual gifts including those of White, derived authority from Scripture (Knight 2013a:649). It would appear that White viewed Scripture as receiving its authority directly from God as the Word of God (White 2002:46-47). Outside of the canon, prophetic gifts may exist, but they are subject to Scripture's authority. This is in line with her view of the *Great Controversy* theme in her writings. White views a cosmic scale controversy that exists between Christ and Satan, stating: 'The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture...He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption' (White 1903:190).

The *Great Controversy* theme is an overarching theme in White's writings, with the pivotal point being between 'fable religion' and 'Bible religion' (Douglas 1998:851). To White, Scripture appears central in her *Great Controversy* theme as it supplies the individual with the necessary information to be saved (White 2002:46). Therefore, early Church pioneers and White held Scripture supreme in authority and subjected all other spiritual manifestations to Scriptural authority.

The delineation being observed with Douglas (1998:296) and Pfandl (2013:627) is based on the equation of inspiration to authority. Ironically Canright seems to follow a similar reasoning process, only to the negative, as his arguments seek to prove that White was not inspired by God and therefore without authority (Canright 1919:32). White's critics and advocates use the same arguments but from angles, arriving at different conclusion.

White also used Scripture homiletically as opposed to an exegetical process (Bradford 2006:208). It can therefore be argued that she should not serve as a commentary on Scripture or an authority on Scriptural interpretation. Her use of Scripture was intended for her immediate time and situation (Bradford 2006:210). As

such, one cannot use her work exegetically or judge her work in relation to Scripture on an exegetical level.

J. White, White's husband, stated that Scripture is to be taken as the 'perfect rule of faith and duty'; attempting to learn faith and duty from the testimonies would place White's gifts in the wrong position (Knight 2013a:648). Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate the results of putting White's authority in a position that it was never meant to occupy. Not only White, but also other pioneers of the Church saw her work as a gift with authority, although it was not meant to equal or exceed Scriptural authority. The following section will consider White's role in the Church – both past and present.

#### **4.5 White's role in the Church – Past and Present**

The argument that serves White's advocates best is the positive influence she has had on the Church. Nichol labels this as a distinguishing mark of the Church and states that it cannot be denied that her counsel has repeatedly guided the Church (Nichol 1951:22-23). *Seventh-day Adventist Believe...* claims that she is second to Scripture in shaping the Church (General Conference [Inst] 2005:257).

Canright reports that in 1912 the Church presented the following figures: 2,769 churches and 129 conferences. These figures, however, do not present an image of a large church for that time (Canright 1914:9). Canright also compared White with other religious leaders who also claimed to be prophets and/or received visions, that are mostly referred to as delusional (Canright 1919:3, 6). He mentions the following names (Canright 1919:3-8):

- E. Swedenborg: After his death, various interpretations of his work arose. Currently the 'New Church' holds to his teachings, with numbers between 25,000 and 50,000 worldwide (Slick 2015).
- Lee: She has guided the Shakers with her visions. In 2009 it was estimated that the largest group had ten members (Hogan 2009).
- J. Southcoat: Her work formed the basis for the Panacea society, which ceased to exist as a religious organisation in 2012 and now only serves as a trust (Anonymous 2012b).
- J. Smith: Presents one of the few on the list who originated a self-sustaining organisation. The Church of the Latter Day Saints claims 15 million members worldwide (Anonymous 2015).

- Mrs Eddy: The Church of Christian Science do not publicise their numbers, but Dr Barret claims that their membership has declined progressively from 1988 to currently being less than 50,000 (Barret 2009).
- C.T. Russel: Started the Jehovah's Witnesses who currently number over eight million members (Jehovah's Witnesses [Organisation] 2015).
- Dowie: From here the Zionist movement (ZCC) arose. Due to the various factions it is difficult to determine the exact number of adherents, but it was estimated at between two to six million during the 1990s (U.S. Library of Congress 2015).

Except for Smith and Russel, no other example that Canright mentions, managed to leave behind a large, growing, united and functioning organisation. Nichol mentions meeting with an unidentified person who represented another group that originated from the *Great Disappointment* of 1844. Nichol mentions this individual's expression of the Church's achievement against his own organisation, concluding that, due to White's influence, the Church has enjoyed a great deal of success (Nichol 1951:23-24).

The official statistics of the Church in 2015 stood at over 18 million baptised members with baptisms worldwide of over a million in one year. This was also the fastest growing church worldwide at the time (Ng 2015)<sup>56</sup>. Canright compares the Church to the Mormons and Christian Science at the time, pointing out that Church growth had been inferior to these groups (Canright 1914:10). Despite Canright's misgivings, time has shown that White's influence has had positive effects on the Church. There are two groups who broke away from the Church and still hold to the teachings of White, and in reviewing them, one observes the following:

- The *Davidian group* broke away from the Church in 1930 under the leadership of Houteff. This group is difficult to measure since they have repeatedly fragmented. In 1959 one Davidian group, with just over a thousand members, expected the return of Christ. After the subsequent failed prediction, Howell, who was a member of the group, broke away with the largest number of followers. He changed his name to David Koresh and called his group the Branch Davidians, which resulted in the Waco Texas raid in which several

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<sup>56</sup> The number of baptised members would not include children or potential members. It can therefore be calculated that Church membership worldwide could exceed 50 Million.

members were killed (CRI 2009). Having evidence that Koresh was building a cache of weapons at his secluded compound near Waco Federal and Texas, Law officials acted resulting in a 51-day standoff. During the standoff negotiations stalled when Koresh delayed his surrender. When the FBI approached the compound, throwing tear gas inside the building, the building erupted in flames killing 75 people (Chan 2018). One section of this group who claims to remain true to the original teachings of Houteff claims that thousands belong to this religious body (The Shepherds Rod Speaks 2012). However, the exact numbers of this group remain unclear, due to the repeated fragmentation.

- The *Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement*, referred to as the Reformed Adventists, broke away from the mainstream Church in 1920. Although it has been structured along similar lines as the mainstream Church, its current membership is only 40,000 members worldwide. In an interview with Spectrum Magazine, Silva, the president of their Conference made the following statement: 'Although membership growth is an important aspect of one's existence, it is not the primary focus in our church. Making sure that a prospective member has truly given their heart to Jesus as their personal Savior is the main focus' (Byrd 2015).

The sentiment expressed underlies the desire to hide the fact that growth is minimal. The growth of the Reformed Adventists has been hampered by a continual process of rivalries, power splits and sheep (church members) stealing between the two main branches (Ferrel 1998:39).

These two examples reveal that, although White's council can be deemed as positive, it can also have the opposite effect when viewed from a fundamentalistic angle<sup>57</sup>. It is clear that, despite slow growth in the early years of the Church, it has increased over time. In contrast to other groups who also claim to have a prophet, the Church has benefitted to a much larger extent. It would take more time and study to determine all factors causing the growth of the Church, but in the context of this dissertation, White's authority has in part contributed to this (Nichol 1951:24).

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<sup>57</sup> One such example taken from the Reformed Adventists is that after divorce, remarriage is prohibited. The women are not allowed to cut their hair and the buns become so heavy, causing headaches (Ferrel 1998:9, 33).

Despite the positive influence that is recognised by the advocates, it must also be noted that in the case of Davidian and Reformed Adventists there is an absence of positive results. Both these groups originate during the period 1920-1950. The Davidians have one element in common with the theology of the SDA that was promoted by Andreason, namely, that before the coming of Christ there should be a righteous group on earth (Reid 1993; Bradford 2006:177). The Reformed Adventists believe that they are to preach righteousness by faith as understood by Jones (Pfandl 2003). Considering the period and similarities between the two groups, it is clear that Jones' thinking, promoted by Andreason, seems to have had an effect on these groups. White's authority alone cannot promote success in an organisation but is dependent upon a proper view to ensure the right position of her authority. A key element, according to Bradford, is that a proper view with which to consider White's authority is critical thinking (Bradford 2006:225). Within the Church, this lack of critical thinking has produced challenges in theology.

Bradford mentions the challenge of theological conundrums that modern Church members inherited from previous generations, particularly challenges that arose from blindly following White's authority at the expense of critical thinking (Bradford 2006:227-228). Knight also highlights this problem by pointing to the period from 1950 onward as one of theological tension within the Church (Knight 2000:160). Both Knight and Bradford connect this tension, in part, to the understanding that developed from White's authority. Jones exalted White's authority and this view was promoted by Andreason, which resulted in a lack of critical thinking (Knight 2000:172; Bradford 2006:214-215). The emphasis that Knight and Bradford have put on this subject would suggest that a correct view of White's authority is essentially not only for growth, but for a theological development within the Church.

