

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

-COMPILATIONS-
WHAT THEY
ARE AND WHAT
THEY ARE NOT

NORMA J. COLLINS

**Compilations—What
They Are and What
They Are Not**

Ellen G. White

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Information about this Book

Overview

This eBook is provided by the [Ellen G. White Estate](#). It is included in the larger free [Online Books](#) collection on the Ellen G. White Estate Web site.

About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

Further Links

[A Brief Biography of Ellen G. White](#)
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by Norma J. Collins

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Introduction

The last will and testament of Ellen G. White set up a Board of Trustees to manage her estate and produce compilations from her manuscripts. In harmony with this responsibility, the Trustees have issued more than sixty compilations since her death in 1915.

Are these compilations really Ellen G. White books? Should only the books published during her lifetime be considered genuine Ellen White books? Do today's compilations fairly represent her inspired counsel? Can they be trusted?

Chapter 1—What Is a Compilation?

What is a compilation? Webster defines compile: “To gather and put together (statistics, facts, etc.) in an orderly form.” “To compose (a book, etc.) of materials gathered from various sources.”

The book *The Great Controversy* provides a case study of a compilation produced while Ellen White was alive. Mrs. White wrote the first little 219-page book on the great controversy between Christ and Satan as a result of the vision she was given at a funeral at Lovett’s Grove, Ohio, March 14, 1858. The devil struck her with paralysis to prevent her from writing out the vision, but she had a great deal of “stick-to-itiveness” and she worked at it a little at a time until her strength was restored, the paralysis dissipated, and the book was completed. It appeared as *Spiritual Gifts*, Volume 1.

After the publication of Volume 2 in 1860, which was largely a biographical sketch, she wrote 21 chapters on Old Testament history from creation to the Exodus and the giving of the Law at Sinai. This material was published as Volume 3. She also wrote 16 chapters on the Israelites from Sinai to David and Solomon. These chapters, along with an article on health and a reprint of *Testimonies* 1-10, made up Volume 4 of *Spiritual Gifts*. The four books—clearly compilations—were printed in 1864.

Next came four larger volumes titled *Spirit of Prophecy*, covering the same subject. (Available today in facsimile reprint.) They were printed in 1870, 1877, 1878, and 1884. As Ellen White was given more visions with greater detail, the great controversy story expanded into the five volumes of what is known today as “The Conflict of the Ages Series.” All were made up of materials originally written as books, articles, letters, and manuscripts. By definition they were compilations. “Compile: To compose (a book, etc.) of materials gathered from various sources.”

Chapter 2—How Were Compilations Prepared?

Ellen White's copyists secretaries well understood that only her thoughts were to be used, and her own words, as far as they were grammatically consistent in expressing those thoughts. In no case was a copyist or editor to introduce thoughts not found in Mrs. White's manuscripts. Where paragraphs and sentences were awkward or lost some of their force because of sentence structure, the secretaries were expected to make needed grammatical changes. They also were instructed to watch for unnecessary repetition. Mrs. White gave her personal attention to a review of the final manuscript. Since the author is no longer alive, the White Estate keeps this kind of editing to a minimum. There is virtually no elimination of repetition of thought today.

Over the years Ellen White wrote more than 5,000 articles, and thousands of pages of testimonies and letters to individuals. From this vast literary treasurehouse materials were drawn to incorporate into her books. She wrote on many subjects and left a wealth of material, published and unpublished.

Chapter 3—Writing on the Life of Christ

In the 1870s Mrs. White wrote extensively on the life of Christ. When she went to Australia in 1891, she hoped she could devote much of her time to completing a book on this important subject. From 1892 until *The Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, she spent many hours each day preparing chapters for the book.

She did not just sit down and write the book straight through, chapter by chapter. She assigned her helpers to gather what she had written in past years on the subject. This matter was found in her published books, in articles that had appeared in periodicals, and in her letters and manuscripts. With all this material in hand she wrote many additional articles as the experiences of Christ were opened anew to her. Then these passages were put together in their natural order, and she wrote in the connecting history.

Her writings on the life and teachings of our Saviour were so great that they could not be contained in one volume. So *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, and a portion of *The Ministry of Healing*, were made up of the overflow.

“Compile: To compose (a book, etc.) of materials gathered from various sources.”

