

From Acceptance to Expedience: A Look at Shifting Perspectives between Ellen G. White and
Arthur G. Daniells

by Jon-Philippe Ruhumuliza
jruhumu@emory.edu

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Over the past few years, I have been looking at African American Seventh-day Adventists and their relationship to the church during the Progressive Era. I have been especially interested in church interpretation of her counsels surrounding racial separation. And because one of the major issues in the 1919 Bible Conference centered around interpretation, this becomes an important topic indeed. In the past, the lack of minority representation in the dissemination and interpretation of sacred text have led to significant blind spots for the church. For example, I have discovered a nuanced discrepancy between EGW's intention and church officials understanding around African American inclusion which I will expand upon in this presentation. We will look at EGW's counsels (especially her 1909 counsels found in T9) along with Daniells interpretation and application of her counsels in his response to the People's Church in 1906. I propose not only that Daniells interpretation became *the* interpretation of EGW on this issue, but that he created the twentieth-century model for church interpretation. By way of conclusion I will connect this method

to some of the concerns found in the July 30 and Aug. 1 1919 Bible conference minutes. Let's start with two controversial quotes.

To Integrate or Not to Integrate

You have no license from God to exclude the colored people from your places of worship—Ellen White (1891)¹

In regard to white and colored people worshipping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party.

—Ellen White (1909)²

These statements help highlight the conundrum that many faithful African American Seventh-day Adventists faced. The very person who seemed to advocate so eloquently on their behalf, by 1909, seemed to stand at odds with her previously held views of complete inclusion. Even more confusing, there seemed to be no indication from Ellen White herself that recognized any change in her position except for a reference back to counsels given in 1895—a time where she clearly and unequivocally opined that the SDA Church should be completely inclusive of all.³ Taken as they are, these quotes convey a clearly contradictory message concerning how church members were to associate together. Perhaps we should see her perspective as progressive, but this does not rectify the significant challenges this reading provides. A closer contextual analysis is in order.

In 1891, EGW spoke exclusively to an all-white northern leadership with next to no presence yet in the South. Local context permitting, there are universal overtones that indicate that

¹ White, *SWk*, 15.

² White, *T9*, 206.

³ Eg. White, *SWk*, 31 “Whatever may be the nationality or color, whatever may be the social condition, the missionary of God will look upon all men as the purchase of the blood of Christ and will understand that there is no caste with God.”

she understood her perspective as applicable to the South as well. Statements like “God makes no distinction between the North and the South” and that African Americans “will not by any means be excluded from the gathering of the white people” clearly express the ideal that all SDA churches should practice not only inclusive membership but worship participation as well.⁴ This understanding is made quite explicit in an 1895 article where she recognized Southern strategies bent on separating universal salvation from ethnic equality. EGW viewed this as a direct attack from Satan which only Jesus could overcome.⁵ For her, prejudice fell into the realm of divine warfare, thus she denounced any effort for fallible humans to construct lines of separation or to force integration between groups.⁶

By November of 1895 EGW recognized that “among the colored people they will have to labor in different lines from those followed in the North.”⁷ The tendency for Southern ministers from both ethnicities to oppose Seventh-day Adventist mission work especially in regards to Sabbath observance and working on Sunday created unlikely alliances against mission workers.⁸ In order to prevent unnecessary confrontations, she urged missionaries to use extreme caution when introducing our peculiar doctrines. Instead she promoted education through bible study along

⁴ Brackets supplied; White, *SWk*, 13, 16.

⁵ White, *SWk*, 19-20 “Men have thought it necessary to plan in such a way as to meet the prejudice of the white people; and a wall of separation in religious worship has been built up between the colored people and the white people. The white people have declared themselves willing that the colored people should be converted. They have no objection to this... yet they were not willing to sit side by the side of their colored brethren and sing and pray and bear witness to the truth which they had in common... The image of Christ might be stamped upon the soul, but it still would be necessary to have a separate church and a separate service... Is not this prejudice against the colored people on the part of the white people similar to that which was cherished by the Jews against the Gentiles?... Christ worked throughout His life to break down this prejudice...”

⁶ White, *SWk*, 20, 22.

⁷ White, *SWk*, 67.