With reference to organisations following White, there are the examples of the Davidian failure in predicting the coming of Christ on 22 April 1959, and the Branch Davidians who fared even worse in Waco Texas after the death of 75 of their members (CRI 2009). The Reformed Adventists have taken extreme positions on certain points, even superseding White's authority (Pfandl 2003)<sup>58</sup>. This dissertation

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<sup>58</sup> Vegetarianism has been made a test of faith; there is no opportunity for remarriage after divorce; and the expression of their standards leaves little room for an individual's consciousness (Pfandl 2003).

has also cited several examples of individuals, both in the past and present, who have suffered due to an extreme interpretation of White's authority. Even in her own lifetime, White was compelled to warn against those who would take extreme positions on her authority (White 1991:237; 1903:230; 1983:337). One area that seems to attract extreme views more than others happens to be the area of health<sup>59</sup>.

These extremist positions have continued to be prevalent throughout history<sup>60</sup>. Although these extreme interpretations are not unique to Adventism, the fact that people who are prone to extreme interpretations can quote an authoritative source, gives greater strength to their arguments to make their fanaticism appear as faithfulness. In his book, *Reading Ellen White*, Knight has a healthy outlook on White, concentrating on the central issues, and does not take her work to extremes, but apply them to common sense (Knight 1997:43, 46, 71, 99). His focus is meant to counter fanatical positions, and at the same time he also illustrates the prevalence of such extreme positions. Despite his attempts to promote a balanced view, he does not specify how one would identify or test a balanced view.

The Church points out that the reading of White's works can be positive for the individual (General Conference [Inst] 2005:258). These arguments of positive results present a positive case for the advocates of White. However, when claiming that White was inspired on the same level as Scripture, but that she is excluded from the Scripture because the canon was closed, it creates a second entity of authority equal to Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2005:255, 253). It is also necessary to recognise the critics' arguments that White's works result in 'spying, fault finding, criticising and judging one another' (Canright 1919:30). Bradford states that White hoped for readers of her books to apply the love of Christ in their life. Bradford also points out the persistent, narrow, fundamentalism that appeared after her death (Bradford 2006:98, 203). What Bradford is highlighting is that there are two distinct outcomes of White's authority, depending on how her authority is viewed.

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<sup>59</sup> One such example was of a minister who went to extremes regarding to health. White had to write and counsel him to use eggs to supplement his diet (White 1938:204). In another instance, in a letter to ministers, she warned against making statements that can be used by unbalanced minds or misunderstood by inexperienced listeners (White 1923a:227-228).

<sup>60</sup> Knight reflects on Haskel who found that doctrines such as the seal of God could not apply to people with grey hair, and that Church members would reach a stage of sinless perfection, both physically and spiritually, where disease would not affect them (Knight 1997:70).

It would appear that both Nichol and Canright are guilty of only viewing the aspects that suit their arguments. It becomes advantageous for White's authority to remain undefined in such a situation, since the individual who quotes White is left to determine the limits of her authority for their arguments. Thompson, in an article in *Spectrum Magazine*, addresses what he terms as the rise of fundamentalism in the Church that prevents the growth of the members. In this article he also states that the fundamentalist mindset is focused on guarding the truth and not on investigating truth (Thompson 2008). When White's authority is static – negative for the critic and positive for the advocate – it is easy to discuss White's authority as it suits the individual. Bradford presents the possibility that the Church needs to move beyond the foundation that White has laid (Bradford 2006:225). He does not want to remove her as an authority, but to remove her as a final authority. Bradford also views White's authority from a more dynamic perspective, moving beyond exclusive criticism or advocating. The following section will consider White's position on matters of authority.

#### **4.6 White's views on Matters of Authority**

Regarding her work, White held the view that the message she presented was from God. This idea is presented in the following quote: 'If you would obey their teachings you would be assured of their divine origin...If they are from God they will stand. Those who seek to lessen the faith of God's people in these testimonies, which have been in the church for the last thirty-six years, are fighting against God' (White 1889:234).

White has removed herself from the equation and left it to the reader to test her work and make a judgement in light of the result. She also states: 'If the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them' (White 1889:691). She did not rely on imperial authority to assert her position but asked the reader to test her writings and apply veracious authority to her work. When Nichol's other works are considered, one observes a different process at work.

The SDA Bible Commentary on Genesis 2:25 states that Adam and Eve were not naked but clothed in light: 'Adam and Eve had no need of material clothing, for about them the Creator had placed a robe of light' (Nichol 1978a:227). This idea originated with White, whom Nichol borrowed and interjected into the commentary. White

elaborated on the clothing: 'The sinless pair wore no artificial garments; they were clothed with a covering of light and glory, such as the angels wear. So long as they lived in obedience to God, this robe of light continued to enshroud them' (White 1890:45).

Both Nicol and the editor of *The SDA Bible Commentary* seem to blindly apply White's views on Scriptural passages. Despite the warning by White that everything should be proven by Scripture and not by her work, Nicol has done the opposite (White 1946:256). If White is used to interpreting Scripture, it begs the question, With who does the higher authority rest? Nicol, when working on *The SDA Bible Commentary* made sure that no part of the commentary would contradict White's work (Cronk 2010). Although Nicol did not view White's work as equal to Scripture, in practice it can be observed that her work is used to interpret Scripture. Despite Nicol's arguments for the primacy of Scripture in Church doctrine, the practice did not follow suit (Nicol 1951:87).

Another example is taken from Genesis 3:14 where White describes the serpent prior to the fall, stating: 'The serpent was then one of the wisest and most beautiful creatures on the earth. It had wings, and while flying through the air presented an appearance of dazzling brightness, having the color and brilliancy of burnished gold' (White 1999:21). Once again Nicol interposes White's idea into the *SDA Bible Commentary*: 'Formerly the most clever and beautiful of creatures, the serpent was now deprived of wings and doomed henceforth to crawl in the dust' (Nicol 1978a:232).

With the commentary on the first passage (Gn 2:25), Nicol defends the position by quoting Scriptures regarding future events (Rev 7:9, 19:8) that speak of the children of God being clothed in light. The future reference is then applied to Adam and Eve in Eden and referencing Revelation to God's restoration of what was lost. He also relies on a reference from White to support his view. However, there is no correspondence between the commentary and the quote from White. Nicol is merely interpreting Scripture to harmonise with White. In the second instance (Gn 3:14), Nicol again interprets Scripture to correspond with White. Despite what the Church claims for Scripture (General Conference [Inst] 2005:20), the examples show

that the view that originated with Jones and was promoted by Andreason has been present in subtle ways (Knight 2000:99, 140).

Sanders and Cleveland have listed fifty instances where they claim White contradicts Scripture (Sanders & Cleveland n.d.). The EGW Estate countered with an article, stating that White did not contradict Scripture (The EGW Estate 2015). The discussion of whether White contradicted Scripture or not, is dependent on the interpretation of the individual interpretation of Scripture and White. The actual problem arises when White and Scripture are no longer separate, and White's work becomes a commentary on Scripture. In Nichol's case the area of authority of Scripture and White have become confused. The views as promoted by Pfandl and Douglas focus on the core of the problem (Pfandl 2013:627; Douglas 1998:296). The concepts of only one level of inspiration, and linking inspiration to authority, has led White to equal and even supersede Scripture.

In practice, the incorrect use of White's writings by advocates has led to this methodology that contradicts White's original views. A clearly marked deviation of her own guidance is visible, especially in her own view of Scriptural authority. Although White did claim authority for her work, due to its origin, the final test of authority was to be Scripture. During the 1888 General Conference session when several theological debates had led to tension, one delegate referred to her work as support for certain arguments. Knight writes that White held the following view on the method of using her work as a final authority in theological matters:

We have no indication that she considered the matter settled by that method, nor did she quote her own writings at Minneapolis to decide any of the theological, historical, or Biblical issues. Her writings had their purpose, but as she saw it, they were not to take a superior position to Scripture by providing an infallible commentary on it (Knight 2000:97).

Knight reflected a view that clearly separate her from Scripture, especially as an authority in the fields of theology, history, or Scriptural interpretation. Thus, the original view that White promoted for her own work has been replaced with another method that has roots in Jones' view. Next, the focus of White's work will be considered.

#### 4.7 White's Focus in Work and Writing

In reading White's books, it is clear that she did not write theological, historical, or scientific works (Bradford 2006:100, 133). Her work is aimed at practical everyday faith. She viewed her work as aiding the believer in coming to a better understanding of Scripture (Douglas 1998). The focus of her work can be described as giving a clear instruction of what God requires of people in all facets of everyday life.

Perhaps the best example can be taken from works that gave guidance to health principles. Considering the conditions referred to in the historical part of this dissertation, the following statements make sense: Those who claim to believe in health reform, and yet work counter to its principles in the daily life practice, are hurting their own souls and are leaving wrong impressions upon the minds of believers and unbelievers (White 1985:75). This influence has remained with the Church, as statements can be found in their doctrines promoting health concepts: Christians will abstain from all that is harmful, using in moderation only that which is good (General Conference [Inst] 2005:314); and regarding diet, the Church believes, 'The diet God ordained in the Garden of Eden – the vegetarian diet is the ideal, but sometimes we cannot have the ideal' (General Conference [Inst] 2005:318).

