
**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ELLEN G.
WHITE'S WRITINGS IN AFRICA (Part Two)**

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15519826>

Abstract

This article addresses the persistent misinterpretations of Ellen White's statements on three contentious issues: amalgamation, interracial marriage, and the Solusi land. To provide clarity and promote a deeper understanding of Ellen White's writings, this paper outlines three essential principles for interpreting her work. These principles, grounded in Adventist teachings and hermeneutics, are applied to each of the three issues, revealing a balanced and contextualized understanding of Ellen White's statements. The paper attempts to carefully examine the historical, cultural, and theological contexts in which Ellen White wrote. It aims to correct common misinterpretations and provide a more accurate understanding of her views on these topics. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a more informed and respectful discussion within the Adventist community, and to promote a deeper appreciation for the complexity and richness of Ellen White's writings.

Keywords: Principles of interpretation. Ellen White's Writings. Amalgamation. Interracial marriage. Solusi Land.

Introduction

Several offshoot groups were identified in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For instance, the Holy Flesh Movement was in existence in the late 1890s and early 1901. They yearned for a tangible manifestation of the “spirit” and engaged in fervent shouting, praying, and singing. They claimed that they could attain a state of holy flesh and unwavering faith in transcending mortal bounds. The movement was condemned by the General Conference leadership and Ellen White. This offshoot asserted that Christ took Adam’s pre-fall nature and which means that He had a ‘holy flesh.’^{xxxv} Other offshoot groups such as the one that encouraged pantheism, the philosophical and religious belief that posits reality, the universe, and nature as synonymous with divinity or a supreme entity, existed as well.

During the formative years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there was an offshoot that was made up of individuals who spurned unique Seventh-day Adventist doctrines or the authority of Ellen White in the initial decades of Adventist history. This group evolved into distinct denominations, eventually disconnecting from their Seventh-day Adventist roots. In this group included the Church of God which refers to a branch that diverged from Adventism in the 1860s, spawning subsequent subdivisions such as Herbert W. Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God and its splinter groups.^{xxxv}

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has successfully resisted the threat of the fringe groups and consolidated even the more its teachings through progressive development of its doctrines. What is going on in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa today should not therefore bring fear within the hearts of faithful members. Ellen White wrote: “Not one cloud has fallen upon the church that God has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork the work of God that He has not foreseen.”^{xxxv} Though offshoot groups had sprang up here and there in Adventist history, none of them threatened the existence of global Adventism.

This article focuses on three groups of individuals who shun Ellen White and her writings because of misinterpretations of her statements on amalgamation, interracial marriage, and the Solusi land issue. The paper also provides three key

principles in interpreting the writings of Ellen White and their application within the Adventist theology.

Ellen G. White's View on Mixed Marriages

Ellen White addressed issues related to interracial marriage. Her statements on mixed marriages should be examined within the context of her time. She made two major statements on mixed marriages. First, Children born from mixed marriages may suffer “humiliation” and “disadvantage.” Second, a mixed marriage can create controversy and confusion.^{xxxv} In this regard, she noted that “time is too short to be lost.” If these statements are not understood within their historical contexts, they can create severe discussion, and even division among church members. Ellen White speaks here within the setting of a Civil War in America engendered mostly by the fight for abolition of slavery and equal rights. Ellen White penned these statements between 1896 and 1912. In the light of insights from the previous section of this Chapter, it is important for the reader to note that Ellen White was not in support of racial inequality. These statements are given as counsels derived certainly from her experiences of stigmas given to those who engaged in mixed marriage. Her statements are the products of circumstances and conditions that made them necessary at the time she wrote them. Ellen White reaffirmed the equality of all races, and she never meant to belittle a race by upholding that Seventh-day Adventists, of her time, should not get involved in mixed marriage. She noted for instance:

We are one brotherhood. No matter what the gain or the loss, we must act nobly and courageously in the sight of God and our Saviour. Let us as Christians who accept the principle that all men, white and black, are free and equal, adhere to this principle, and not be cowards in the face of the world, and in the face of the heavenly intelligences. We should treat the colored man just as respectfully as we would treat the white man. And we can now, by precept and example, win others to this course.^{xxxv}

