

The Ministry of Healing

THEODORE N. LEVTEROV

Theodore N. Levterov, Ph.D., is director of the Ellen G. White Estate branch office on the Loma Linda University campus, as well as a faculty member of the Loma Linda University School of Religion. Levterov served as a pastor both in his native land of Bulgaria and the United States before coming to Loma Linda in 2011. His Ph.D. dissertation at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary dealt with early Adventist understandings of Ellen White's prophetic gift.

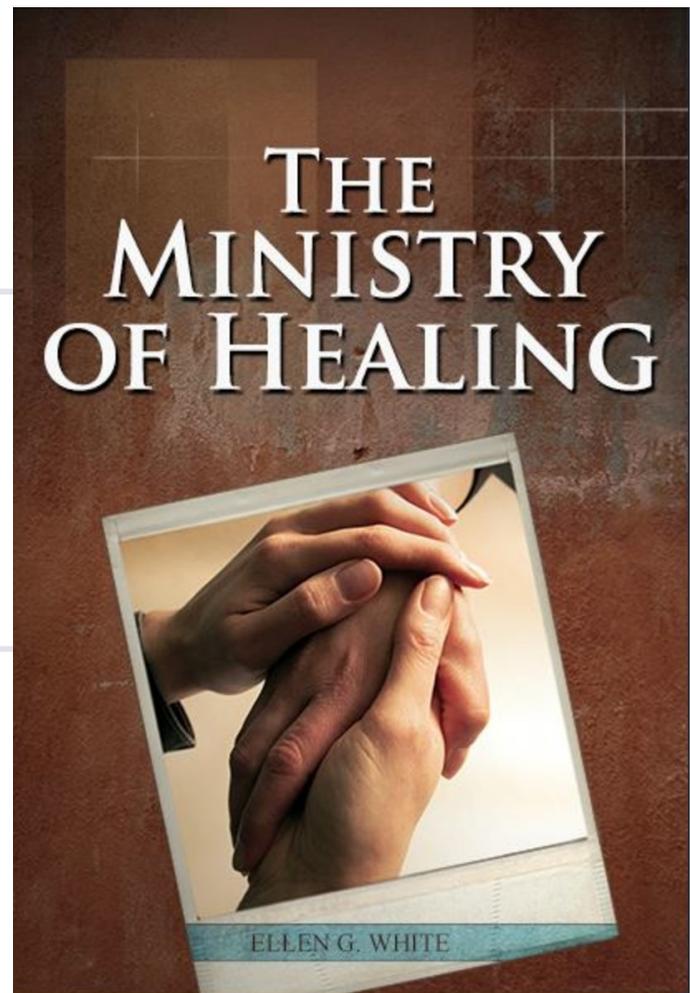
The Ministry of Healing, published in 1905, is considered Ellen White's most comprehensive work on health and healthful living. The book is also a representation of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of health. As with many of her other works, Ellen White did not write it chapter by chapter, but largely compiled it from materials she had previously prepared on the topic.

The idea for the book came as early as 1903. "My next book," Ellen White wrote, "is to be on

Temperance and the Medical Missionary work. It is my purpose to give the manuscript of this book to our Sanitariums, to help them to raise the debts resting on them. . . . I think that this is the best I can do, and that this will be a most appropriate book for this purpose."¹ She assigned the preparation of the volume to Marian Davis, her long-time literary assistant, who compiled materials from Ellen White's previous writings on health-related topics and incorporated them into appropriate chapters.

Earlier Health Writings

Ellen White began writing on the subject of health after she received her first comprehensive health vision June 5, 1863. In 1864 she published a short booklet entitled *An Appeal to Mothers* and a chapter on "Health" in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4.² A year later, in 1865, she also contributed a six-part article, "Disease and Its Causes," for the book, *Health, or How to Live*, edited by James White.³ The book was the first major publication on health by the



The Ministry of Healing by Ellen G. White

Photo courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

new denomination. Beyond giving general instructions on healthful living, these three works helped Seventh-day Adventists to make a fundamental shift in their thinking on the subject of health. Instead of ignoring the topic, Adventists would make it an integral part of their overall mission to the world.

During the next decades Ellen White continued to write on various health matters. Her articles appeared in denominational papers or in her *Testimonies for the Church* volumes. In 1890 the health writings of both James and Ellen White were brought together in the book *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*.⁴ Ellen White was not completely satisfied with the work, however, envisioning a more comprehensive volume on health, a desire that ultimately led to the publication of *The Ministry of Healing* in 1905.

From Preparation to Publication

Although Marian Davis did the gathering of relevant materials for *The Ministry of Healing*, Ellen White was deeply involved in the process of putting the book together. According to her son, William C. White, questions discussed in the preparation of the book included: Who is the intended audience? How much space should be given to each topic? What should be the order of subjects and content?