In summary, the Church promotes a vegetarian diet, but does not condemn people for eating meat. In neither *Adventism Renounced* nor *The Life of Ellen White*, does Canright criticise the health reform work of White. He, conversely, criticises White as being a sickly person as a means to explain her visions (Canright 1919:19). In light of both the works of Numbers and McMahon (see Chapter 3), White was not out of date with other health reformers of the time. Critics cannot deny that White presented positive advice on health for the time in which she lived.

The first problem is that her health advice goes back some two hundred years. The argument could be made that she was inspired, but so was Paul when he wrote to Timothy urging him to use wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim 5:23). The Church refrains from alcohol as a whole, and in turn, would have problems with Paul's advice (General Conference [Inst] 2005:315). In his commentary, Nichol presents two options: That the term refers to either wine (fermented) or grape juice (unfermented). Although Nichol does not outright state the conclusion, the second option of grape juice (unfermented) is the option presented as being in cohesion with

the rest of Scripture (Nichol 1957:314). The point in both matters is that at the time of Paul and White, the advice they gave was valid. Nonetheless, in the current time, it is not necessary to use wine for the stomach as modern medicine has advanced more curative means. If the advancement of medical science is true for Paul, then the same should be true for White.

Bradford states in regard to White's writings: 'The statements she makes need to be taken seriously. But in the end, the gift of discernment must be used to see if the advice is practical given in today's circumstances' (Bradford 2006:216).

Certain keywords like 'today's circumstances' bear further scrutiny. Bradford is acknowledging that White's writings were meant to first address the issues in her time. Recently the fundamental doctrine number 18 of the Church has been changed in order to avoid giving the impression that White held equal authority with Scripture (Zinke 2015). When one considers the actual revisions, one finds the following passages have been deleted: 'Her writings speak with prophetic authority ~~are a~~ continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church' (General Conference [Inst] 2015:7).

There are other deletions, but the first two are directed at the issue at hand. This deletion as quoted in the previous paragraph is a definite move away from the view presented by Douglas, that White was equal in authority to Scripture (Douglas 1998:296). Zinke's quote also suggests a move toward the direction of the view that A.L. White presented (White, A.L. n.d.:57). The following section will discuss errors in White's work.

#### **4.8 Errors in White's writings**

No prophet was ever infallible, and in White's case there is no difference (Bradford 2006:28). White similarly gave no allusion that she was perfect or that her work contained no mistakes. As Canright attempts to diminish White's authority, Jones pushes for the opposite extreme, promoting the following ideas: First, that the Scripture should be studied through the works of White<sup>61</sup>, second, that her inspiration was verbal and dictated everything that came from God in writing, third, that her work

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<sup>61</sup> This was also evidenced by the reasoning of Du Preez, considered earlier.

was error-free, and last, that the literary and historical context was of no importance (Knight 2000:99). The problem is that Jones' views persist up to this very day. The reason for this persistence is twofold: There are speakers who promote this idea and there are people willing to accept it<sup>62</sup>.

Despite these views, errors can be found in White's work. Knight argues that it is simple to judge her by modern standards, but one cannot lose sight of the fact that she was a woman immersed in her world (Knight 1998:141). Knight addresses a myth in the SDA that White was ahead of her time by years. He denies this assumption and points out that she was current to her own time (Knight 2009:34). This raises the question as to the resulting affect on education and the effects on White's understanding. Bradford states that the modern Church member is better educated than the pioneers were (Bradford 2006:225). Considering the changes brought about by the fundamental beliefs regarding White, it must be considered that new ideas and information would emerge and challenge White's beliefs and writings.

The EGW Estate is willing to admit that White made factual errors due to the limits of knowledge in the 1800s. Though, the question must be raised: *What if White made theological errors?* As shown in the section dealing with the 1919 Bible Conference, White was not considered a theological authority. By implication, the fact that her statements were not blindly accepted as absolute doctrine would also mean that she was not considered faultless. As has been discussed, it was during the post-1920 era that errors in White's work were denied (cf. Chapter 3).

Avoiding the usual process of advocates and critics, a position of White's, which is not held officially by the Church but is promoted through various publications, is presented. In this instance, Church doctrine and a supposed view held by White contradict one another. Church eschatology claims that there will be two resurrections, one for the righteous and one for the wicked, as shown in Appendix A (General Conference [Inst] 2005:371, 387)<sup>63</sup>. According to the EGW Estate, White

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<sup>62</sup> The underlying mindset for this is that when we give absolute authority to White, it removes grey areas and apparently gives the individual clear-cut answers. In short, it removes the individual choice and thus individual responsibility; one can then merely follow credible dictates of White.

<sup>63</sup> When the Lord returns, the righteous dead will be raised and with the living righteous be translated to have their earthly bodies conform to Christ's Heavenly body (1 Cor 15:52; Php 3:20, 21; 1 Th 4:6, 17). The living wicked die and during the Millennium the righteous are in Heaven and the wicked lie in their graves, while Satan is bound by circumstances on earth. After the thousand years, the wicked are raised in order receive

teaches a third special resurrection<sup>64</sup>, stating: ‘Then those who pierced Him will call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb’ (White 1992:275).

The idea of the special resurrection is that, before the first resurrection, certain people who have been particularly wicked, will see Him whom they have pierced (Reynolds 2013:1082)<sup>65</sup>. This stands in contradiction to Church official doctrine. When White is compared to Scripture, the phrase ‘those who pierced Him’ is noted in Zechariah 12:10. A comparison of the two passages reveals that there are similarities between concepts of what happens after the millennium. A comparison of Zechariah 12 and Revelation 20 reveals several similarities:

<b><u>Zechariah 12</u></b>		<b><u>Revelation 20</u></b>	
12:3	all the nations of the earth will gather against it (Jerusalem)	20:8, 9	to deceive the nations the beloved city
12:6	like a flaming torch	20:9	fire came down from Heaven
12:9	I will seek to destroy all the nations	20:10, 15	and consumed them anyone’s name who was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire
12:2	The siege of Jerusalem	20:9	...surrounded...the beloved city

Since Zechariah 12:10 is the first to utilise the phrase, it sets the tone for all other references that come afterwards. Nichol does not connect this passage (Zech 12) to Revelation 20 despite the similarities. He does, on the other hand, link the passage to the return of Christ by connecting it to Matthew 24:30. Nichol argues that this passage refers to the special resurrection supported by quotes from White (Nichol

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their judgement and then destroyed with Satan and death with fire (Rev 20:7-10). This is a synopsis of what Church doctrines hold and what is taught to every convert who wishes to be baptised into the Church.

<sup>64</sup> The idea of a ‘special resurrection’ states that that at the second Advent of Christ, or just before, those that crucified Christ will be resurrected to behold Christ and then die again to be raised once again after the thousand years to receive judgement.

<sup>65</sup> White apparently interjects a third resurrection, although Reynolds claims that it would happen before the resurrection of the righteous (Reynolds 2013:1082). Other publications have put this ‘special resurrection’ at the same time as the resurrection of the righteous (Anonymous 1960:529). Reynolds in the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, claims that White has put the special resurrection during the time of the *Seven Last Plagues* (Reynolds 2013:1082). It is clear that even within those who hold this view, there is no consensus.

1977:112-113). As stated earlier once again one finds Nichol writing the commentary to harmonise with White (Cronk 2010).

The term 'special resurrection' is not Scriptural and not even to be found in White's writings. For Church scholars who claim to go strictly according to Scripture, this invented phrase that is used to describe a teaching by White will pose a problem. Another problem for Church scholars who claim to go strictly according to Scripture with teachings of the Church, is that Scripture only speaks of two resurrections and not three (Dn 12:2; Jos 5:28, 29; Rev 20). There are several descriptions within Scripture that Church teachings can claim to refer to the resurrection of the righteous or the resurrection of the wicked (General Conference [Inst] 2005:377, 397). There are none, that relate to the special resurrection. Even in the official Church doctrine, it recognises that Christ spoke of two resurrections – one for the righteous and one for the wicked (General Conference [Inst] 2005:396).

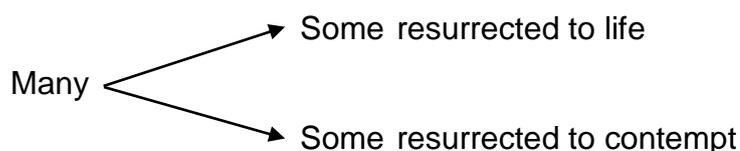
In *The SDA Theological Handbook*, Brunt (2000:349) mentions this special resurrection and relies on a single verse (Rev 1:7). In referring to Daniel 12:2, Brunt mentions that White used this passage when she was speaking of the special resurrection. Did White truly teach this or has this been a mistaken interpretation of her work? Ironically, if one returns to White's work, then it would appear that she did not promote a special resurrection, but that she has been misunderstood:

Then at the close of the one thousand years, Jesus, with the angels and all the saints, leaves the Holy City, and while He is descending to the earth with them, the wicked dead are raised, and then the very men that 'pierced Him', being raised, will see Him afar off in all His glory, the angels and saints with Him, and will wail because of Him...It is at the close of the one thousand years that Jesus stands upon the Mount of Olives, and the mount parts asunder and becomes a mighty plain (White 1945:52).

