

A.L. WHITE RESEARCH PAPER

This research paper, *The Circulation of Great Controversy*, was presented to the Field Missionary Secretaries' Council, meeting at St. Helena Sanitarium, in California, on September 30, 1938.

The study, "The Circulation of Great Controversy," was prepared in the main office of the Ellen G. White Estate (at that time located in Elmhaven, California, prior to its later removal to Washington, D.C.) by its director, Arthur L. White, grandson of Ellen White. It was presented by him at the Field Missionary Secretaries' Council at Sanitarium, California (today called Deer Park, California) on September 30, 1938. All of the following material is as originally given with the following exceptions: bracketed references. Only Spirit of Prophecy statements will be placed within quotations marks; not A. L. White's comments. The subheads are his. Here now is this compilation:

Foremost among the reasons for the wide circulation of *Great Controversy* is the fact that the book is of more than human origin. The author in the introduction points to the Source of her information. She says:

"Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time have been permitted to behold the workings, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the author of salvation; and Satan, the author of evil, the first transgressor of God's holy law." —[*Great Controversy*, 13].

"As the spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His Word and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future."—*Great Controversy*, 10-11.

Speaking of the Source of the information which was presented in 1888 in a little volume touching the high points of the conflict story, the last part of which was enlarged and became the *Great Controversy*:

"In this vision at Lovett's Grove, much of the material of the *Great Controversy* which I had seen ten years before was repeated, and I was shown that I must write it out; that I should have to contend with the powers of darkness, for Satan would make strong efforts to hinder me, but angels of God would not leave me in the conflict, that in God must I put my trust" -2 *Spiritual Gifts*, 270. [*Life Sketches*, 162, is almost identical. For the full story, read 162-163, 1880].

This statement brings to view that, with the revelation of scenes of the great controversy, Mrs. White was shown that in writing these out she was to be opposed by Satan. This is readily understood; for, if the Lord's humble servant could be hindered from exposing his work and methods of attack, there would be less interference with his work.

The great adversary was not slow in bringing his attacks. Before Mrs. White reached her home a few days after the vision at Lovett's Grove, she was stricken with paralysis and despaired even of her life. Healed through prayer, but not completely restored at first, Mrs. White wrote out the story in a very brief form as now found in the last pages of *Early Writings*. [1 *Spiritual Gifts*, 1858, now in *Early Writings*, 133-295]. When the work was about completed she was shown, "that in the sudden attack at Jackson, Satan designed to take my life to hinder the work I was about to write; but angels of God were sent to raise me above the effect of Satan's attack."—2 *Spiritual Gifts*, 272. [*Life Sketches*, 163, is almost identical, 1880].

In 1884 there came from the press the first edition of our present *Great Controversy* [*Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 4, Fall, 1884]. It was popular from the first, and ten editions were printed and sold within the first four years of the life of the book. It was enlarged in 1888. Mrs. White frequently spoke of the especial value of this book and of the Source of its inspiration. A few brief quotations follow:

"I was moved by the Spirit of God to write that book, and while working upon it I felt a great burden upon my soul. I knew that time was short, that the scenes which are soon to crowd upon us would at the last come very suddenly and swiftly, as represented in the words of Scripture: 'The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night' —[*Colporteur Ministry*, 127; Letter 1, 1890].

"The Lord has set before me matters which are of urgent importance for the present time, and which reach into the future. These words have been spoken in a charge to me, 'Write in a book the things thou hast seen and heard, and let it go to all people, for the time is at hand when past history will be repeated.' I have been aroused at one, two, or three O'clock in the morning, with some point forcibly impressed upon my mind as if spoken by the voice of God." —[*Colporteur Ministry*, 128; Letter 1, 1890].

"I was shown. . . that I should devote myself to writing out the important matters for Volume four (*Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 4, later became the present *Great Controversy*); and that the warning must go where the living messenger could not go, and that it would call the attention of many to the important

events to occur in the closing scenes of the world's history." —BL. [Colporteur Ministry, 128; Letter 1, 1890].

"God gave me the light contained in Great Controversy and Patriarchs and Prophets, and this light was needed to arouse the people to prepare for the great day of God, which is just before us. These books contain God's direct appeal to the people. Thus He is speaking to the people in stirring words, urging them to make ready for His coming. The light God has given in these books should not be concealed." —Manuscript 23, 1890. [Colporteur Ministry, 129].

WITHHOLDING LIGHT

When the new, enlarged edition of Great Controversy came from the press in 1888, there was every hope that the book would have a wide sale and accomplish much good. Certain conditions in our Publishing work, however, thwarted these hopes, for the management of the Review and Herald had passed from the hands of men who had long experience in the work, to the hands of businessmen—a banker, a title lawyer, and later a sea captain.