⁸ By observing the Sabbath in the South, that would mean the loss of one day of work and in an Agrarian economy, that could prove disastrous. For this reason, missionaries had begun to encourage converts to catch up their work on Sundays, which led to arrests and harassment; Cf. Ronald D. Graybill, *Mission to Black America: The True Story of Edson White and the Riverboat Morning Star* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Publishing Ass., 1971); Reynolds, 85-107; See also Josh Dobson, “Adventists Arrested for Sabbath-Breaking?” *Gainesville Seventh-day Adventist Church*, website (date unknown), accessed December 14, 2018, <https://gainesvillega.adventistchurch.org/media/revival/arrested-for-sabbath-breaking>.

with medical missions, leaving church ‘testing truths’ for when interested parties had gained a surer footing in scripture.⁹ EGW began to understand that what worked in the North would not necessarily work in the South and with that, her ideals for a church publicly integrated seemed less likely.

By 1899, Ellen White admitted that Southern Whites “are determined to make it appear that the blacks were better off in slavery than since they were set free.”¹⁰ Recognizing the growing tendency for white violence against anyone trying to teach or minister to African Americans she recommended Industrial Education as a means for sharing the message soliciting continued support of the then three-year-old “Oakwood Industrial School.”¹¹ More importantly, she also recognized that the growing tensions between ethnic groups in the South meant that Northern missionaries would be blocked more readily, necessitating the need to train Southern workers to labor for their own.¹² As per the issue of integration; EGW admitted that it was a “difficult problem to solve.”¹³

As the twentieth-century dawned, in the midst of impressive African American growth in the church, issues of racism in America had not gotten any easier. With Jim Crow in full swing and increased Southern pressures for full segregation, EGW recognized the growing pressures in the border states as well as the country. In a private letter (1908), she pointed out that to officially recognize no separation would lead to great barriers in the work. Such difficulties had emerged

⁹ White, *SWk*, 22, “As the truth is brought to bear upon the minds of both colored and white people, as souls are thoroughly converted, they will become new men and women in Christ Jesus;” Cf. Delbert W. Baker, *The Dynamics of Communication and African-American Progress in the Seventh-day Adventist Organization: A Historical Descriptive Analysis* (PhD diss.: Howard University, 1992) 177-261 comstats of EGW’s writings.

¹⁰ White, *SWk*, 83.

¹¹ White, *SWk*, 85; Ronald D. Graybill, *E.G. White and Church Race Relations* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Ass., 1970), 44-52; Benjamin J. Baker, comp., *A Place Called Oakwood, Inspired Counsel: A Comprehensive Compilation of Ellen G. White Statements on the Oakwood Educational Institution* (Huntsville, AL: Oakwood College, 2007), v documents the history of terminology used for Oakwood University.

¹² White, *SWk*, 84, 92.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript (Ms77)*, No. 77 (August 2, 1903).

due to a lack of consistent outreach to African Americans by local white believers.¹⁴ Because of this, prejudice had increased to such a point that to officially create policy would only lead to greater harm.¹⁵ Yet, she still stood opposed to creating a policy for segregation: “But who will press the question of entire exclusion? Both white and colored people have the same Creator, and are saved by the redeeming grace of the same Saviour... The Lord has not made two heavens, one for white people and one for the colored people. There is but one heaven for the saved.”¹⁶ It would be with this rationale that she would publish her counsel in 1909 stating that issues of equality should not be publicly stressed and that integrated worship spaces should no longer be pursued.¹⁷ It would not be due to any ontological inferiority but to protect African Americans from reprisal and “in order that the progress of the truth may be advanced.”¹⁸

Clearly a shift in Ellen White’s thinking regarding integration had occurred. The pressures of increased persecution of African Americans made it next to impossible to safely integrate worship spaces in the South (and growingly in the North) without serious reprisals from surrounding communities. She expressed an understanding of God’s ideal for completely integrated worship spaces but underestimated how pervasive racism was to the work (which she associated directly to the workings of Satan and his agents). For her, the most important factor remained; that people know Jesus. This ultimate aim to share the gospel even made it possible for

¹⁴ E.g. White, *T9*, 204, “One of the difficulties attending the work is that many of the white people living where the colored people are numerous are not willing that special efforts should be put forth to uplift them.”