The concept of the special resurrection raises several points. The first point is that it is based on a small number of White's writings, in which she does not elaborate on in much detail (Coon 2015:5). Second, it is based on only four passages of Scripture (Dn 12:1-2; Mt 26:64; Rev 1:7; 14:13), in contrast to other doctrines of the Church which are supported by numerous Scriptural references. Third, it is incorrect to

assert that White was using Scripture homiletically in her exegetical analysis of Scripture.

The Biblical reference, Daniel 12:1-2, refers to many who sleep in the dust, being woken up to either everlasting life or everlasting contempt (ESV). In comparing this passage to John 5:28-29, a similar construction with the resurrection of some to a resurrection of life and others to a resurrection of judgement (ESV) can be found<sup>66</sup>. The SDA Bible Commentary supports the idea of a special resurrection in Daniel 12:2 (Nichol 1977:878) and uses the Great Controversy as a reference (White 1911:637). What is problematic is that there is no explanation as to how Nichol reaches this conclusion other than his reference to White. Keil sees this as the resurrection and reflects that the reference to 'many' specifically refers to many and not to 'all' (Keil 1973b:481-483). The specific use of 'many' makes sense when the next passage is considered that 'some' will attain the resurrection of everlasting life and 'some' to everlasting contempt. The construction would look like this:



This particular passage underscores the assumption that there are two resurrections and provides no support for a 'special resurrection'. The next passage (Mt 26:64) recalls that Jesus told Caiaphas that He would see the Son of Man seated in power and coming with the clouds of heaven. This verse does not specify a time and can only by assumption then be applied to a special resurrection.

In the last two passages, Revelation 1:7 and 14:13, only the first one refers to anything in regard to a special resurrection. The problem, however, is that Revelation 1:7 repeatedly stresses that 'all' will see Christ, using words like 'every eye' and 'all tribes'. In accordance with Church doctrine, this will only be possible

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<sup>66</sup> The *ESV Study Bible* actually links the two passages via reference in the margin (Anonymous 2010:2032). The *Andrews Study Bible* does exactly the same and refers to the two resurrections without reference to a third (Anonymous 2008:1387).

after the thousand years when the wicked are raised<sup>67</sup>. Those two phrases juxtapose the phrase 'even those who pierced him' and make it part of the whole picture representing the resurrection of the wicked after the thousand years. This conclusion also complies with the interpretation of Zechariah 12. Furthermore, Revelation 1:7 merely echoes the words taken from Zechariah 12:10, but gives no indication of the time attached to the event. In comparison to other Church doctrines which have numerous references to Scriptural support, this belief stands in stark contrast. Furthermore, when the evidence is considered, it cannot support the concept of a special resurrection.

In White's writings it can be observed that some quotes appear to support the view of the special resurrection:

All who have died in the faith of the third angel's message come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God's covenant of peace with those who have kept His law. 'They also which pierced Him', those that mocked and derided Christ's dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory and to see the honor placed upon the loyal and obedient (White 1911:637).

Although this would appear to support the theory of a 'special resurrection', another quote with a different view is found:

Then at the close of the one thousand years...the wicked dead are raised, and then the very men that 'pierced Him', being raised, will see Him afar off in all His glory...and will wail because of Him...It is at the close of the one thousand years that Jesus stands upon the Mount of Olives, and the mount parts asunder and becomes a mighty plain. Those who flee at that time are the wicked, who have just been raised (White 1882:52).

This passage seems to contradict the previous statement and it would appear confusing. There is, however, a passage that clarifies this conundrum. *The Faith I*

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<sup>67</sup> According to Church doctrine, the wicked who are dead remain so at the resurrection of the righteous; only after the millennium are the wicked raised and only then can the terms, 'every eye' and 'all nations' truly apply.

*Live By*, which is a compilation of comments by White, refers to Daniel 12:2, seemingly supporting the first quote and a special resurrection (White 1958a:182). In the next two sections, the resurrection of the righteous is described separately from the resurrection of the wicked. In the description of the resurrection of the wicked after the millennium, White writes that those who have pierced Christ will see Him (White 1958a:184).

What can be concluded is that Daniel 12:2 refers to two resurrections. In John 5:28, 29, Jesus quotes Daniel 12:2 and expands on the original idea, and last, Revelation 20 even more expands on the details of the events and the period that separates them. This perspectival foreshortening becomes confusing if one does not follow the entire process<sup>68</sup>. If one applies this reasoning to White's work, one finds that when she refers to Daniel 12:2, she focuses on the immediate message of that passage and does not elaborate on the sequence of events as explained in later passages. For this reason, when she quotes Daniel 12:2, it appears confusing because there is no interpretation of her use of that passage. In other words, her works are read without scrutiny, and ideas are formed around them which are then attempted to be proven by Scripture.

The question then arises, why did Canright not disagree on this point? The first possibility is that White never held this view and that it only developed later. The second possibility is that both Canright and White believed in a special resurrection and therefore Canright did not see the need to disagree with her. Third, the possibility could be that Canright was ignorant of this belief. The second option seems unlikely as Canright joined the Baptist Church and it was from a Baptist, ex-Adventist view that Canright criticised White. When Canright lists the Church doctrines, he makes no mention of a special resurrection (Canright 1914:9). The third option is even less likely, as Canright spent 28 years in the Church as both member and pastor. He was well acquainted with the White family and it would be unlikely that he would be ignorant of White's views and beliefs. The first option is then the only answer that gives satisfactory answers to the question. White's writing

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<sup>68</sup> 'Perspectival foreshortening' refers to several things being mentioned at once and appearing to take place at the same time. Later on, they are unpacked and are shown to be separate events – separated in time. Keil makes mention of this Scriptural methodology when reflecting upon the Old Testament understanding that God would come and destroy the wicked; at the first coming of Christ, however, it was shown that the destruction of wickedness would take place at the second coming (Keil 1973c:474).

does at times appear unclear, but, as illustrated, when her writings are read in light of Scriptural evidence, they do not promote a special resurrection. Failure to comprehend White's methodology of using Scripture homiletically, while using her writings to apply an exegetical method, has led to confusion on this matter.

This matter calls for theological honesty: There must be recognition that either White's writings are misunderstood, or that White held a position that is contrary to the Church doctrine and not substantiated by Scripture. Without recognising one of these positions, an unofficial Church doctrine does permeate that Church thinking exists.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The source of inspiration for both Scripture and White has been discussed. The concept that White is inspired in the same manner as Scripture, and the effects it has on her authority, was also investigated. The ideas that inspiration is continuous, that it is not limited to only White, and that the sole focus on White has led to the neglect of other gifts to other Christians, were also reflected on. White's own view of Scriptural authority was considered and the use of her work to interpret Scripture as with Nichol. Consideration was given to White's positive effect on the Church. Other groups such as the Davidians and Reformed Adventist served as examples where White's authority was not based on a correct foundation. White's own views on her authority were looked at and also her focus in work and writing. Last, errors in White's writing with attention given to the idea of the special Resurrection, were considered. The next Chapter will conclude these various issues and consider certain issues that deal with White's authority and her position within the Church.

## Chapter 5

### Authority of White: Critical Evaluation

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous Chapters have made it clear that in the debates on White's authority there are considerable differences regarding how her authority is viewed and evaluated. Chapter 2 introduced the views of Canright and Nichol, and then of Knight and Bradford. I highlighted that the critical element in these debates was White's authority. The debate is hampered because White's authority is not clearly defined. Chapter 2 also considered a theory of authority and supplied attempts of Adventism in seeking to clarify White's authority. Examples of the selective quoting of White as an authoritative figure revealed that, despite the attempts made to clarify her authority, it has not prevented abuse of her work. Despite official documents of the Church, the issue of White's authority remains undefined and unresolved.

In Chapter 3, the historical events that created the foundation from which White's authority would develop, were investigated. Furthermore, the events and conditions in the life of White and her influence in these matters would add to her influence and in turn her authority. What was also discussed was the changes made in the position of her authority by later generations of Church leadership. It was demonstrated that White's authority has fluctuated over time, with individuals and within larger groups. Historically, White's authority has been part of the debate, but at the same time, her authority has remained undefined.

Chapter 4 specifically highlighted the inconsistencies in the view on White's authority. Consideration was given to White's relationship to Scripture and the continuation of inspiration. This Chapter also investigated the positive influence of White's authority on the Church as opposed to the negative influence of her authority by other churches such as the Davidian and Reformed Adventists. White's own views on authority and Scripture were considered. Last, the possibility of errors either on the part of White or those who interpreted her, was also examined.

Chapter 5 will present my evaluation of this debate. I wish to focus on areas that I feel are essential but neglected. The neglect of certain key areas has created vacuums in the understanding of White's authority. These vacuums have resulted in debates on White's authority, ranging for more than a hundred years while allowing certain key points to be neglected.