A strong effort was made to have Mrs. White release all royalties on Great Controversy. The banker-manager, being a good financier, rejected to paying royalties on books that he supposed would have only limited circulation. Mrs. White stated Positively that she had been instructed otherwise and could not relinquish the royalty.

When she returned from Europe, it was found that the manager and some of his associates were determined to bring out books that were free from royalty. Bible Readings was brought out by a variety of authors who donated their work so the book could be put on the market without royalty. This book was a great success.

When the enlarged editions of Great Controversy and Patriarchs and Prophets came out, the canvassing business was in the hands of the men who were advocating, "One book; everybody on one book; all agents on one book." Bible Readings was pushed to the front and Great Controversy and Patriarchs and Prophets lay idle on the shelves and had only a limited sale.

When Mrs. White protested against this, she was promised that, after running Bible Readings a year, they would take up Great Controversy and concentrate on it. When the year was done, those in charge of the publishing and canvassing work did not fulfill their promise and Bible Readings was majored for several years, to the neglect of other books. Then in later years, when the book passed to other hands in the canvassing work, Great Controversy and Patriarchs and Prophets were brought to the front and had a good sale.

With this brief recital of the circumstances surrounding the neglect of Great Controversy, the following extracts will be understood and appreciated:

"About this time, when the new edition of Volume Four (Great Controversy) came from the press, the new book, Bible Readings, was introduced. This book had a great sale and has been permitted to swallow up every other interest. Canvassers found it an easy book to handle, and Volume Four was kept out of the field. I felt that this was not right. I knew that it was not right because it was not in harmony with the light which God had given me." —BL, 1899.

"As soon as Great Controversy came from the press, it should have been pushed forward above every other book. I have been shown this. Had it been circulated at the time it was lying idle, there would have been a very different order of things among our workers. The impressions made would have brought decided changes. But instead of this the book was suppressed, although the promise was made me that it should go forward if I would take the lowest royalty. The book that should have gone did not go; and the men who should have worked to carry it forward, discouraged the canvassers from handling it. Thus saith the Lord, 'I will judge for this false, dishonest work.' " —BL, 1899.

"Just at this point his satanic majesty was in the management of the books at the Review and Herald Office. Those at the head of the publishing work there would handle neither Great Controversy nor Patriarchs and Prophets, the books God has specified the people must have at once. They promised me faithfully that after certain months they would handle these books, but they failed to keep their word. When the Great Controversy should have been circulated everywhere, it was lying dead in the Review and Herald Office and the Pacific Press,"-Letter 35, 1899.

"My mind has been so fully occupied with the burden upon me of getting before the people the light having especial reference to these last days, and the crisis before us. The world is to be warned, and I have felt so deeply over Volume Four standing still as it has done. . .

"I do not demerit Bible Readings. It is a book, which will do a great amount of good, but it can never take the place the Lord designed that Volume Four should have in the world and among our people. I have spread before them the light given me of Heaven in that book." —E-25a 1889.

"This sale of Bible Readings, had it been preceded by the sale of Great Controversy, would have

had far more weight than it had in going first. The Lord knew all about this. He knew that principles were violated. He knew the falsehoods told and reiterated, that the books bearing the vital truth to the people would not sell. He knew that ministers and presidents were advised to recommend that all handle the one book; and that the keeping of Great Controversy from the field has done a work that men will have to answer for in the judgment." -Manuscript 64, 1894.

"This book has to a great degree been misplaced by another book, which has kept from the world the light God has given."-Manuscript 24, 1891.

"I know that the statement made that these books cannot be sold, is not true. I know; for the Lord has instructed me that this is said because human devising has blocked the way for their sale. It cannot be denied that these works were not the product of any human mind, they are the voice of God speaking to the people, and they will have an influence upon minds that other books do not have."— Manuscript 13, 1890. [Colporteur Ministry, 129].

"For nearly two years the book containing warnings and instructions from the Lord, given especially for this time, has been lying in our publishing houses, and no one feels the necessity or importance of bringing it before the people. Brethren, how long am I to wait for you to get the burden? Now Volume one, or Patriarchs and Prophets, is ready for circulation; but, even for this book, I would not allow Volume Four to remain longer as a light under a bushel. I am in sore distress of mind, but who of my brethren cares for this?

"Has the Lord moved upon my mind to prepare this work to be sent everywhere, and is He moving upon my brethren to devise plans which shall bar the way so that the light which He has given me shall be hid in our publishing houses instead of shining forth to all who will receive it?

"It is now urged that only one book at a time shall have a place in the field—that all the canvassers shall work for the same book. I do not see the force or propriety of this. If the Lord has light for His people, who shall venture to put up barriers so that the light shall not reach them? One book is published at little expense, and it is therefore sold cheaply; other books that present truths essential at this time have involved greater expense. Shall they therefore be kept from the people? Bible Readings is a good book to occupy its own place, but should not be permitted to crowd out other important works, which the people need. The presidents of our conferences have a duty to do; our board of directors should have something to say in this matter, that the different branches of God's work may receive equal attention.