It was due to impending historical events and circumstances that Ellen White opposed the marriage of the White with the Black. “...there should be no

intermarriage between the white and the colored race.”^{xxxv} She believed that individuals who chose to enter such unions should bear in mind that

they have no right to entail upon their offspring that which will place them at a disadvantage; they have no right to give them as a birthright a condition which would subject them to a life of humiliation. The children of these mixed marriages have a feeling of bitterness toward the parents who have given them this lifelong inheritance. For this reason, if there were no other, there should be no intermarriage between the white and the colored race.^{xxxv}

In this line, she added:

In reply to inquiries regarding the advisability of intermarriage between Christian young people of the white and black races, I will say in my earlier experience this question was brought before me, and the light given me of the Lord was that this step should not be taken; for it is sure to create controversy and confusion.^{xxxv}

The practice of interracial marriage is not unbiblical. While the Israelites were admonished not to marry outside their people, the Bible did not prohibit a union between two individuals who are believers in Christ, particularly within the same denominational faith. It is comprehensible today that interracial marriage is common even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This practice is now viable because society has undergone a significant transformation that enables individuals of different races to marry. What Ellen White conveyed through her earlier statements in this Chapter was simply to look beyond the mere happiness of two individuals choosing to marry. She was also concerned about the joy of the children that may arise from mixed marriages.

Amalgamation Issues

Amalgamation is a word used by Ellen White “to describe how Satan corrupted the world.”^{xxxv} There are several places in her writings where she used the term “amalgamation”. For instance, she spoke of corruption of the people of God through their union with “worldly agencies,”^{xxxv} of biblical truth with “human devising,” and “worldly opinion,” that causes “apostasy,” spiritual “darkness.”^{xxxv} She also wrote about the “the obedient and the disobedient,” that can become “so amalgamated,” to bring confusion in distinguishing. The first mention of

amalgamation in the writings of Ellen White appears in her book titled *Spiritual Gifts* published in 1864, just one year after the official establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White, in this important volume, describes history of the ancient world. In Chapter 6 of this book, Ellen White presents the conditions of the world before the flood. One of the most destructive crimes committed by humanity at this period was the amalgamation of beast and man. During this period, it seems that the concept of amalgamation was mostly connected to popular fables according to which the alliance between the beasts and human beings produced strange beings that appeared like human beings. When Ellen White used the term, some of her critics believed that she was referring to Africans as people who came from the union of beast and man. Others have asked if Ellen White's statements do not give credence to these popular fables of the 19th century period. In Chapter 7 of *the Spiritual Gifts*, Ellen White wrote:

Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the Flood. Since the Flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.^{xxxv}

What Ellen White meant by these passages has been the occasion of some speculation through the years. Some have held that she taught not only that men and beasts have cohabited but also that progeny resulted. However, those who hold this view have contended that this does not support the doctrine of evolution. The evolution theory depends on the idea that small, simple living structures can gradually evolve into ever higher forms of life, finally bringing forth man. But other views provide more explanation. The recent publication by Michael W. Campbell and Timothy G. Standish, argues that a careful examination of grammar and syntax of her statements do not support viewing Ellen White as racist.^{xxxv}

After Ellen White's publication and statements on 'amalgamation,' several critics raised their voices to condemn her as they prematurely concluded that the Prophet was racist. This view as championed by Adventist defectors B. F. Snooth and W. H. Brinkerhoff.^{xxxv} Such acute criticism of the Adventist Prophet led the

leadership of the Church to come up with a response. Uriah Smith, one of the prominent theologians of the Church at the time, argued that the statements of Ellen White some “races of men now living” are chimeras of humans and animals.^{xxxv} Smith’s view was endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was republished in a book *The Visions of Ellen White*.^{xxxv} This interpretation was also approved by James White and was later accepted by Ellen White’s secretary D. E. Robinson, her son W. C. White, and Harold Clark, among several others.^{xxxv}