The research aims consider the area of White's authority during her lifetime. The second research aim was to consider how the area of White's authority had changed over time. This dissertation has considered the first two points. This final Chapter will seek to answer the third and fourth aim of my research. The third aim would consider what the area of White's authority should be. With the fourth aim, I consider what I view as the best approach to White's authority. In order to consider these points honestly and provide at least partial answers, it is necessary to consider the approach one would use to evaluate White.

Critics, such as Canright, and advocates, such as Nichol, argue for or against the authority of White, but have neglected defining in clear terms the area of her authority. The arguments presented are designed to deny or promote White's authority in an absolute sense. Canright criticises White, allowing only for references to human and negative aspects in order to deny her any authority. Nichol advocates White, reviewing only the divine and positive elements to promote her authority.

The view of both Knight and Bradford allows for White to be removed from the absolutes employed by Canright and Nichol. The view that Knight and Bradford promote, allows for a viewing of White and her work in moderation, and for balancing positive or negative elements allowing for a complete picture of White. When both positive and divine are compared to negative and human elements, it is possible to provide a clear view of White's authority. I will now highlight what I consider to be key elements necessary to achieve this balance of moderation between White's positive and negative elements, and present a critical evaluation of the debate.

## **5.2 A Critical Evaluation**

Each individual who presented their views in the debate on White's authority, has presented a critical evaluation of White. I wish in turn to present a critical evaluation on the individuals who have presented their views and evaluation of White. Keeping

in mind the historical debate pertaining to White's authority, I wish to begin by evaluating current developments in this debate.

Good theology requires that the view relied upon in the debate is open to all sides of an argument (Knight 2000:200). This has been the key failure in the discussion between the critics and the advocates. Whereas Canright criticised White's authority, it would in fact appear that it was the perception of Jones' view on White's authority that took centre stage at the 1919 Bible Conference, promoted by Andreason, and took further by Nichol. Neither side questioning the exact area of White's authority or whose view of White's authority was under discussion.

At the 2015 General Conference session, representatives of the Church from all over the world made decisions as to leadership and doctrines. No doctrines were changed, nor were new doctrines introduced. There were, nonetheless, changes made to the wording and language used to express the doctrines. Changes were made to the wording of the statement expressing the Church's view on White and her work. The changes are pertinent for three reasons: First, they reveal a shift towards Knight and Bradford's views; second, the changes, although slight, have an impact on White's authority; and third, this is an official statement for the Church worldwide. The following words that have a line through are the words to be deleted:

#### 18. The Gift of Prophecy

The Scriptures testify that one ~~One~~ of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. ~~As the Lord's messenger,~~ her writings speak with prophetic authority ~~are a continuing and authoritative source of truth~~ which provide ~~for the church comfort,~~ guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim 3:16,17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.) ~~(Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10~~ (General Conference [Inst] 2015:7).

Although subtle, the changes are significant, especially in light of this dissertation. The first sentence has been changed to express that '[t]he Scriptures testify that

one...' spiritual gift is prophecy. This change places the focus on Scripture, verifying the gift of White, rather than tradition verifying the gift of White. The clause 'the Bible is the standard' has remained unchanged but is highlighted by the insertion that Scripture testifies that the gift of prophecy originates from the Holy Spirit.

White is no longer referenced as the Lord's messenger. I believe that part of the motivation for this deletion, first, was to bring across that White alone is not the messenger of the Lord, but that this should apply to all Church members. The second consideration for this deletion is that White is no longer alive and she cannot still be a messenger. This does not deny that her work is still valid, but simply that she cannot be a messenger posthumously.

White is no longer seen as a continuing, authoritative source of truth. This would be in part to the fact that her work is limited within the time she wrote. The advice she penned two hundred years ago cannot simply be applied today and must be interpreted to be relevant in current times. To simply refer to White's work as truth negates recognition of faults or errors on her part. Calling her work 'truth' suggests that White wrote with unquestioning authority, and that everything that does not agree would be a lie. Removing the term 'truth' does not negate the positive, but it does allow for a more balanced view of her work.

Removing the idea that the work of White provides comfort for the Church, first recognises the time limits on her work. Second, it avoids a stagnated sentimentality of a historical figure. Many Church members still adhere to a sentimental view of White as an iconic ideal of Adventism. This view is derived from idolising White, allowing only for her positive and divine aspects to be considered. White, in my view, is too far removed from our time to provide true comfort other than the hope of Christ's return. Promoting hope in Christ's return is contained within the name, Seventh-day Adventist, and this responsibility would rest with all who join this faith.

What one notices is that the changes revolve around a single point, namely White being viewed as an authoritative figure in the Church. Her work, the source of her gift, and her authority are not questioned or denied. While her work, gift, and authority are recognised, the changes indicated a shift away from the absolute position being taken during 1920 to 1950 of White's authority.

As I am able to interpret these subtle changes and the effect it has on White's authority, my critique of these changes is that they are inconspicuous. I would like to see more pertinent changes and various discussions on White's authority in relation to these changes. The changes are indicating a shift to the views held by Knight and Bradford, but they would not be noticed by most Church members. Although there is a shift, which I believe is positive, the shift is not able to make noticeable improvements in the current debate of White's authority.

### **5.2.1 The Area of her Authority**

Canale, in discussing the issue of revelation and inspiration, states the following in regard to God and time: 'In relationship to God's being and activity, one foundational difference between Greek philosophy and the Bible is that the former interprets ultimate reality to be timeless, whereas the Bible considers reality to be temporal and historical' (Canale 2001:37).

White must be seen as a historical figure emerged in her time and influenced by her surroundings. Ignoring the time factor of White's authority has removed a key boundary of her authority. White's prophetic gift remained a continuing source of authority after her death, and this allowed for her authority to exceed the limitations of time. White's authority not only exceeded time, but began to become absolute in theology, history and science, areas where her authority had never functioned initially. As such, White's authority has in fact superseded Scriptural authority – if not in official statements, then in practice.

It is this removal from time that has crippled the intentions of White's work more than anything else, by attempting to apply practical 18<sup>th</sup>-century advice in a current era. This has resulted in extreme positions, relying on White's authority, on various issues where she was not authoritative (Knight 2009:141). White and her writings must be considered as products of a certain time and not as timeless. It is for this reason that the removal of the term 'continuing', dealing with White's authority, is significant. This minor change concurs with the thinking that has been promoted by Bradford and Knight. If one considers that Bradford's work was published in 2006 and Knight's works range from 1997 to 2013, then the influence cannot be denied. Although I consider this a positive influence, it must also be noted that if a clear paradigm is not created for White's authority, the change will be temporary. White's

authority in the future will remain dependent on the inclinations of committees and Church leaders. In light of what I have stated, it adds weight to the following quote: 'In our estimate of the spirit of prophecy, isn't its value to us more in the spiritual light it throws into our own hearts and lives than in intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters?' (Bradford 2006:153).

This quote implies that the value of White's authority was intended to function in a spiritual area. In the work, *Seventh-day Adventist's Believe...*, there is a reference to a study which considered the impact of White's works on her readers in general. The report found that readers of White were surer and more active in their practical Christianity (General Conference [Inst] 2005:259). From the above statement, it would seem reasonable to demarcate the area of White's authority to spirituality and practical Christianity. Reflecting on the health advice of White, it can be observed that her authority has functioned well in that area, in promoting the general health of the Church<sup>69</sup>. Her writings can be demarcated into two areas – the one being practical matters and the second, spiritual matters. My own reading of White leads me to summarise her work as wishing the reader to meet Christ and apply Christian principles in all aspects of life.

The Church pioneers designated authority to White not from her position but based on her work and the effect she had on the Church. To refer back to Gordon's views on authority, one sees White's authority commenced with veracious authority, not imperial authority. Later generations would, however, commence White's authority from an imperial position, hoping that it would lead to veracious authority. It is therefore necessary to review White's authority and reconsider her position as being voracious or imperial.

A strong motivation can be observed to have White's authority originate from the effect that her writings have on the individual and the group in the current time. Thus, relying on veracious authority, I can delegate authority relevant to the current time. This would prevent blanket statements of White's work to enforce personal ideas, but it would also compel Church members to study her work to discover the veracious

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<sup>69</sup> Although the focus is on health, White wrote on other areas such as education, raising children, evangelism, and various other practical topics. The other area on which White produced large volumes of work, was spiritual matters.

aspects for themselves. Viewing White's authority as voracious in nature, rather than imperial, allows her authority to remain within the boundaries of time, practical, and spiritual matters. This line of thought does require that White's position must be reviewed and cannot remain static. During her lifetime White was placed in a position of a prophet. This position may not summarily be delegated in the modern age but requires a renewed study of her work and writings to re-establish that position of a prophet. Some may view this as negative when it is intended as positive. When a constant review of the voracious authority of White's work is done to ascertain her position of authority, it forces every Church generation to do the following:

- Re-study the history of the Church.
- Re-study the role that White played in the formation of the Church.
- Discover how the view of White's authority has positively and negatively impacted individuals and larger groups.

When these aspects are reviewed, it provides a foundation from which the Church can develop currently and in the future.