The White Estate office has letters and other documents telling of Mrs. White's work on *The Desire of Ages* and the manner in which the book was prepared. She frequently mentioned the fact that she was writing on the life of Christ, and included definite statements regarding the part that Marian Davis acted. In a letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg, October 25, 1895, she said:

“Marian is working at the greatest disadvantage. I find but little time in which to write on the life of Christ. I am continually receiving letters that demand an answer, and I dare not neglect important matters that are brought to my notice. Then there are churches to visit, private testimonies to write, and many other things

to be attended to that tax me and consume my time. Marian greedily grasps every letter I write to others in order to find sentences that she can use in the life of Christ. She has been collecting everything that has a bearing on Christ's lessons to His disciples, from all possible sources....

“You know that my whole theme both in the pulpit and in private, by voice and pen, is the life of Christ.”—[Letter 41, 1895](#).

[3]

Speaking of the work of her helpers in 1900, Mrs. White made this statement about Miss Davis:

“She does her work in this way: She takes my articles which are published in the papers, and pastes them in blank books. She also has a copy of all the letters I write. In preparing a chapter for a book, Marian remembers that I have written something on that special point, which may make the matter more forcible. She begins to search for this, and if, when she finds it she sees that it will make the chapter more clear, she adds it.

“The books are not Marian's productions, but my own, gathered from all my writings. Marian has a large field from which to draw, and her ability to arrange the matter is of great value to me. It saves my poring over a mass of matter, which I have no time to do.... Marian is a most valuable help to me in bringing out my books.”—[Letter 61a, 1900](#). (See [Selected Messages 3:91, 92](#).)

Marian Davis had a wonderfully organized mind and memory, thus she was able to remember and find items that Mrs. White had written on various topics. When enough material had been gathered for certain chapters, the manuscript would be read to Ellen White or given to her to read. This often revived her memory of certain scenes and she eagerly rewrote many passages, giving them greater vigor and freshness. To uplift Christ and present Him to others in all His beauty and holiness was always her main objective.

Soon after her arrival in Australia, Ellen White was stricken with malarial fever and inflammatory rheumatism. For eleven months she suffered greatly, and was confined to her bed for days at a time, unable to write but a little each day. And yet she persevered and God sustained her as she wrote on the life of Christ. Of this experience she wrote:

“I have been passing through great trial in pain and suffering and helplessness, but through it all I have obtained a precious experience more valuable to me than gold.”—[Selected Messages 2:240](#).

She was disappointed that she was unable to visit among the churches, but God used her affliction to advance His purposes. By placing herself in a sitting/lying position she was able to use her crippled hands, and she began to write. In a few months she had written sixteen hundred pages on the life of Christ. She found that in the night when she could not sleep, Jesus was precious near. She thought of Christ a great deal during this time and knew where her strength lay.

A letter written in 1892 to O. A. Olsen, president of the General Conference, reveals the intensity with which Mrs. White wrote while preparing this book:

“I walk with trembling before God. I know not how to speak or trace with pen the large subject of the atoning sacrifice. I know not how to present subjects in the living power in which they stand before me. I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words. I bow my soul in awe and reverence before God and say, ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’”—[Letter 40, 1892](#). (See [Selected Messages 3:115](#).)

Some of the most beautiful passages in *The Desire of Ages* came from her pen when she was confined not only to her room, but to her bed.

Chapter 4—Literary Assistants

[4]

Did any of the literary assistants alter the thoughts or make additions as the writings passed through their hands? This question is answered clearly by the written statements of several of Mrs. White's helpers:

“None of Mother's workers are authorized to add to the manuscripts by introducing thoughts of their own.”—W. C. White to G. A. Irwin, May 7, 1900.

“From my own knowledge of the work, as well as from the statements of Sister White herself, I have the strongest possible ground for disbelieving that such a thing [the adding of thoughts by the copyist] was done.”—Marian Davis to G. A. Irwin, April 23, 1900.

“In all good conscience I can testify that never was I presumptuous enough to venture to add any ideas of my own or to do other than follow with most scrupulous care the thoughts of the author.”—D. E. Robinson, 1933, White Estate Document File 107g.

