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# The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Mutual Love: Lessons from the 'Daily' Controversy for Conflict Resolution

Denis Kaiser

Andrews University, [denis@andrews.edu](mailto:denis@andrews.edu)

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**Denis Kaiser** is a PhD candidate, adjunct professor at Andrews University, and assistant annotator of Ellen G. White's letters and manuscripts for the Ellen G. White Estate, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



# The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and mutual love: Lessons from the “daily” controversy for conflict resolution

Just as God's people in biblical times have benefited from the failures and victories of their forefathers, we, too, may learn from the mistakes of our predecessors. The conflict in Adventist history over the interpretation of the *tāmîd* (“daily,” “continual,” perpetual”) in Daniel (8:11–13; 11:31; 12:11) is a good example of what we might learn by way of lessons in conflict resolution. The *tāmîd* had traditionally been identified as pagan Rome. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, some leading Adventist ministers started a dispute by reinterpreting it to symbolize the heavenly ministration of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Such differences occur not only on theological and exegetical levels but also on personal levels, such as emotions, spirituality, assumptions, hidden agendas, and polemics. This article briefly discusses the spiritual climate of that debate and summarizes Ellen G. White's evaluation of and solution to the conflict. Such a discussion may provide insights for modern-day disputes.

## The characteristics of the conflict

Both parties—the one that identified *tāmîd* with Roman paganism (old view) and the one that identified it with Christ's heavenly ministration (new view)—had significant reason to believe their view was correct. Supporters of the old view noted that Ellen White had made a statement about 60 years earlier, which seemed to settle the identity of the *tāmîd*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it felt like an adoption of the new view would question the authority of Ellen G. White and certainly challenge Christ's leadership in the Advent movement. To them the topic was one of great importance. Meanwhile, supporters of the new view argued that the topic was based entirely on Scripture and that they did not need an extrabiblical final arbiter,<sup>3</sup> apparently weakening the authority of Ellen White's writings. It should be noted, however, that while some of the proponents shared merely a few similarities and differed in other important points, they were nevertheless viewed as members of the same group—guilt by association.

Ellen White, however, was critical of both sides. To begin with, she did not approve of those who relied on her writings to settle the question: “I request that my writings shall not be used as the leading argument to settle questions over which there is now so much controversy. I entreat of Elders H, I, J, and others of our leading brethren, that they make no reference to my writings to sustain their views of ‘the daily.’”

“. . . I cannot consent that any of my writings shall be taken as settling this matter. . . .”

“I now ask that my ministering brethren shall not make use of my writings in their arguments regarding this question.”<sup>4</sup>

She gives two reasons for this caution. First, she says she did not receive any divine “instruction on the point under discussion.”<sup>5</sup> Second, the topic and the whole discussion had “been presented to” her as having no “vital importance” or having only “minor importance.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, although she did not have any divine instruction on the exact definition of the *tāmîd*, she did

have divine instruction about the minor significance of the topic. Therefore, even proponents of the old view who employed her writings to support their position had to admit that the topic, in and of itself, was only of minor importance.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Ellen White criticized advocates of the new view for placing excessive focus on trivial matters and trying to sow dissension.<sup>8</sup> Of Prescott, she complained that he spent hours discussing minor points that had no real significance “for the salvation of the soul.”<sup>9</sup> She deplored his tendency to dwell on mistakes and flaws in the denominational history that resulted in confusion, unbelief, and the questioning of the simple truths of God’s work.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, some of the new-view promoters contended that Ellen White’s writings had no doctrinal significance whatsoever, that Seventh-day Adventists did not need an infallible confirmation of their teachings, and that the reasoning for the old view was absolutely absurd.<sup>11</sup>

Although she did not consider it an important topic, for some time Ellen White tried to bring the two parties together for prayer and Bible study because, in her opinion, it was through a prayerful and solemn investigation of the Word, with the Bible as the final arbiter of truth, that the exegetical and theological questions were to be mutually solved.<sup>12</sup> However, the arrogance displayed by promoters of the new view was hard to swallow for those who had helped build up the church. That may explain why, by mid-1910, the proponents of the old view refused to participate in these meetings because they believed further dialogue would be of no avail.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it is easily comprehensible why Ellen White tried to turn the attention away from the specifics of the exegetical or theological aspects to the underlying spiritual problem. She suggested that preconceived opinions, prejudices, evil surmising, irreconcilability, unchristian conduct, callous hearts, and a lack of mutual love were preventing any real solution and true Christian unity.<sup>14</sup>

## The fruits of continuing the conflict

Ellen White was in contact with members of both groups, making them aware of their respective mistakes and delineating the actual and potential implications and repercussions of their actions and behavior. She further emphasized that the real problem was not exegetical or theological questions but spiritual circumstances.