The example of Du Preez and Veith, relying on White to enforce ideas of translation of Scripture, is applicable in this situation. Both of them rely on White as a timeless entity which can simply be quoted to give authority to their personal views. Quoting White allows them to ignore current research and evidence that would not support their views. White is used as an absolute and timeless authority in the scientific field of Scriptural translation – in this case, even at the expense of White's own views on this matter. By neglecting to consider the voracious authority of White, Du Preez and Veith have relied on her position of authority to promote their personal views.

Knight points to the inherent danger that, by overemphasising the unique nature of the Adventism, it results in the loss of their general Christian character. The loss of a general Christian character leads to the fact that sources other than Scripture begin to serve as foundational in authority. The results are either an extreme that turns Church members into cultic member seeking to have sinless perfection, or people who reject Adventism having lost the critical aspects of their faith (Knight 2000:199). This problem exists, due in part to the lack of clarity of White's authority in relation to Scriptural authority. This issue is seen in the works of Douglas and Pfandl where subtle assumptions are made that equate White's authority to Scriptural authority.

Douglas and Pfandl share a similar view in that they equate White's inspiration with her authority (Pfandl 2013:627). White has become the ideal of Adventism. This has resulted in the Church losing its Christian identity and White functioning in greater degrees of authority, even to rival Scripture, as with the views of Pfandl and Douglas.

For the Church to retain its Christian identity, Bradford's question should become the question of the Church as a whole: 'How then shall we judge a true prophet from a false prophet?' (Bradford 2006:51). The methods used by the pioneers in comparing White's visions to Scripture are insufficient for the current time. The visions are no longer present for the current generation to view publicly and therefore other methods must be explored to answer this question. The question is correct in how a prophet should be judged, but I would dare to add. '...in the present day...'. The Church must continually redefine its identity to retain what is unique in Seventh-day Adventism, yet not at the cost of what is Christian in Seventh-day Adventism. Scripture should serve as the foundation not only for doctrine but also identity. By placing an overemphasis on White, the Church has made her a source of authority that has challenged the principle fundamental belief of Scripture as the primary source of authority. The removal of the phrase '...are a continuing...' from the doctrines of the Church is indirectly a recognition of this point. Nichol enforced her ideas into *The SDA Bible commentary*. Canright accused the Church of taking White as the voice of God (Canright 1914:32). The students at Solusi would not use quinine for fear of disobeying White. These are results of White being a 'continuing' source of authority, by removing the time factor, when White was followed blindly and not studied as a woman of her time.

Hermeneutics requires that the time limits of the original writer be taken into consideration (Davidson 2000:70). This process places the writer of a certain passage within a time frame and ensures that God remains the focus and not the human figure. When one employs the hermeneutic principle, for example to Paul, Paul can never equal God, and one studies the writings of Paul to understand his source of inspiration. This ensures that all inspired writings within Scripture remain equal and that the human writers serve only as the messenger of the inspired message. This hermeneutical principle has not been applied to White or at least not to the extent it should be.

Inevitably, if the writers of Scripture were fixed in time by the hermeneutic process, but not White, inevitably White would gain greater authority. White viewed as a timeless authority would come at the cost of the divine gift of human reason given to all Church members (Knight 1999a:17). When a time limit is placed upon White, her works come under the scrutiny of the hermeneutic process and her authority becomes subject to the authority of Scripture as it was in her lifetime. White's authority and how it relates to Scripture will be considered next.

### **5.2.2 White's Authority in Relation to Scripture**

Davidson states that the concept of *Sola Scriptura* implies that Scripture stands alone and unique as the unerring guide to truth (Davidson 2000:61). If the Church wishes to continue with the claim that Scripture serves as the primary authority, then Scripture can have no equal in authority. This echoes the thoughts penned by A.L. White that allow for no equality or superiority of White to Scripture (White, A.L. n.d.:57).

This process allows Church theology to return to the freedom that existed while White was alive, and allows the recognition of mistakes in White's work, without damaging the Church itself. White stated:

The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony...Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition, as did our Master, saying, 'It is written'. Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline (White 1958b:416).

Relying on White's own words, the implication is that the Church is bound to Scriptural authority, not to her authority. It is this Scriptural authority, which produces harmony, and it is Scripture that is to be quoted as authoritative. White's authority would come into play when the Church no longer applies *Sola Scriptura*. Therefore, White serves to ensure that the Church remains true to the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Ironically, the failure of understanding the role and position of White's authority has led to a marked deviation from this principle. As number 18 of the Fundamental Beliefs now stand, there is also a clear demand that, 'They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be

tested...’ (General Conference [Inst] 2015:7). The problem nonetheless are not official statements, but the unofficial use of White that supersedes the limitations of her authority.

The foundational argument is that the Church and White recognise the sufficiency of Scripture. It was the foundation in the forming years of the Church and has remained so. The true destruction of Church identity is the abuse of White for personal agendas to appear as authoritative.

Although this was not the case with White, it has not prevented her influence to be present in the formulation of various doctrines (Dederen 2000:x). This opens the door to use White to prove points of faith by relying on her quotes. Bradford reflects on the results of trying to use White to prove theological viewpoints resulting in a wilderness of quotes and counter-quotes (Bradford 2006:188). This statement and the previous by Dederen, reveal that White may not have enough authority to formulate doctrines, but in practice, she has enough authority to substantiate or influence doctrines.

Without any form of restraint, it becomes possible to claim both belief in Scripture and in White to promote personal agendas by quoting either as it would suit the individual. With this in mind, the question must be posed: Why is it that when White’s authority is discussed, that so much time is spent on affirming the centrality of the Scripture? *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* states that White viewed Scripture as the primary authority in the life of the Christian (Damsteegt 2013a:645). The question arises whether (if not in an official capacity, then in practice) White’s authority has not superseded that of Scripture? This would then entail that the criticism of Canright may hold some truth that White’s words ‘dictate’ to members of the Church (Canright 1914:39). The continual need to reinforce the primacy of Scripture, Veith, and Du Preez, and White’s role in confirming doctrine or theology, are all pointers to the problem that White’s authority can exceed the parameters of *Sola Scriptura* (Bradford 2006:188-189)<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Knight repeatedly states that Scripture should remain primary as an essential for Adventism and, considering the evidence presented, it can be understood to prevent or correct a faulty mindset and practice within the Church (Knight 2000:199, 201, 202).

In the early years of Adventism, the unifying motivation was preparing for the Second Advent (Pease 1987:176). White interpreted prophetic elements within the context of events in her time. This ensured the stimulation of an interactive process between Scripture and daily life. Currently, White is relied upon as the final word on the matter and it dampens the interactive process between Scripture and daily life (Bradford 2006:279). Due to the length of time, the return of Christ has become less forceful in motivating unity within the Church (Knight 2000:197). This delay in the coming of Christ has caught up with the Church and in turn, the Church is at risk of losing its identity (Asaftei 2007:24). The Church seeks to promote White's authority and in doing so, promotes a unique Adventist identity. White relied on a belief in the imminent second coming and the fulfilment of prophecy as a factor for uniting the Church. The current Church thinking relies on White herself for the desired unity.

With the issue as to how White relates to Scripture in authority, the argument is made that Scripture is supreme and White is somewhere below Scripture as authoritative. This is problematic, as White becomes the channel through which Scripture is to be understood. White's interpretation of Scripture becomes unquestionable regardless of advancement in knowledge or current guidance from the Holy Spirit. White also becomes a barrier to Scripture, where members do not read or rely on Scripture as the supreme authority. Quotes from White are taken as authoritative expressions of what Scripture demands of Christians. Placing White above members and below Scripture in authority is not a solution. Her authority is subject to Scripture but this is true for every member of the Church: No matter what position of authority any individual fills, they are subject to Scriptural authority. Authority in the Church was not developed so that one person may rule over another, but rather that one may lead another.

No authority should prescribe an *a priori* to White. White should be read and questioned in order to compare her work to Scripture. This ensures that she remains the lesser light that leads to Scripture – which is the greater light. When this method is applied to White, it establishes her authority not from an empirical or delegated position, but it establishes the voraciousness of her work. White gains authority in that she leads to Scriptural authority. This method ensures that Scripture remains unchallenged in authority. It also ensures the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. It furthermore requires more than a superficial reading of both Scripture and White.

This method establishes White's authority as dynamic and current to each generation of the Church. To give White *a priori* authority, enforces acceptance of her authority without foundation and opens it up to criticism. When the veracious nature of White's work can be tested by Scriptural authority, authority can be attributed to correct statements, while incorrect statements can be ignored as not being authoritative. The link between White's authority and the identity of the Church will be discussed next.

### **5.2.3 White and the Identity of the Church**

In the book, *A Search for Identity*, Knight designates the current time period in which the critical questions in Adventism deal specifically with the Church identity (Knight 2000:10). He also highlights that even after her death, the perception of White played a critical role in the shaping of Church identity (Knight 2000:184). It is thus necessary to consider how White has shaped Church identity.