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, “To Our Churches in Washington,” *Manuscript Releases (4MR)*, Vol. 4 (October 19, 1908), 33, “There is too much at stake for human judgment to be followed in this matter. If the Conference should say that no difference is to be recognized and no separation is to be made in church relationship between the white people and the colored people, our work with both races would be greatly hindered. If it should be recommended and generally practiced in all our Washington churches, that white and black believers assemble in the same house of worship, and be seated promiscuously in the building, many evils would be the result. Many would say that this should not be, and must not be.”

¹⁶ White, *4MR*, 33.

¹⁷ White, *T9*, 206, 214.

¹⁸ White, *T9*, 204, 206-7.

her to tolerate separation in the SDA church. For administrators, this provided the freedom to construct their own set of guidelines regarding segregation. While it is clear that EGW did see the need to separate worship spaces, not much effort was made by the administration to comprehend the nuanced reasons why. To which we now turn.

The Breaking Down of Prejudice

If Jesus is abiding in our hearts we cannot despise the colored man who has the same Saviour abiding in his heart—Ellen White (1891)¹⁹

He who is closely connected with Christ is lifted above the prejudice of color or caste.

—Ellen White (1909)²⁰

Central to Ellen White’s ministry rested in the conviction that when a person came to know Jesus fully, they became a new creation.²¹ The snare of racism and prejudice could be destroyed by a correct presentation of the gospel; once completed, all hatred and malice would cease.²² EGW envisioned workers who personally and privately saw every person as their equal while effectively operating within sinful society—a form of spiritual guerilla warfare. Thus, only missionaries with a “self-sacrificing spirit” were to enter the South if they were to navigate the difficulties there.²³ By setting up industrial schools, providing healthcare and training for the local communities, the inevitable result of any faithful adherent would be to forego their racism: “Those who claim to be Christians have a work to do in teaching [African Americans] to read and to follow various trades

¹⁹ White, *SWk*, 14.

²⁰ White, *T9*, 209.

²¹ White, *SWk*, 22.

²² White, *SWk*, 55, “The Walls of sectarianism and caste and race will fall down when the true missionary spirit enters the hearts of men.”

²³ White, *SWk*, 17.

and engage in different business enterprises... If they had an opportunity to develop, they would stand upon an equality with the whites.”²⁴

When Ellen White urged in 1909 that issues of equality should not be urged on white people, it stood within the above conviction that the true solution would not come through the ideas of her time: “If we move quietly and judiciously, laboring in the way that God has marked out both white and colored people will be benefited by our labors.”²⁵ The only way this would prove successful would be if workers could operate within oppressive structures without becoming changed by them.²⁶ As can be seen in what I believe to be prophetically significant found in T9:

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, there will be a triumph of humanity over prejudice in seeking the salvation of the souls of human beings. God will control minds. Human hearts will love Christ as love. And the color line will be regarded by many very differently from the way in which it is now regarded.²⁷

This sounds a lot like what happened during the Civil Rights Movement. At a certain time, a tipping point where people would be guided by God to turn away from prejudice would appear and when that happened the SDA church would stand united with infrastructure already established for integration. Unfortunately, the church chose a different path.

An Unofficial “Official” Policy

²⁴ Brackets supplied; White, *SWk*, 44; Cf. White, *SWk*, 70 “Let them visit the sick and the poor, ministering to their wants, and they will find favorable opportunities to open the Scriptures to individuals and to families;” and White, *T9*, 211, “As a means of overcoming prejudice and gaining access to minds, medical missionary work must be done, not in one or two places only, but in many places where the truth has not yet been proclaimed.”

²⁵ White, *T9*, 214-5; Cf. Graybill (1970), 70-87.

²⁶ White, *Swk*, 76-8, after quoting 1 Co. 9:20-23 states, “We know that the apostle did not sacrifice one jot or principle. He did not allow himself to be led away by the sophistry and maxims of men... This was the manner of his working—adapting his methods to win souls. Had he been abrupt and unskillful in handling the Word, he would not have reached either Jew or Gentile.” That there were two be an internal perspective different from external practices is indicated at the end o this letter where EGW requests, “I would not advise that this be published in our papers, but let the workers have it in leaflets, and let them keep their own counsels (78).”