Smith’s view is certainly helpful. It debunks any attempt of the critics to attach labels of racism to Ellen White. Two explanations stand out in Smith’s publication: (1) Ellen White still called Africans “men”, and did not view them as subhuman.^{xxxv} (2) The Prophet wrote extensively against racism even well before the statements on amalgamation. The critics who argue that Ellen White was racist and that she referred to Africans as products of amalgamation of beast and men contradicted her entire writings on race from 1851 to 1909. She affirmed the full humanity of Blacks and their creation by God.^{xxxv}

A careful examination of Ellen White’s writings from the time she wrote her first piece of work until the time she died reveal that she was not racist. Indeed, if “she ever held racist views, it must have been before she began writing. She certainly gave no indication of it later in life.”^{xxxv} Delbert Baker, one of the foremost historians of black Seventh-day Adventist history in North America wrote: “Ellen White can rightfully be called the initiator of the Black work. No person had a greater impact on the inclusion and status of Black people in the Adventist Church; it is impossible to talk about Black Adventist history without constantly referring to her contributions. ...There would have been little hope for the Black work had Ellen White not championed the cause.”^{xxxv}

As observed in the previous Chapter of this book, no one else can claim to have impacted the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa more than Ellen White. She condemned the denigration of Africans by White missionaries. She stood in favour of the establishment of Seventh-day Adventism among Africans by writing letters of encouragements, counsels, and even, at times, of rebuke to Adventist missionaries in Africa between the years 1886 to 1909. Ellen White not only

condemned the practice of slavery, she also did not view the Whites as superior to the Blacks. She intentionally declared that Blacks are equal with Whites “by creation and redemption.”^{xxxv} It is thus baseless to argue that by the use of the term “amalgamation,” Ellen White meant the process of how Black people came into existence.

Solusi Land Issue

As referred to in Chapter 3, the call from South Africans to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Battle Creek to send missionaries to South Africa was received with much gladness. In July 1887, the denomination sent its first group of missionaries. Upon arriving in South Africa, they primarily worked among people of Western background, with hardly any efforts made to reach the indigenous populations of Southern Africa. However, in 1893, during the visit of O. A. Olsen, the General Conference President, a recommendation was made to begin a mission station among the indigenous populations.^{xxxv}

Following this recommendation, Pieter Wessels, A. T. Robinson, and the General Conference President contacted Cecil John Rhodes, a British colonial authority and the Premier of Cape Colony, by late 1893.^{xxxv} They sought his assistance in obtaining land in Mashonaland to establish a Mission Station among Black Africans. Rhodes providentially handed them a sealed envelope containing his response. In a letter written to his representative in Bulawayo, Matabeleland, Dr. Leander S. Jameson, in 1894, Rhodes instructed that a large piece of land, which belonged to indigenous people, should be freely granted to Seventh-day Adventists. A land measuring 12,000 acres was demarcated and given on July 4, 1894, to Adventists to open the Solusi Mission station.

However, this free gift was not welcomed by the Foreign Mission Board of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The church was skeptical of accepting free land coming from political authorities, as the principle of the separation of Church and State informed the decision of the Mission Board. After some months of discussions and disagreement between the church leaders and General Conference Executive committee members, Ellen White was contacted.

On January 30, 1895, she advised that the General Conference leadership should not refuse the land; She wrote:

You inquire concerning the propriety of receiving gifts from Gentiles or the heathen. The question is not strange; but I would ask you, Who is it that owns our world? Who are the real owners of houses and lands? Is it not God? He has an abundance in our world which He has placed in the hands of men, by which the hungry might be supplied with food, the naked with clothing, the homeless with homes. The Lord would move upon worldly men, even idolaters, to give of their abundance for the support of the work, if we would approach them wisely, and give them an opportunity of doing those things which it is their privilege to do. What they would give we should be privileged to receive.^{xxxv}

African critics argue that Rhodes did not own the land, and therefore, Ellen White's advice to accept the land from local indigenous people without agreeable compensation betrayed her prophetic office.