Ellen White read each chapter and finally approved it. Interestingly, she would change some of her original material in order to make the final version of the book more readable and understandable to a wider non-Adventist audience. It was her desire that *The Ministry of Healing* be useful for all people and not merely Seventh-day Adventists.⁵ She also asked additional readers such as Dr. David Paulson to offer suggestions regarding terminology and expression of thoughts so as to make the reading clearer. Finding suitable illustrations also took considerable time.⁶

The assembled contents of the book, however, might have been even more intentional. *The Ministry of Healing* was published during the so-called “Kellogg crisis” when Dr. John H. Kellogg, the most prominent medical professional in Adventism at that time, published *The Living Temple*, a book that included pantheistic elements. Furthermore, toward the end of the 1890s, Kellogg wrote a letter to Ellen White expressing certain extreme positions regarding health and healing. Complete healing of disease, he believed, was possible as an evidence of God’s forgiveness and achievement of moral perfection in this life.⁷ Specific chapters in *The Ministry of Healing*, (for example: “The Co-Working of the Divine and the Human”; “Prayer for the Sick”; “Diet and Health”; and “Extremes in Diet”), seem designed to refute such “extreme” views, directing readers toward a balanced understanding of health from both spiritual (theological) and practical aspects.

On April 11, 1905, Ellen White reported that she had “just finished reading over the proofs of ‘Ministry of Healing’” with the hope that the book would be out for the upcoming General Conference session in Washington, D. C. in May.⁸ The volume, however, did not come off the press until later that year.

Meanwhile, the General Conference expressed its gratitude and appreciation to Ellen White for her plan to donate the profits from the sale of the book to relieve the debts accrued by the Seventh-day Adventist medical institutions. It also agreed to bear some of the initial publication expenses and made a special effort to promote its sale and distribution.⁹

September 12, 1905, was announced as the book's publication date and the Pacific Press Publishing Association (located in Mountain View, California, at that time) made 10,000 copies available for sale. The book contained 541 pages and more than one hundred illustrations.¹⁰ The original cover of the first edition, for example, portrayed an image of two grapevines with large leaves. According to W. C. White's explanation, all the illustrations were not only to "beautify" the text, but to "impress upon the reader the truths" presented in each chapter.¹¹ The initial cost was set at \$1.50 per copy.¹²

The book was an immediate success. Within two months *The Ministry of Healing* needed reprinting. The Review and Herald Publishing also produced its own edition. Printing plates were made available for the Southern Publishing Association in Nashville, Tennessee, the Echo Publishing Company in Melbourne, Australia, and the International Tract Society in London, England.¹³

Major Themes

The book's eight sections cover four general themes. First, the book underlines Christ as our Example in the ministry of healing. Ellen White portrays Him as "the great Healer" and the "Source of Life."⁴ In fact, as she pointed out, during His earthly ministry, "Christ devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching"⁵ Moreover, His ministry did not discriminate against anyone. Instead, Jesus helped everyone regardless of their nationality, class, rank, or creed. "The Saviour's work was not restricted to any time or place. His compassion knew no limit," Ellen White wrote. "He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul."⁶ Thus the Adventist mission was to reflect the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus for all people around the world. "To reach the people, wherever they are, and whatever their position or condition, and to help them in every way possible—this is true ministry."⁷

The next major theme is the concept of "wholeness." Ellen White views health comprehensively, including its physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. As she put it: "Our Saviour's words, 'Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28), are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental, and spiritual ills."⁸ The spiritual aspect of health became and still is a unique Adventist concept of healthful living. According to the Adventist philosophy of health, healing must include a spiritual component since a human being is seen as a whole person.

A third major theme found in the book involves practical advice for doing medical work by health professionals. For example, entire chapters focus on such issues as the care for the sick in the sickroom, the use of remedies, prayer for the sick, and other similar topics. Ellen White discusses the subjects from a Christian perspective

although the principles have universal significance. Physicians, for instance, were not only to point people to the divine Physician, Jesus Christ, but also to educate them in the principles of healthful living. As she noted, "Gospel workers should be able also to give instruction in the principles of healthful living. There is sickness everywhere, and most of it might be prevented by attention to the laws of health. The people need to see the bearing of health principles upon their well-being, both for this life and for the life to come."¹⁹ Whole sections give similar practical counsels.

A fourth major theme includes general instructions designed to help people live and enjoy healthier and happier lives. The book touches on numerous topics from hygiene, diet, and dress, to family relationships and education. The final chapters note the importance of daily living with God and experiencing life to the fullest. Such experiences, according to Ellen White, are to be visible through a life of service to others. "We shall rejoice to be co-workers with Christ, and we shall not fear to trust His care," she wrote. "If we make God our strength we shall have clear perceptions of duty, unselfish aspirations; our life will be actuated by a noble purpose which will raise us above sordid motives."²⁰ In sum, the book includes practical applications for daily living rather than mere theoretical ideas.

Ellen White seemed to be personally satisfied with the outcome of the book and the accomplishment of its primary purposes. A few years after its initial publication she reflected: "The book 'Ministry of Healing' may do the same work for our sanitariums and health institutions that 'Christ's Object Lessons' has done for our schools. This book contains the wisdom of the Great Physician. To me, it has been a great privilege to donate my work on these books to the cause of God."²¹ *The Ministry of Healing* is still considered one of the best and most popular works by Ellen G. White.

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