Mrs. White wrote voluminously on many topics. To supplement what was written specifically for a definite book, the literary assistant gathered other related gems of thought from her writings—books, published articles, manuscripts, letters, and discourses. Working together, Mrs. White and her assistants planned the outline of the books and prepared the matter chapter by chapter. In its final form, the manuscripts were read and given approval by Mrs. White herself and then sent to the printer.

Chapter 5—How the Book *Evangelism* Was Prepared

Since the death of Ellen White in 1915, how have compilations been prepared? The book *Evangelism* provides a case study.

In August 1944, representatives from the Ministerial Association of the General Conference asked the White Estate whether there was enough specific counsel on evangelism to create a volume that would give guidance in the work of evangelism. If there was sufficient material, they hoped that these counsels could be brought together and published as a single volume.

As Arthur White, at that time director of the White Estate, scanned the files, he found ample material that could be drawn together for a book of counsels on evangelism. On September 10, 1944, the Board of Trustees took the following action:

“Voted: That, in harmony with the recommendation of the Ministerial Association Advisory Council, we authorize the compilation of a manuscript, ‘Counsels to Evangelists and Bible Instructors,’ the work to be done by a committee of five, appointed by the chair. The committee named as follows: A. L. White, W. H. Branson, R. A. Anderson, Miss Louise Kleuser, J. L. Shuler.”—White Estate Board Minutes, Sept. 10, 1944.

As the committee members planned their work, they decided that the new volume would serve best if it were complete in its coverage, using both published and unpublished sources. This would include some repetition of articles already published.

Arthur White and Louise Kleuser were named as a working team to prepare the manuscript. The plan they followed called for bringing together every item that had a bearing on the subject. Then with all the Ellen White statements before them, they organized the material and developed the manuscript. This plan minimized the influence

of the compilers, allowing Mrs. White's thoughts and emphases to come through clearly in the finished work.

As Elder White and Miss Kleuser made the selections, it was [5] easy to see where Ellen White placed the emphasis, and the general outline of the subject matter fell naturally into about 22 general divisions. In cases where there were two or more statements covering the same point, the strongest or most complete was chosen and the other laid aside. Because there could be no change in Ellen White's words, which made up the text, the items were drawn together by using side headings highlighting the main point. Side headings and subtitles are almost always supplied by the compiler, and this is generally understood.

At one point during preparation of the manuscript, Elder White sought counsel on using italics to emphasize certain parts of the manuscript. The ensuing Board action read:

“Voted: That the Trustees feel that it would be out of place to use italics to emphasize certain parts of the manuscript, and might appear to take on the form of private interpretation.”—White Estate Board Minutes, July 2, 1945.

The question arose as to whether the compilers should be named in the Foreword. It was pointed out that it had always been policy not to name those participating in the work of compilation but to keep the focus on the author of the materials. The Trustees signed the Foreword, based on the following action:

“Voted: That the Foreword to the *Evangelism* manuscript be signed by the Trustees, and that we request the Secretary to draft a statement for consideration.”—*Ibid.*

The reports of the nine readers of the manuscript dealt mostly with the wording of side headings, and a few additional Ellen White statements were suggested that were thought to strengthen the manuscript.

The book *Evangelism* was on the market about 18 months after the decision to prepare the book. It has served as a guide and inspiration to those engaged in evangelistic ministries. Each item carries its source reference, thus enabling anyone to check for context and integrity of use.

It is the primary concern of those in the White Estate that all compilations be fully representative and as free as possible from any bias of the compiler. The compiler does not leave out statements that may differ from his personal opinion. Private opinions must have no weight in selecting materials. The compilation must fully and correctly represent the position, teachings, and emphasis of Ellen White.

Chapter 6—Book on the Home

In her later years Ellen White expressed her hope to get out a book on the Christian home. But other works, such as *The Acts of the Apostles*, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, *Gospel Workers*, and *Prophets and Kings*, crowded in and Ellen White died before the book on the home could be undertaken. Soon after the manuscript for *Evangelism* had been accepted for publication, the Trustees commissioned the preparation of a manuscript on the home. When the materials were assembled, following the same methods used for *Evangelism*, there was enough for two books, *The Adventist Home* and *Child Guidance*.

Chapter 7—Wealth of Material

When all the items Ellen White was known to have written on a given subject are assembled, often there is such a wealth of material that it is difficult to hold the volume to a reasonable number of pages. When the material for *Mind, Character, and Personality* was brought together, there was such an abundance of material that it had to be issued in two volumes.