²⁷ White, *T9*, 209 predicts,

As the church sought guidance from EGW, Daniells and his administration found themselves challenged concerning the color-line in DC. In 1902 Daniells had privately determined a course of action:

First, That the time in which we live, and the message we have to give, demand that we shall not waste our time in squabbles over the color question; but that we devote our energies to the salvation of both races. Second, that no effort be made to bring about an equality of the races, nor join the popular cry of elevating the colored man. Third, that we advise separate meetings of the races in those parts of the country where it causes offense for them to mix. Fourth, that in separating the races for meeting purposes, we shall not leave the colored people to themselves, nor neglect friendly counsel and cooperation in church management.²⁸

It is important to recognize that while this agreement declares an inherent equality between ethnicities, and even a willingness to allow for some representation by African Americans, there were no definitive declarations concerning the use of institutions, and this lack of clarity resulted in immediate barring of all African Americans membership from Adventist education and medical facilities in DC. And the People's Church demanded access. In 1906 the GC responded to a petition by the People's church. This lengthy response consisted of eleven pages, including the submission of the two-page People's Church petition into the committee record. For the People's Church, the central issue in their petition rested in equal access to facilities, but Daniells perceived this letter as an attempt to introduce racial tensions into the church. Referencing the mission of the church to "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" he asserted that it would be "inconsistent and foolish"

²⁸ Daniells to Cottrell, *Letter (Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, (GCA): January 21, 1902)*, from Douglas Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe: Apostle to Black America* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Ass., 2010), 190.

to create a policy that would benefit one group over the other.²⁹ For Daniells and the committee the request for access equated to an attempt to “frighten us and press us to their terms.”³⁰

The committee argued that the presence of “error and superstition” among the people, meant that access to the new facilities could not be delivered equally alongside the gospel; to do so would risk jeopardizing the work of salvation.³¹ Central to their justification rested on the uniqueness of the mission of the church. Unequivocally, they argued that Seventh-day Adventists could not involve themselves in issues of “socialism, civic reform, and modern humanitarianism;” which included the question of the “equality of the races.”³² Daniells then provided three arguments defending the decision to deny the People’s Church request: the primacy of proclaiming the Three Angel’s message over that of social equality, the privilege of giving up our privileges for the sake of promoting this message (an ironic argument to make against a constituency that arguably had comparatively few privileges) and a compilation of EGW statements which Daniells believed supported his rationale. Time only permits a brief look at Daniells use of EGW’s writings, although I would be happy to discuss in more detail the first two points off-line. Let us now turn to Daniells’ Segregation Compilation.

The Segregation Compilation

Daniells compilation consists of quotations placed in no chronological order and with no consideration for the original context. Every new quotation ranges from large block quotes to small sentences pulled from larger paragraphs. There are even missing quotations marks which, coupled

²⁹ GCC, 1906, 5 (.pdf 60).

³⁰ AG Daniells to Willie White, *Letter* (May 30, 1906) from Morgan, 299.

³¹ GCC, 1906, 5 (.pdf 60).

³² GCC, 1906, 5-6 (.pdf. 60, 62); It stands as strange that Daniells would have included in this list “humanitarianism”, especially in regard to the SDA church’s strong position concerning health. Most likely, this response is best understood within the context of the Kellogg Crisis (see Schwarz & Greenleaf, 264-72)

with the lack of proper citations, makes it seem like it coincides with EGW's actual thought.³³ Most of these quotes come from *The Southern Work* while others came from personal correspondence not available to the general public during this time.³⁴ Now we have already dealt with some of these quotations above, but it should be noted that considering the risk of persecution in the South, *Southern Work* would not have been widely distributed and no one except the recipients (in this case, Daniells and key officials) had access to personal correspondence. The People's Church assumed, given the closeness of Daniells with the White family, that this was an accurate portrayal of the prophet's views. A point supported by their soon departure from the denomination.

I call this a segregation compilation because when compared with the original context of Ellen White's counsels it makes it seem that her primary concern was separation even though in reality her counsel had to do with the power of conversion and ultimately integration. So, even as Daniells denounced any form of racism as the driving emphasis of his approach, he also de-emphasized the temporary nature of ethnic separation. And he especially ignored EGW's expectancy for spiritual revival that would lead to the dissolution of all prejudice. For him, it stood as unnecessary to reiterate the churches views against racism. But by missing the central focus of her position, he only saw as pertinent the explicit mentions of the color line; thus, ignoring her larger vision of a subversive Spirit led movement. Even while capturing an explicit statement of

³³ *GCC*, 1906, 7 (.pdf 63), the end of the second paragraph and the beginning of the third paragraph are without quotation marks. Being that the third quotation comes from an unknown source this could have been read as either a brand-new quote or a continuation of the second quote. This becomes especially problematic in that the end of the third paragraph has quotation marks.