One can understand that it is encouraging to claim that a person gifted with the prophetic gift was part of the founding members of one's church. Especially as White viewed historical events in a spiritual light, such as the French Revolution, the fall of the Papacy and the signs in nature, it helped to create a unique Church identity. Even with the Great Disappointment of 1844, her work and growing authority at the time shaped Church identity. The problem is that this process is a double-edged sword. As is shown above, White has been elevated from a woman of her time to something that was viewed as divine. I purposefully use the term 'something' as opposed to 'someone', in light of the current discussion in the Church on the ordination of women as pastors.

Despite the approaches of advocates who followed Nichol's thinking and elevated the authority of White, the Church is willing to recognise that White was ordained as a prophet, but another woman cannot be ordained as a pastor. How could the Church make White a prophet, but a woman cannot be a pastor? Although there are many factors such as culture and tradition, one point relevant to this study is White's humanity. She has become a 'thing' and her femininity has not permeated her perfect image. By removing White from the limits of the time, she has also been removed from the limits of a human being and has thus become an icon of Church idealism. Why can a woman tell men not to take quinine and she can influence *The*

*SDA Bible Commentary*, but another woman cannot be ordained as a minister? One aspect where this is most clearly seen is in regard to health issues. McMahon can defend White's authority in regard to health and even states that she is timeless in her health advice. This is achieved by placing the focus solely on the 'correct' health advice and ignoring the 'incorrect' health advice. Even today, White can serve as an authority on health despite a better understanding of health and medicine. She can be argued to be authoritative as a prophet, as a guide to health, but her femininity is not considered in the equation. Just as certain aspects of White's personality are selected and others neglected, so her authority is selected and neglected at the whim of an individual.

Both Knight and Bradford promote the idea that the focus should be on Christ and Scripture (Knight 2000:199, 204; Bradford 2006:235). At the same time, both of them are considering White as a human being. I believe it is the lack of focus on Christ and the overemphasis on White that have led to the theological tension within the Church. The emphasis on White has focused on selective aspects of her work and her person at the neglect of others.

White is not the sole proprietor of the formation of Church identity, although it cannot be denied that she did serve greatly to shape and influence the formation of this identity. In her lifetime she contributed to a dynamic identity for the Church. After her death, the Church utilised certain aspects of White to solidify Church identity – utilising certain aspects such as White's inspiration and success, and neglecting other aspects such as her femininity and failures. This was done to solidify the identity of the Church, but it led to stagnation in critical thinking and theological development within the Church. As long as the Church denies the total package of her identity – in this case, the feminine aspect – they will struggle to form a true, dynamic Seventh-day Adventist identity. If the Church wishes to continue to recognise the authority of White, it is essential that her full humanity also be recognised.

Not only is the area of White's authority to be demarcated, but it should be released into an area where it has been limited. To Canright, White's femininity was a reason to charge her with hysteria and deny her authority (Canright 1919:62). Nichol does not discuss this matter directly nor consider the implication of her gender. Even

Bradford and Knight, who give more consideration to White's cultural setting, have not fully explored the implication of her gender. When the Church seeks to establish White's authority, they need to establish her authority as a woman. I specifically use the verb 'establish' in regard to White's authority. The Church established White's authority at the beginning of her ministry and would later re-establish her authority after her death. It is essential that the Church recognises its role in how White's authority is viewed. White's authority is not a static object but in part subject to the position taken by the Church. It is essential for the Church to balance the divine gift of prophecy with the divine gift of critical thinking in considering White's authority. I wish to consider in the next section a statement made by White concerning her prophetic gift.

#### **5.2.4 The Claim, 'I am not a Prophet'**

White made a statement that to this day elicit a wide range of responses, saying, 'Some have stumbled over the fact that I said I did not claim to be a prophet...' (White 1986:31). For the critic, this serves as proof that White cannot be considered a prophet and is therefore not authoritative (Anonymous 2012a). Coon explains that at the time, there were others who claimed to be prophets and White wished to avoid association with possible fanatics – there was a controversy with Kellogg who claimed that she was a prophet and head of the Church (Coon 2013:1058). The explanation of Doctrine 18 of the Church states that she was more than a prophet (General Conference [Inst] 2005:255). There is also a third option to be considered in light of the following quote: 'The initiative in making a prophet rests with God and it is only the false prophet who dares to take the office upon himself' (Douglas & Hillyer 1982:975).

If one compares this to the response of John the Baptist (Jn 1:21), then one finds a great similarity to his response. When Christ spoke of John, He stated that the Baptist was a prophet, but also more (Mt 11:9; Lk 7:26). John has no miracles or prophecies attested to him, but the foundation of his prophetic role was in preparing the way for Christ (Keil 1973c:473).

The overemphasis on White's prophetic aspects has led to a neglect of the foundation of her ministry, namely to place the focus on Christ as the centre of Scripture. The following statement is made on White and her work: 'Christ became

central in the life of Ellen White in her childhood and continued through her ministry to the end of her life' (Blanco 2013:688).

It is this key component that Bradford stresses in testing a prophet by raising the question, 'Does the prophet seek to lead others to Christ?' (Bradford 2006:62-63). In the debate of White's authority, the overemphasis on her prophetic aspects has led to a neglect of her other gifts. She was a writer who successfully guided the Church in various endeavours; she was also a mother and filled various other roles. Even if one was to deny her prophetic gift, it would be dishonest to deny all else she achieved. The irony is that even in the Church it is not required for membership to recognise White as a prophet. However, even if one was to deny her authority as a prophet, one could not deny her authority in other aspects. I will be so bold as to state to both critic and advocate that one may disagree with White. It is not necessary to reject her authority to do so, and on the other hand to disagree with White is not a summary rejection of her authority.

### **5.3 My Personal Contribution**

It would be clear that I favour the views of Knight and Bradford. I believe that these views are balanced and allow for greater theological freedom. Nonetheless, I do feel that these scholars have neglected one key issue: It is the relationship between inspiration and authority.

Douglas and Pfandl assume that inspiration and position produce authority. One also finds other arguments, including:

- That there are no levels of inspiration in Scripture.
- That White was as inspired as the writers of Scripture.
- That White held the same authority as a non-Canonical prophet, and a non-Canonical prophet has the same authority as Canonical prophets.

Individually these statements present no obvious difficulty. When one realises that they address the same topic and begin to connect these points, the result is equating White to Scripture as a source of authority.

The argument is made that White has the same authority as Scripture but that it differs in function and scope. This argument nevertheless fails on two aspects: First,

when White is equal in authority to Scripture, Adventism cannot claim *Sola Scriptura*. The term '*Sola Scriptura*' designates Scripture as supreme in authority, with no equal. To designate the authority of White equal to Scripture, but claiming that it differs in function and scope, still violates *Sola Scriptura*. Roman Catholicism equates the authority of tradition, Scripture, and the Roman Catholic Church, while each function in its own scope (Roman Catholic Church 1994:53). White cannot have the same authority as Scripture while a claim is still made to *Sola Scriptura*. To place White below Scripture in authority makes her an authoritative barrier between Church members and Scripture. The best-case scenario would be that the Church member may read Scripture but White must interpret it.

I considered Nathan, Elijah, and John the Baptist as non-Canonical prophets, especially in their failings, as examples to better understand White's authority. We also discovered that God alone elects a person to the position of prophet. Here I believe is a key point that election to a position does not provide immediate authority. The reason for this is that within the position of a prophet the individual remains human and can be at fault. Being elected to the position of prophet also follows that there will be periods of inspiration. This means that at times the prophet will speak or act in accordance with God and at other times in accordance with their own sinful humanity. Neither position nor inspiration is the source of authority. Canright focuses on the human and negative aspects to remove White from the position of a prophet and thus remove her authority. Nichol focuses on the positive and divine elements to establish White as a prophet and promote her authority. Bradford and Knight allow for both positive and negative, divine and human elements. Both of them seek to establish White's authority by presenting her as a human being who was inspired. In other words, White did make mistakes, but God could still use her and therefore she has authority.

I believe that the authority of a prophet is based on their actions or words when it follows the will of God. When Nathan told David to build the temple, his words did not carry authority (2 Sam 7). When Elijah fled from Jezebel, his actions did not carry authority (1 Ki 19). When John the Baptist doubted if Christ was the one, his question was without authority (Mt 11). What was said and done by these prophets, could not be considered authoritative, as it was not in accordance with God's will. I believe that White was elected to the position of a prophet and that she was inspired

within the position of a prophet. Those two points, however, are not where White's authority originates from. White was meant to bring the reader back to Scripture as the supreme authority. God's will for her was to bring others to Scriptural authority – this is where her authority lies.

Canright, Nichol, Bradford, and Knight all view White's authority from a human perspective. That view developed from their individual *Sitz im Leben*, which entails that the view taken of White's authority is part of their personal worldview. Canright's view of the world and himself is part of the view he assumes of White. This also holds true for Nichol, Bradford, and Knight, as well as every other individual. We can only perceive White from within the limitations of our own humanity. When I view White, either positive or negative, does this view lead me to Scripture?