In planning a new Ellen White book, there is always the question of whether the volume should be limited to statements not already available in previous books, or whether, for the sake of making the book a complete unit in itself, all the counsel relating to the subject should be included, regardless of whether some statements are in other of her books. After in-depth study, the conclusion usually is reached that the book should be complete in itself. “Compile: To compose (a book, etc.) of materials gathered from various sources.”

Through the years since her death, the White Estate board has been requested to prepare compilations on various subjects. The board considers only those projects thought to make a definite contribution to the needs of the church, and counsels with church leaders before commencing any project. Some people have the misconception that compilations are just a rearrangement of materials appearing in other published books. The fact is, most compilations include previously unpublished counsel and instruction from Ellen White’s letters and manuscripts. The Trustees see no light in recycling the counsels available in books already in print.

Chapter 8—Not All Books Serve the Same Purpose [6]

While all compilations are prepared in essentially the same way, not all are prepared for the same purpose; that is, some are more of an encyclopedic or reference type, such as *Counsels on Diet and Foods*. This book is not designed to be read as a narrative from cover to cover, but to bring together counsels on certain topics in an orderly and easily accessible way. The devotional books are just that—devotional. They are planned as brief readings to direct one's thoughts toward God at the beginning of the day. Other, larger books, such as the Conflict of the Ages series, give a thrilling history from creation to the second advent of Christ. Still others give counsel on various aspects of everyday life.

Chapter 9—Summary

Now back to the questions asked in the beginning of this article.

Whether counsel was published before or after Ellen White's death has no bearing on the inspiration of the counsel. Printing the materials before her death did not give them more inspiration, nor are they any less her work after her death. While alive she participated in drawing together materials from articles and letters to be published in books, the preparation of which she could oversee. In her will she gave the charge to her Board of Trustees to continue this work, and to supervise its preparation in her stead.

In the books prepared since Ellen White's death the Trustees feel confident that they have followed Ellen White's instructions when she wrote:

“Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last. My writings are kept on file in the office, and even though I should not live, these words that have been given to me by the Lord will still have life and will speak to the people.”—[Letter 371, 1907](#). (See [Selected Messages 3:76](#).)

- [7] The Board of Trustees and the White Estate staff take seriously their responsibilities in rightly representing Ellen White and her teachings. When materials are prepared for publication, the only adjustments made are grammatical. We feel that her guidelines to her secretaries provide this authority. If a word needs to be supplied in order to make a sentence clear, that word is placed in brackets so that the reader knows it is supplied. No one at the White Estate ever adds his or her own words to Ellen White's material. If it is felt that additional information is needed, it is placed in a footnote or in an appendix. References are given so that the researcher can check

the original sources. Enough context is supplied so that the material can stand on its own. If material is adapted or paraphrased, this is clearly and prominently stated.

Subtitles or side headings, which help to organize the materials, are supplied by the compiler, but all of the text is written by Ellen White. The compiler seeks to be entirely objective, avoiding personal bias in selecting materials. The final product is designed to represent Ellen White's full thought on a subject and is scrutinized by a committee to guard against misrepresentation.

When a new book is brought out, it is indeed an Ellen G. White book, even though she is no longer living and cannot give her personal attention to it. If she were here, no doubt she would add connective phrasing to join certain paragraphs for a smooth flow. Since this is a task reserved for the author only, the compilers sometimes use side headings to introduce the next subject or idea, but they never add phrasing to connect one paragraph or thought with another.

So, the answers to the questions asked at the beginning of the article are: Yes, books published posthumously under Ellen White's by-line are truly Ellen G. White books; No, they are not products of other writers; and, Yes, they contain inspired messages given by God for the guidance, edification, and strength of the church in these last days of earth's history.

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Based on an article by Arthur L. White

For further information see:

“How Ellen White's Books Were Written,” by W. C. White, June 18, 1935.

“In Defense of Compilations,” by Arthur L. White, in *Spectrum*, August 1985.

Brief Statements Regarding the Writings of Ellen G. White, by W. C. White and D. E. Robinson, 1933. Reprinted as Supplement to *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1981.

How the Desire of Ages Was Written, by Robert W. Olson, 1979.

“Guidelines for Editing Ellen G. White Material,” by Kenneth H. Wood, September, 1989.