³⁴ The order of this compilation with a brief context is as follows: White, *SWk* (June 5, 1899), 84.2 (intolerance for SDA doctrine in the South), *MR77*, par. 2 (Holy Spirit power needed to deal with color line), *SWk* (November 20, 1895), 68.2, 71.1 (Caution in promoting the Sabbath), *SWk* (June 21, 1899), 92.1 (Against Northern colonization in the Southern field), *SWk* (April 27, 1899), 96.2, 95.1 (Warnings of dangerous mission work in Deep South).

hers (Ms77): “Receive the Holy Spirit before you submit your plans for dealing with the color line” he would not explicitly or implicitly apply this principle to his own guidelines.³⁵

A Subtle Hermeneutical Shift

By shifting the emphasis of EGW’s writings dealing with the power of divine transformation to solely a matter of ethnic separation, the church effectively neutered the significance of these statements. What makes this reading all the more dangerous resides in its subtlety. Indeed, Ellen White did shift her views concerning public integration as Jim Crow proceeded, and she also consistently emphasized the need to move quietly and not politically in issues of contention. But, in every written counsel for reaching African Americans in the midst of prejudice and persecution, stood the conviction that hatred would be undermined through patient biblical guidance by Spirit filled workers. Internally, there was to be no separation, but Daniell’s administrative response counteracted this by never addressing this intended aim of the work. It would take the People’s Church and Sheafe’s exit and few more years on top of that before Daniells began to comprehend his mistake. The formation of the GC Negro Department in 1909 was an attempt to begin fulfilling his promise of fair representation, but that was not enough to change the trajectory of SDA institutions in the South and across the country. The seed of segregation had been planted.

Fast-forward to the 1919 Bible conference. When the issue of inspiration arose (specifically the pedagogical use of EGW’s writings), we see traces of over-centralization of critical EGW texts and a heavy reliance on Daniells for understanding. In Daniells reluctance to be taken too seriously concerning issues of proper interpretation, he does pull significantly from sources that were not available to the general public. We also see, a strong reliance on empiricism (I’m thinking here of

³⁵ White, *Ms77*; Although administration and laity alike pointed to EGW’s writings to justify their actions, Daniells never received been an explicit commendation from her pen concerning his separation policy.

his comments concerning physical manifestations³⁶ and his readiness to edit EGW's historical and theological views according to modern research).³⁷ His personal reliance on evidence-based study and his access to primary documents made him and the GC a critical asset for the church. This does impact interpretation. Daniells seemed hesitant to deal with portions of counsel hard to understand. A wise move for an administrator, but a terrible move for determining contextual understanding. This expedient approach to EGW's writings can be traced through numerous compilations over the years. How many other segregation compilations would emerge using this approach? We spent most of our time looking at EGW's complex but compelling vision for the church. It has been a stunning and often times challenging problem to see our prophet shift so suddenly over her vision of integrated institutions, but there is at least a consistent thread of hope in her writings. Separation was not an end; it was meant to be a weapon for integration (If I may be so bold). We have also seen how administrations can oversimplify problems for the sake of expedience. In the very near future, I plan to do a more thorough write up of Daniells' 1906 response to the People's Church. As far as I can determine, this moment marks the first official separation plan for the SDA church. It will also be important to expand this research into the periodicals to see who else created similar segregation compilations or adopted a similar administrative interpretation of EGW's writings. I could also see this kind of research spreading into the role of editorial interpretation. It is one thing to present the cultural limitations of our prophet (perhaps through commentary and footnotes). But where do we draw the line when it comes to making historical and theological updates to her work? And who should we trust to such a work?

³⁶ "The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in our Teaching of Bible and History," *Report of the 1919 Bible Conference* (July 30), 4 (1190), accessed July 4, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Resources/1919BC/RBC19190730.pdf>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-7 (1202-3).