Thus, she repeatedly urged Daniells and Prescott to cease picking flaws in significant denominational publications. She stated that even though some of the authors of these books were not alive anymore, we need to remember that God had used them and through them brought many to a knowledge of the truth. Further, she exhorted that we need to be exceedingly careful not to introduce any subjects in the *Review* that would seem to suggest “flaws in our past experience” and mistakes in how some of the leading ministers had viewed the sanctuary doctrine with respect to the nature of *tāmîd*. The inclination to “search out things to be criticized or condemned” was not inspired of God, nor a job assigned to them by the Lord.<sup>15</sup> Ellen White acknowledged that some Adventist publications that “have brought many to a knowledge of the truth” might contain some things of “minor importance” that should be carefully studied and corrected.<sup>16</sup> In her estimation, the bone of contention was, however, just “jots and tittles,” “unimportant,” “unnecessary,” “not vital,” and “not essential for the salvation of the soul.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it would be entirely counterproductive to overemphasize these things and draw everybody’s attention to them. Instead of having everybody—ministers, canvassers, administrators, for example—publicly debating these issues, the responsibility for looking into these matters should lie with those who were “regularly appointed” for such a task. Otherwise it would result in discrediting soul-saving literature, in providing those who had turned away from the truth with arguments against the church, and in confusing

those who had accepted the message just recently.<sup>18</sup>

Ellen White talked forthrightly with President A. G. Daniells,<sup>19</sup> who tended to put in the weight of his office “to decide the question.” White said that God had not called him to decide theological questions or meddle with the denomination’s publications. She condemned the exercise of such “dominating power” and “kingly rule,” for the president of a conference or the General Conference was not supposed to be an oppressive ruler.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, she rebuked Haskell for republishing and circulating the 1843 chart<sup>21</sup> because it tended to create confusion, quarrels, and divisions. It was a mistake that would play into Satan’s hands, who would use it to this end.<sup>22</sup>

Concentrating on the subject of the *tāmîd* would divert the church leaders’ attention from the golden moments that should be spent in familiarizing people with the message of salvation and training church members how to do the same.<sup>23</sup> White observed that both groups lacked wise actions and needed divine wisdom.<sup>24</sup> The behavior and actions exhibited by both groups in the conflict would encourage and invite satanic agencies to take even little differences and magnify these as major disagreements to produce confusion, divisions, uncertainty, loss of confidence, skepticism, doubts, questioning, and unbelief among believers and nonbelievers.<sup>25</sup> The agitation of the subject would not only unsettle minds and “place the truth in an uncertainty” but also tempt those who had not been thoroughly converted to jump to quick conclusions and to hasty decisions.<sup>26</sup> People would become uncertain about God’s leading in the Advent movement and the “doctrines that have been established by the sanction of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Restoring the confidence of those who had been unsettled and confused would require much time and effort.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the injury done to church members, Ellen White also foresaw damage to the church’s evangelistic work. Time and again she emphasized that the unchristian behavior of some

of the ministers and church leaders and the loud chatter about supposed mistakes, errors, and flaws in Adventist publications and past experience only provided ammunition for Satan, the enemy of truth, to deploy opponents of the truth, people “who have departed from the faith,” and “gone out from us.” They would take advantage of the inner-Adventist conflict and make a “mountain out of a molehill,”<sup>29</sup> and, as a result, hinder the church’s divinely appointed evangelistic work, turn people away from the truth, and cause even “a worse issue.”<sup>30</sup>

### A spiritual redirection

As mentioned already, in Ellen White’s view, the theological and exegetical details of the debate were only of minor importance whereas the real underlying problem was of a spiritual nature. This is evident from her frequent mention that the leaders of both groups were encouraging “Satan,” “Satanic agencies,” “evil angels,” “the enemy,” “the enemy of truth,” and “fallen angels.”<sup>31</sup> That being the case, it is easily comprehensible why she pushed for a spiritual redirection as the solution to the conflict. Thus, she urged leading ministers and church members to humble their hearts before the Lord and pray often, though not necessarily long, in faith for the sanctification of soul and mind.<sup>32</sup> They were to follow Christ’s example and cultivate meekness and lowliness of heart (Matt. 11:29).<sup>33</sup> She frequently emphasized that the controversy about the *tāmīd* was completely unnecessary but that there was a real need for seeking the Lord for a reconversion,<sup>34</sup> a “true conversion of heart and life,”<sup>35</sup> a “daily” conversion.<sup>36</sup> Bringing self “under the control of the Holy Spirit,” members were to consecrate their hearts unreservedly to God, depend fully on Him, and cooperate with divine and angelic influences.<sup>37</sup> This individual effort<sup>38</sup> would make a “sacred impression” on the minds of fellow ministers, church members, and new converts.<sup>39</sup>