There is some irony here in that Canright in seeking to criticise White, relies on Scripture (Canright 1919:2). Even though he wants to deny White's authority, she still achieved her goal in leading Canright to read Scripture. When White can achieve her goal – to lead others to Scripture, even her critics – does that not promote her authority? As we have seen, White was more than willing to be rejected, permitting the individual to read and obey Scripture. This is also criticism on those who claim to support White's authority but read her works rather than Scripture. To read White at the neglect of Scripture would be a denial of her authority as her goal remains unachieved with the individual. Personally, I view White's authority beginning in her ability to get me to read Scripture. If White was correct in everything she wrote, I would not need to read Scripture. She, however, is not correct in everything and thus I am required to read Scripture to find when White was correct and when not. This establishes her authority, but also my own. When I am able to recognise divine guidance while not losing the divine gift of critical reasoning, it promotes both my spiritual and intellectual maturity.

#### **5.4 The Result of White's Authority**

To the person outside of the Seventh-day Adventism it must seem peculiar that White's authority can elicit both positive and negative results. As we have seen in this dissertation, there are positive results for individuals and for the Church at large which promote White's authority. At the same time, there are also negative results for individuals and organisations which negate White's authority. I believe that

Bradford touches on a key point in stating: 'Seventh-day Adventism was meant to be a free, open, living, dynamic movement. While Ellen White was alive she fought for this, but the church slipped into the narrowness of Fundamentalism after her death' (Bradford 2006:203).

We have examples from the Reformed Adventist and Davidian branches that, despite promoting White's authority, they do not share the success of the Church<sup>71</sup>. The Reformed Adventist and Davidian branches are examples of the results of applying fundamental views to the work of White. White, in my understanding, did not promote fundamentalism, but sought a moderate and balanced application of Scriptural principles. This is a problematic statement since there is no objective standards for 'moderate' and 'balanced'.

All the proponents listed above focus on positive or negative results or on both in the debate of White's authority. Little consideration is given to what makes the actual difference. Why do some read White and find positive results from her authority, while others find negative results? Knight makes mention of inflexibility and rigidity but there is no objective standard to identify these qualities (Knight 1999a:17).

I have made mention of this above but have purposefully not discussed the following point: The need for a paradigm in evaluating White. The debate on White's authority has not moved beyond apologetics. Knight and Bradford have attempted to present some criteria as to how one should evaluate her. These criteria are still very vague and wide. Knight, for instance, speaks of having a healthy outlook when reading White (Knight 1997:43); nonetheless, he fails to provide clear criteria for what a healthy outlook would constitute.

There exists a need for a paradigm from which one can evaluate White's authority as well as other aspects of her person and her work. This paradigm needs to be systematic and clearly defined. Currently, I am not aware of any such paradigm, and until such a paradigm is created, White's authority will be at the whim of individuals

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<sup>71</sup> When White is read for the purposes of proving fanatical ideas or to condemn another, the results that follow are negative. It leaves the reader 'inflexible' and 'rigid' (Knight 1999a:17). Very often in quoting White, their original intent of the writing is lost as passages are wrested from their original context in meaning and circumstances (Knight 1999a:19). With this approach problems are very often created rather than solved.

and committees. To simply make statements on White's authority is not sufficient. There must be a model with which White is approached. A statement on White's authority will not prevent an abuse of her work. Such a paradigm would also have far-reaching consequences in that it would not only be applicable to her, but to any person who claims to act under inspiration outside of the canon. Until such a paradigm exists, using a healthy outlook when reading White will remain vague and unacademic. I will now move to my closing remarks.

## **5.5 Closing Remarks**

In Chapter 1 my primary aim was to question White's authority, specifically the area in which it should function in this dissertation. I presented four questions which I sought to answer in this dissertation to arrive at my primary aim. The first question sought to investigate the area of White's authority during her lifetime. I conclude that she was one of many Church members who was spiritually gifted and who assisted in the formation of the Church. Her authority, just like that of the Church, was subject to Scriptural authority.

The second question was to examine how the area of White's authority changed over time. Church history has shown that White was subject to Scriptural authority. After her passing, her authority was elevated, not officially but in practice, to rival Scripture. The changes made in the wording of the Church doctrine on White, is a shift to a more moderate view of White's authority.

The third question was to provide a critical evaluation of the debate on White's authority. Having investigated the major points of the debate, and in this last Chapter given my evaluation, I have also answered my fourth question.

After my evaluation, I believe that the best way to view White's authority would be to focus on the voracious aspects of her authority. Bradford recounts the words of Heppenstall: 'Let her writings be our guide not our jailer, our shield but not our straightjacket' (Bradford 2006:177).

White was a human being given unique gifts by the Holy Spirit. In her life she wanted to understand and apply Scripture to the best of her ability. Her work was meant to assist others, not to imitate her, rather to better understand and apply Scripture in

the life of the reader. When I am able to view White as either correct or incorrect, it requires that I study Scripture to determine whether she was correct or incorrect. Irrespective of whether she was correct or incorrect, it has led me to gain a deeper knowledge of Scripture. The lesser light has led me to the greater light. The veracious character of White's authority does not rest on statements proven correct, but an ongoing process of evaluating White in light of my best understanding of Scripture.

This method validates White's authority not solely on past achievements but in current interaction and debate with her work. When this method is employed, the Church does not have to fear the loss of White. At the same time, White does not hamper theological growth but becomes a catalyst for it. Continuous evaluation of White's work and my understanding of Scripture ensures that her authority remains valid as well as dynamic. This will also lead to greater growth on spiritual and theological levels within individuals and the Church. Furthermore, it allows for the principle of *Sola Scriptura* to be substantiated and at the same time to view White as authoritative. What this requires of the individual is the honesty to evaluate White's authority – positive and negative, as well as human and divine; second is the courage to view White, not as the idolised ideal of Adventism, but as a genuine human being who wanted to know God. I believe this will allow her authority to be a guide and not a jailer, a shield and not a straightjacket.

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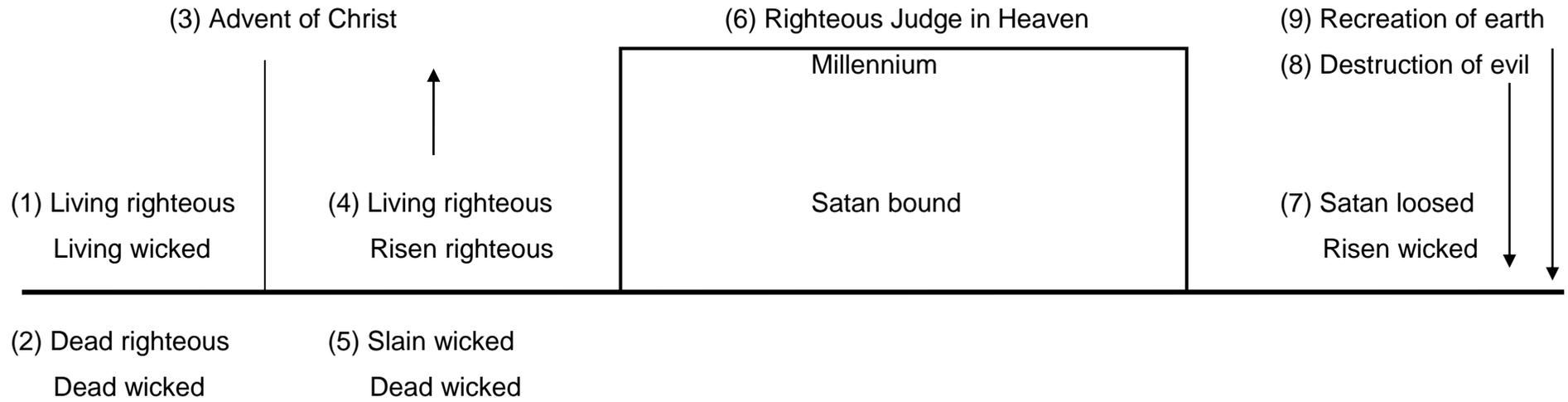
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**Appendix A: An outline of SDA Eschatology**



## Key

1. Both the righteous and the wicked that are still alive will see the coming of Christ to the earth.
2. At the coming of Christ, the ones who died in Christ will be resurrected.
3. The coming of Christ is seen by everyone living and by the dead who are raised.
4. The living righteous and the risen righteous are transformed to have bodies like Christ after His resurrection.
5. The living wicked is slain.
6. For a thousand years, the righteous are in Heaven, judging to see if God has been fair to all. This is a matter of God being transparent and satisfying any question that any righteous person would have. Satan is 'bound' since he is powerless, as there is no one to acknowledge his power either directly or indirectly.
7. After the thousand years, the wicked are risen to receive the results of their choice for a short period. Satan is free to manipulate the wicked once more.
8. Satan gathers them for a final disagreement in which they are destroyed by fire to exist no more<sup>72</sup>.
9. After sin is destroyed, God recreates the earth to its former glory.

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<sup>72</sup> SDA theology does not hold to everlasting fire as indicated in Jude 7. The term 'everlasting' would point to the completion of an event and not the time. The idea of the destruction of the wicked and Satan is to eradicate all sin. If hell was eternal torment, the universe would not be free from sin.