"If our canvassers are controlled by the prospect of financial gain; if they circulate books on which they can make the most money, to the neglect of others that the people need, I ask, in what sense is theirs a missionary work? Where is the missionary spirit of self-sacrifice?

"The work of the intelligent, God-fearing canvasser has been represented as equal to that of the Gospel ministry. Then should the canvasser, any more than the minister, feel at liberty to act from selfish motives? Should he turn his back on all the principles of missionary work, and handle the books—placed before him, shall I say, as a temptation—on which he can make the most money? Should he have no interest to circulate any book but that which brings him the greatest financial gain? How is the missionary spirit revealed here? Has not the canvassing work ceased to be what it ought to be? How is it that no voice is raised to correct this state of things?

"I speak to you who are engaged in the canvassing work. Have you read Volume Four? Do you know what it contains? Have you any appreciation for the subject matter? Do you not see that the people need the light therein given? If you have not already done so, I entreat you to read carefully these solemn warnings and appeals. I am sure that the Lord would have this work carried into all the highways and byways where there are souls to be warned of the dangers so soon to come."—BL. [Colporteur Ministry, 127; Letter 1, 1890].

When there came a change of attitude toward her books, Mrs. White recognized it and rejoiced over their wide circulation, for thus the words of truth, which had been given her, were passed on to the people. A recognition of this change is noted in the two following extracts, written in 1894 and 1907 respectively.

"Light was in that book which came from Heaven; but what account will these men have to give to God for the little faith and confidence manifested in that book that the warnings should not come to the people when they should have had them. I am so glad the people can have them now. The delay was Satan's devising. He was working diligently and had brought about a condition of things that the work cannot go as it would have gone." —0-55, 1894.

"Years ago when I was in Battle Creek I was much distressed that Great Controversy should lie idle on the shelf. For two years it was held back that Bible Readings might have more attention. All that I could say did not change the course of those who had control of the canvassing work. . . There is not now a studied, determined effort to hold back those books that are of the most importance. We are planning to bring out many books." —H- 70, 1907.

In 1899 Mrs. White was led to speak of the experience in which Great Controversy was neglected, giving as a reason the danger of a repetition of that experience. She said:

"The rights of brethren are to be respected; there should not be a multiplication of books, when it is well understood that one will interfere with the sale of the one just preceding it. This was the way with Great Controversy. This book was not left to have a fair chance in being handled with Bible Readings. The Bible Readings was brought in before the books of great importance, Great Controversy and Daniel and Revelation, which relate to the vital interests before us. Through the instruction to the canvassing agents, Great Controversy had little opportunity to be circulated, and was nearly eclipsed. There is danger that the same course will be followed, therefore it is necessary to refer to the light given on this subject. It was presented to me that one book was crossing the track of another. This is not righteous judgment. I have now to say, that selfishness be uprooted. Let the precious plants of God's own garden of the heart live and flourish."—J-91, 1899.

REASONS FOR WIDE CIRCULATION

The reasons for Mrs. White's burden for the wide circulation of Great Controversy have been set forth many times, and they should constitute a sound basis for a continued impetus:

"Great Controversy should be very widely circulated. It contains the story of the past, the present, and the future. In its outline of the closing scenes of this earth's history, it bears a powerful testimony in behalf of the truth. I am more anxious to see a wide circulation for this book than for any others I have written; for, in the Great Controversy, the last message of warning to the world is given more distinctly than in any of my other books." —K-281. [Colporteur Ministry, 127; Letter 281, 1905].

"Let there be an interest aroused in the sale of these books. Their sale is essential, for they contain timely instruction from the Lord. They should be appreciated as books that bring to the people light that is especially needed just now. Therefore these books should be widely distributed. Those who make a careful study of the instruction contained in them, and will receive it as from the Lord, will be kept from receiving many of the errors that are being introduced. Those who accept the truth contained in these books will not be led into false paths."—[Colporteur Ministry, 130].

"Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. Patriarchs and Prophets and Great Controversy are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth. The dangers are pointed out that should be avoided by the church. Those who become thoroughly acquainted with the lessons in these books will see the dangers before them, and will be able to discern the plain, straight path marked out for them. They will be kept from strange paths. They will make straight paths for their feet, lest the lame be turned out of the way."—[Colporteur Ministry, 129-130; Evangelism, 366].

"In Desire of Ages, Patriarchs and Prophets, Great Controversy, and in Daniel and Revelation there is precious instruction. These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people."—[Colporteur Ministry, 123].

"We are warned to avoid the mistakes the Israelites made in stubbornly refusing to receive the warnings that came to them from God."—W-229. [Letter 229, 1903].