A second important aspect emphasized by Ellen White was the need for

unity. She wished to see in the ministers a desire to answer Jesus’ last prayer (John 17) and develop true Christian unity.<sup>40</sup> She asked them to bury their differences and “press together,” keep a “united front,” blend “together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” show “respect for the men of age,” and, as far as possible, be in accord in their preaching and activities.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, White did not call them to renounce their present distinct positions but to refrain from voicing their differences of opinion.<sup>42</sup> She explained that people were to cultivate the wisdom to know when to speak and when to be silent, what burdens to bear, and which matters to leave alone.<sup>43</sup> The avoidance of strife, openness to one another, cooperation in the work of salvation, and the preaching of the clear and common truths will have a “powerful impression on human minds” for “in unity there is strength.”<sup>44</sup>

Besides emphasizing the need for daily conversion and true Christian unity, White also urged ministers to focus on different lines of ministry—church, schools, family, and evangelism. They should preach and teach the “important lines of truth,” the “sacred truths,” and “vital subjects” in an earnest, simple, coherent, and faith-affirming way. The *tāmīd* and its related issues were not a “test question,” even though many presented this question like that, but the real “testing questions” were obedience and salvation, “the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”<sup>45</sup> They were not only to preach to church members but also to train and mentor them. Thus, they themselves were to learn from the simple but essential teachings of Christ and also teach church members “how to give others a knowledge of the saving truth for this time.”<sup>46</sup>

In particular, the church was to make special and earnest efforts to help parents consecrate their time and strength to their children so that they might understand the need of seeking Christ for their own salvation.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in all Adventist schools, teachers were to help their students learn how to be

saved and “put on the white robe of the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>48</sup>

Going beyond efforts for church members, parents, and children, Ellen White frequently called attention to a most neglected cause, the necessary work of evangelizing the cities.<sup>49</sup> Ministers were to carry a burden for souls with mind and heart, “preach the Word,” follow Christ’s example in saving people, and share the knowledge of Christ’s saving truth and message with those living in the great cities as well as in the worldwide mission fields.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusion

The features of, and the solutions to, the historic quarrel about the correct interpretation of the *tāmīd* in Daniel 8 may help us in resolving disputes in our denomination today. Ellen White told the two contending parties that Scripture, the Word, should be the foundation for settling doctrinal and exegetical questions. However, resolving such questions is only possible when everyone involved comes to the table with a spirit of mutual love. Nevertheless, a lack of willingness to come to an agreement and find a biblical answer should not be an excuse for tabling a controversial topic but a call to an individual search for a new heart and spirit. If the interaction with one another is not characterized by such an attitude and spirit, a continued discussion of the subject will only make matters worse. The contending parties should turn away from the subject and focus on individual heart conversion; the training of church members; the education of parents, children, and students; and sharing the gospel message with those in need of salvation. All these lines of ministry should be pervaded by a mutual desire for unity with fellow believers and by a desire to form a close love relationship with Jesus.

Even though a mutual investigation of the subject of the *tāmīd* may have been impossible in her time, Ellen White seemed to envision that there would be, in the future, a time to study the subject further, based on Scripture, as is indicated by her frequent clarification

that the issue should be put to rest only “at this time,” “now,” “just now,” “at this period of our history,” and “at this stage of our experience.”<sup>51</sup> Still, it is clear that the spirit in which the church approaches both doctrinal and practical questions is more important than settling the issues themselves. ❏