In counselling the leadership of the General Conference to accept the land, Ellen White was guided by her desire to see Africans receive the gospel. She recognised that a mission station established among Black Africans could be instrumental for advancing the gospel message.^{xxxv} Indeed, Solusi mission station became a centre not only for training Adventist local missionaries but also a significant educational institution where students from across Southern Africa, from various religious backgrounds, were educated.^{xxxv} A retrospective examination of the Solusi land issue today demonstrates that Ellen White was providentially guided by God to direct the leadership of the General Conference to accept the land. God works even through circumstances that may seem unclear to His people to bring His purposes to fruition. Ellen White noted:

We should become acquainted with men in high places and, by exercising the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove, we might obtain advantage from them, for God would move upon their minds to do many things in behalf of His people. If proper persons would set before those who have means and influence the needs of the work of God in a proper light, these men might do much to advance the cause of God in our world. We have put away from us privileges and advantages that we might have had the benefit of, because we chose to stand independent of the world. But we need not sacrifice one principle of truth while taking advantage of every opportunity to advance the cause of God.^{xxxv}

Ellen White affirms that the church should be wise in not separating itself so completely from the world that it misses legitimate avenues for advancing God's cause, while also being careful not to compromise its core beliefs and principles in the process.

Responses to the Critics: Key Principles of the Interpretation of the Writings of Ellen White Within the African Context

In this section, three principles provide tangible guidelines in responding to criticisms about Ellen White and her writings as presented in preceding sections. I briefly explain these principles and state why each of them is significant. The three of them should be understood in line with three other principles presented in Part One of this series of articles: Sola Scriptura, context is key, and focus on central themes.

Integration

The principle of integration, not isolation, is crucial in the interpretation and application of Ellen White's writings within the African Seventh-day Adventist context. This approach emphasizes the need to consider Ellen White's writings in a holistic and interconnected manner, rather than viewing them in isolation or as independent from other important theological and practical teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this regard, four points should be considered: 1. Integration of her writings with Scripture, 2. integration of her writings with Adventist theology and lifestyle, 3. integration with the African context, 4. integration with Adventist identity and mission.

1. Integrating with Scripture: The primary integration must be between Ellen White's writings and the Scriptures. As earlier highlighted in Chapter 4, the Bible is the ultimate authority and standard for all doctrinal and practical matters in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White's writings must be interpreted and applied in a way that is fully consistent with and supportive of the biblical teachings.

2. Integrating with Adventist Theology and Beliefs: Ellen White's writings are an integral part of the Seventh-day Adventist theological framework and must be understood and applied in the context of the church's fundamental beliefs and doctrines. This ensures that the interpretation and application of her writings are aligned with the broader theological understanding and teachings of the Adventist Church.

3. Integrating with the African Context: The interpretation and application of Ellen White's writings in Africa must also take into account the unique cultural, social, and practical realities of the African context. This requires a careful synthesis of her teachings with the specific needs, challenges, and worldviews of the African Adventists. Ellen White's counsels related to fleeing the cities, for instance, should be viewed with wisdom in African regions with high risks of insecurity. Also, the counsel on home schooling until the age of eight or ten years should be contextualized. Many Seventh-day Adventists in Africa grow up in families whose parents never attended school. One should not expect these parents to wait to send their children to schools only when they reach eight or ten years of age. By doing this, these parents would be misinterpreting the prophet's counsel.

4. Integrating with Adventist Identity and Mission: The interpretation and application of Ellen White's writings should also be done in a way that strengthens the Adventist identity and mission within the African context. This involves ensuring that her teachings are understood and applied in a way that reinforces the unique Adventist heritage and values.

Thus, embracing the principle of integration is advantageous. This integrated approach can enable the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa to unlock the full transformative power of its writings and effectively apply them to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by African Seventh-day Adventists. The principle of integration, combined with the diligent use of common sense, can significantly aid in the accurate interpretation and application of Ellen White's writings within the African context. A common-sense approach to interpreting and applying Ellen White's writings should maintain a balanced perspective, neither

over-emphasising nor under-emphasising her role and authority. Her writings should be valued and respected, but not raised to a level that contradicts or undermines the primary authority of Scripture or the broader Adventist theological framework.