GREATEST RESULTS IN THE FUTURE

"The results of the circulation of this book [Great Controversy] are not to be judged by what now appears. By reading it some souls will be aroused and will have courage to unite themselves at once with those who keep the commandments of God. But a much larger number of those who read it will not take their position until they see the very events taking place that are foretold in it. The fulfillment of some of the predictions will inspire faith that others will also come to pass; and, when the earth is lightened with the glory of the Lord in the closing work, many souls will take their position on the commandments of God as the result of this agency."—Manuscript 31, 1890. [Colporteur Ministry, 128-129].

LET NOTHING HINDER THEIR SALE; OUR DUTY IS TO SPREAD THE LIGHT THESE BOOKS CONTAIN

"The larger books, Patriarchs and Prophets, Great Controversy, and Desire of Ages should be sold everywhere. These books contain truth for this time-truth that is to be proclaimed in all parts of the world. Nothing is to hinder their sale." —Colporteur Evangelist, 35. [Colporteur Ministry, 124; Review, January 20, 1903].

"It is a duty we owe to our people and to God, to send every ray of light given me of God, demanded at this time for every tongue and nation." —E-25-a, 1889.

"The light was that Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, Great Controversy, and Patriarchs and Prophets would make their way. They contain the very message the people must have; the special light God

has given His people. The angels of God would prepare the way for these books in the hearts, of the people. —[Colporteur Ministry, 123-124].

CIRCULATION OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

"The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity she will have to do in a terrible crisis under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances. The warnings that worldly conformity has silenced or withheld must be given under the fiercest opposition from enemies of the faith." —5 Testimonies, 463.

"Instruction has been given me that the important books containing the light that God has given regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven should be given a wide circulation just now; for through them the truth will reach many minds. Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and Revelation, and the Great Controversy are needed now as never before; they should be widely circulated because the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes. . . Many of our people have been blind to the importance of the very books that were most needed. Had tact and skill then been shown in the sale of these books, the Sunday-law movement would not be where it is today."—Colporteur Evangelist, 21. [Colporteur Ministry, 123; Review, February 16, 1905].

BOOKS SILENT WITNESSES

"Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her lifework God has given her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given His servants to be given to the world. From their pages this light is to shine into the hearts of men and women, leading them to the Saviour. The Lord has declared that these books are to be scattered throughout the world. There is in them truth which to the receiver is a savor of life unto life. They are silent witnesses for God. In the past they have been the means in His hands of convicting and converting many souls. Many have read them with eager expectation, and by reading them, have been led to see the efficacy of Christ's atonement, and to trust in its power. They have been led to commit the keeping of their souls to their Creator, waiting and hoping for the coming of the Saviour to take His loved ones to their eternal home. In the future these books are to make the Gospel plain to many others, revealing to them the way of salvation." —[Colporteur Ministry, 125; Review, January 20, 1903].

"The Lord has sent His people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. Little heed has been given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light. Oh, now much good would be accomplished if the books containing this light were read with a determination to carry out the principles they contain! There would be a thousand fold greater vigilance, a thousand fold more self-denial and resolute effort. And many more would now be rejoicing in the light of present truth."(Colporteur Ministry, 125-226; Review, January 20, 1903).

"My brethren and sisters, work earnestly to circulate these books. Put your heart into this work, and the blessing of God will be with you. Go forth in faith, as you go praying that God will prepare hearts to receive the light."—Colporteur Evangelist, 36-37. [Colporteur Ministry 126; Review, January 20, 1903].

Mrs. White's last recorded statement relative to the Book, Great Controversy, was made after a careful study of the revised edition published in 1911. She wrote as follows:

"A few days ago I received a copy of the new edition of the book, Great Controversy, recently printed at Mountain View, and also a similar copy printed at Washington. The book pleases me. I have spent many hours looking through its pages, and I see that the publishers have done good work.

"The book, Great Controversy, I appreciate above silver or gold, and I greatly desire that it shall come before the people. While writing the manuscript of Great Controversy, I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God. And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind,"[Colporteur Ministry, 128].

"Recently it was necessary for the book to be reset because the electrotype plates were badly worn. It has cost me much to have this done, but I do not complain, for whatever the cost may be, I regard the edition with great satisfaction."—W-55, 1911. [Letter 56, 1911 (sic., cf. Colporteur Ministry, 128)].

The objective of the author in presenting Great Controversy to the world might well be taken as the objective of those who take part in its circulation:

"To unfold the scenes of the great controversy between truth and error; to reveal the wiles of Satan and the means by which he may be successfully resisted; to present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil, shedding such light on origin and the final disposition of sin as to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God on all His dealing with His creatures; and to show the holy, unchanging nature of the law; is the object of the book. That, through its influence, souls may be delivered from the powers of darkness, and become "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" is the earnest prayer of the writer." —Great Controversy, 12, [1888].

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