- 1 Denis Kaiser, “The History of the Adventist Interpretation of the ‘Daily’ in the Book of Daniel from 1831 to 2008” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 2009).
- 2 For example, J. N. Loughborough, “Time Taken Away of the Daily,” *Bible Training School*, September 1910, 71; idem, “Other Views of the 1,290 and 1,335 Days,” *Bible Training School*, December 1910, 25; S. N. Haskell to A. G. Daniells, January 27, 1908; idem to E. G. White, December 6, 1909; cf. A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905–1915*, vol. 6 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1982), 248, 250, 252, 253; Jerry Moon, “The Daily,” in *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 752.
- 3 For example, L. R. Conradi to J. N. Loughborough, April 16, 1907; idem to A. G. Daniells, October 11, 1910; W. A. Spicer to L. R. Conradi, September 7, 1910; Daniel Heinz, *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar, Evangelist und Organisator der Siebententags-Adventisten in Europa*, 3rd rev. ed., Archiv für international Adventgeschichte, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1998), 97, 98.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), 1:164.
- 5 *Ibid.*; cf. *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981–1993), 9:107, 12:224.
- 6 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:164; cf. *Manuscript Releases*, 9:106, 12:224, 10:334.
- 7 Stephen N. Haskell to Arthur G. Daniells, January 27, 1908, (Silver

- Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1909); Ellen G. White to W. C. White, December 6, 1909 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1909).
- 8 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:334, 359.
- 9 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:359.
- 10 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223–225.
- 11 L. R. Conradi to Arthur G. Daniells, October 11, 1910, Center for Adventist Research, Berrien Springs, MI. [CAR]; idem to J. N. Loughborough, April 16, 1907, CAR; cf. W. W. Prescott, *The Daily: A Brief Reply to Two Leaflets on This Subject* (n.p.: the author, [1924]), 1, 13, 23.
- 12 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:223.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 9:106, 20:223; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 15 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:225, 9:106, 10:336, 20:17, 18, 20.
- 16 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:165.
- 17 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:359, 12:224, 9:106, 20:17, 18; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 18 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:165.
- 19 A. G. Daniells was president of the General Conference from 1901 to 1922.
- 20 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:19–21.
- 21 For more information on the 1843 chart, see Kaiser, “Ellen White and the ‘Daily’ Conflict,” 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 19; P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 54, 310; LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 547, 557, 616, 617, 638, 669, 720–722, 728, 733–737.
- 22 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 9:106.
- 23 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:17; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 24 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:224, 9:106; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 25 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:334, 336, 337, 12:224, 225, 9:106, 20:17, 18, 21, 22; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.

- 26 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223, 224, 9:107, 20:21.
- 27 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 9:107, 10:337.
- 28 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:337.
- 29 She employed this phrase frequently to describe the issue of the *tāmīd* and the way it was discussed by members of both parties. See White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:334, 9:106.
- 30 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:336, 359, 12:224, 225; 9:106, 20:18, 21; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 31 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:334, 336, 337, 12:225, 9:106, 20:17, 18, 21, 22.
- 32 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223, 20:20, 10:337; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 33 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 34 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:20; *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 35 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223.
- 36 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:165.
- 37 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 9:107, 20:21; *Selected Messages*, 1:165, 166.
- 38 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:166.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 1:167, 168.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:18–20, 223, 9:106; *Selected Messages*, 1:167.
- 42 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168.
- 43 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:334, 20:18, 19.
- 44 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:168.
- 45 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:164, 165, 167, 168; *Manuscript Releases*, 12:224, 225.
- 46 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:225.
- 47 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223, 224.
- 48 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:223.
- 49 White, *Manuscript Releases*, 20:18–21.
- 50 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:165, 166, 168; *Manuscript Releases*, 20:18, 19, 21; 10:335, 336.
- 51 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:167, 168; *Manuscript Releases*, 20:17, 12:223–225.

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## “All things work together for good”

Brother Corneliu, a retired engineer, has been active in the church all his life. He was a source of courage and steadfastness during the long years of communism. After his retirement, he moved to Bucharest and was a member of the largest church in that city when I became its pastor in 2005.

About three years ago, Brother Corneliu realized how different mobile devices could help him to read and listen to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy books while walking, riding the bus, or doing different things. He was so enthusiastic about this discovery that whenever I

would encounter him, he always had something to share with me from new and surprising truths he found in the old books he had read all his life. With a big smile on his face, he would speak of the new devotional life he was experiencing and its benefits.

In December 2012, Brother Corneliu was diagnosed with a cancer of the vocal cords. Making decisions for a specific therapeutic approach was a very difficult time for the whole family, but he was still confident—always speaking of his new life in the Word. He told me: “Now I will be better prepared to speak about God to people with a cancer.”



His wife, his family, and the whole church rallied around him for prayer and support, resulting in greater unity and faith. The latest medical tests indicate he has been cured. Brother Corneliu is proof “that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

—ADRIAN BOCANEANU, MA, IS A PASTOR AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIRECTOR OF SPERANTA TV FOR THE ADVENTIST MEDIA CENTER, BUCHAREST, ROMANIA.