Church Unity

The stories of members tearing themselves down over the application and interpretation of Ellen White's writings as noted in Chapter 4 are numerous within the African setting. Ellen White never desired that her writings serve as point of division among Seventh-day Adventists. In this regard, Seventh-day Adventists in Africa should interpret her writings in a way that facilitates unity in truth, love, and mission within the church, resisting divisive separatist offshoots or movements.

Ellen White herself emphasized the importance of unity within the church community. In her writings, she stresses the need for believers to be of one mind and one accord, working together in harmony and love. The transformation of the lives of Christ's disciples should be the leading example for Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White wrote that the disciples of Jesus "Under the Spirit's teaching they received the final qualification," for the mission assigned to them by their Master. "No longer were they ignorant and uncultured. No longer were they a collection of independent units or discordant, conflicting elements. No longer were their hopes set on worldly greatness."^{xxxv} She saw the church as a body, with each member playing a unique role but all necessary for the functioning of the whole. This emphasis on unity can serve as a guiding principle for how Seventh-day Adventists in Africa interpret and apply her writings.

Church unity can help interpret Ellen White's writings in a way that promotes collaboration, understanding, and respect among Adventists. When faced with differing interpretations of her writings, a focus on unity can help avoid division and conflict within the church. Instead of viewing differences as sources of division, Seventh-day Adventists in Africa can see them as opportunities for dialogue, growth, and mutual edification.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa is culturally diverse. Within this diversity church members are called to be teachers of their African brethren and sisters. To achieve this goal, the church should be united in thought, actions, and behaviors. The prayer of Jesus to His Father in favor of His disciples is that “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17: 21, NKJ). Jesus added in his prayer: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (vs. 23). Unity in faith and practice is central to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Africa.

A focus on church unity can help prioritize the central themes and messages of Ellen White’s writings. Rather than getting caught up in minor details or interpretations, Seventh-day Adventists in Africa can use the principle of unity to guide their understanding towards the core teachings of love, mercy, justice, and compassion. This can help create a strong foundation for unity and collaboration within the church.

Ask for Wisdom

Seventh-day Adventists in Africa believe that the gift of prophecy was manifest in the ministry of Ellen White. Her writings were produced under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and just like any other inspired writing, should be approached prayerfully and with humility.

Ellen White’s extensive writings cover a wide range of topics and address various aspects of Christian living, doctrine, and mission. In the context of Africa, with its diverse cultures, languages, and social realities, the need for wisdom in interpreting her writings becomes paramount. Wisdom, in this context, is the ability to discern and apply spiritual truths in a way that is culturally sensitive, relevant, and impactful. It involves seeking God’s guidance, understanding the context in which the writings were given, and applying them in a manner that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities present in the African context. Africa is a

continent of rich cultural heritage, traditions, and practices. In interpreting Ellen White's writings, Seventh-day Adventists in Africa must consider how to communicate and apply her teachings in a way that resonates with the need and practices of the local populations. Wisdom is needed to discern which aspects of her writings are universal truths that transcend culture and which aspects are culturally specific and may require adaptation.

Seeking wisdom involves prayerful reflection, study, and consultation with others within the church community. Interpreting Ellen White's writings is not a solitary endeavor but a communal effort that requires humility, openness, and a willingness to learn from others. By engaging in dialogue, studying together, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists in Africa can gain greater insight and understanding of Ellen White's writings and how they can be applied in their context.

Conclusion

Developing contextualized and well-adjusted principles rooted in a Christ-centered, Bible-based approach, can help the Adventist Church in Africa to allow Ellen White's inspired counsels to be a blessing in African contexts. With this, her writings will illuminate lives with God's love while avoiding the pitfalls of fear-driven extremism or fracturing tendencies that could undermine the integrity of her prophetic ministry.