

The Great Controversy Project 2.0

On 20 August 2021, AdventistToday.org published the following:

“13 August 2021 | Ted Wilson, the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, has announced General Conference plans to distribute a billion copies of Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy*. . . . ‘*The Great Controversy* is a marvelous book. I believe every word in this book. I support it and I promote it—the full and complete book,’ said Wilson. . . . ‘We’re planning two years of massive distribution of millions upon millions of the full, large *Great Controversy* in 2023 and 2024. It has already been voted and is called, The Great Controversy Project 2.0. We are talking about distributing up to 1 billion copies,’ said Wilson.”

Of course, this will not be the first time the SDA Church or one of its independent organizations has done a mass distribution of *The Great Controversy*. E.g., one source reports, “Remnant Publications sent more than 350,000 copies of the book to residents of Charlotte, North Carolina in 2014, after having already sent a million books to people in Manhattan and over 300,000 to people in Washington, D.C.”

So, what is this book and what is its history? White claimed to have received its rudiments in an 1848 vision. After further asserting that this alleged, universal theme of conflict between Christ and Satan was greatly expanded to her in 1858, she subsequently published a version of it as *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1: *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels*, (1858). This was significantly enlarged in the four-volume series, *Spirit of Prophecy*, (1870-84), the last volume of which (1984), covering the Christian period to the present, was sometimes called *The Great Controversy*. As the fifth volume of an expanded project, *The Conflict of the Ages* series, the 1884 edition was enhanced and published in 1888 as *The Great Controversy*. It reached its final, edited form in 1911. The book covers the Christian period from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to the 19th century as history and predicts events to the return of Jesus and beyond.

But why this book, and what about it is deemed to be relevant to a billion, English-speaking people today? The first four volumes in the *Conflict* series are seriously outdated and often methodologically unsupportable portrayals and interpretations of the biblical literature and the events they reflect. *The Great Controversy* shares the same anachronistic assessment. The portrayal of Christian history and its significant players is no more critically sound or methodologically supportable than its four preceding companions.

More importantly, this dated book has nothing of significance to say to modern readers. Its author, a self-proclaimed 19th century visionary, revered by Adventists as a prophet, does not anticipate anything that actually occurred during the 20th and 21st centuries—World War I, the pandemic of 1917, the Depression, Nazism, World War II, the Holocaust, the Cold War, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement, the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the European Community, the revolution of transportation and communication, computers and the Internet, COVID-19, September 11 and January 6, the rise of China and India, the State of Israel and conflict in the Middle East, Q-Anon, the disaster in Afghanistan, and many more positive and

negative phenomena that we live with today. All that it holds out to those who lived through these phenomena or continue to live under their shadow is a mythical, celestial war that is said to extend from before the creation of the earth to after its destruction and the prospect of personal future redemption or damnation based on allegiance to Saturday as the sabbath. In other words, it is cultic Adventism at its best (or its worst). I predict that the vast majority who will receive this sectarian marketing gift will dispose of it the same way as those to whom it was previously distributed.

However, the real tragedy of this project is the misguided and disconnected mindset of those who conceived it and promote it. For a faith community to have any relevance it must deliver messages and model behaviors that address the needs and aspirations of both its own people and those outside the group. These needs and aspirations rarely, if ever, consist of uncertainties about apocalyptic and sectarian matters. Instead, they deal with the challenges of everyday family and community life – where will I live, what will I eat, how can I keep my family safe from disease and crime, how can I deal with depression, why am I hated for how I look or whom I love, how can I deal with family conflicts, will I ever be able to retire, etc. Because Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* has nothing to say about any of these things, most modern readers will understandably disregard it, as they should.

Warren C. Trenchard
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