

PRESS RELEASE FROM SDANONYMOUS

Concerning SDAnonymous?

SDAnonymous is a group of several dozen Seventh-day Adventists from all over the world. SDAnonymous represents 13 nationalities and can be found on all the major continents around the globe. Most of SDAnonymous are voting members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some members hold employment within the institutions of the Church, others are students or laity. There is a diversity of beliefs among the members of SDAnonymous on a variety of contemporary issues. We are united by one common desire – to see transparency by the leadership of the Church regarding our distinctive heritage, beginning with the release of all the writings of Ellen G. White.

Concerning the Writings of Ellen G. White

Generally held by SDAnonymous is a respect for the writings of Ellen G. White. We acknowledge that there are many criticisms of her writings, and even contradicting theories on what she believed. At least 50% of the letters and manuscripts of Ellen White are unreleased in part or in full. We see that thorough examination of Ellen White's views and the meaning of her words is hindered by the restricted access to her complete writings. We do not believe that people should have to live near the Research Centers to have the privilege of access to these complete writings.

Important research, such as Ellen White's literary growth, the development of her thought on various topics and the study of Ellen White's contribution to Adventist heritage cannot be fully realized under such restrictions. Searchable, digitized access, such as has been available only to a handful of privileged people since the 1980's is required to allow all interested parties to contribute to a fuller collective understanding of the beginnings of the church and the life and teachings of the messenger of God.

Concerning the Will of Ellen White

Ellen White's will is dated 1912. Ellen White died on July 16, 1915. Her will named five men as trustees of her manuscript collection – William C. White, Clarence C. Crisler, Charles H. Jones, Arthur G. Daniells, Frank M. Wilcox. These men were not the beneficiaries of her writings, but trustees. The will does not explicitly name a beneficiary or beneficiaries for the manuscript file, but the existence of trustees implies the existence of beneficiaries.

Ellen White's intended beneficiaries are identified in a letter to one of the men she would make her trustees. She wrote in 1907 to F. M. Wilcox that her "writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last." She continued by saying that her "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**." SDAnonymous are thus advocates of the true beneficiaries and true owners of the writings of Ellen White – "the people" who hold her in high regard.

Concerning the White Estate

Contrary to their online claim, the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. were not “created by the last will and testament of Ellen G. White”. The White Estate did not come into existence until 1933, almost two decades after Ellen White died. It was created by the five trustees named in the will, as the Articles of Incorporation say, “to carry out and perform the provisions of the charitable trust created in the last will and testament of Ellen G. White, deceased.”

In a trust, there is not supposed to be a bias of the trustees to any of the beneficiaries. From the 1940s, there is documentary evidence that the White Estate has served as an instrument of church leadership to enforce contemporary policy, including, but not limited to, the following actions.

- a. Using compilations at the urging of the Ministerial Association to enforce doctrinal divisions in the 1940s.
- b. Refusing access to researchers Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short in the 1940s and 1950s for material on the 1888 conference.
- c. Threatening legal action against Wieland and Short for the use of unpublished statements researched in privately held collections.
- d. Allowing access at the same time to Protestant scholars such as Walter Martin around the same time period who questioned many of the positions of Seventh-day Adventism.
- e. Altering statements to further doctrinal policy of the church leadership.
- f. A long history of restricted access to the writings of Ellen White by researchers who do not subscribe exactly to the official portrayal of her life and teachings as presented by the trustees.
- g. The removal of employment of staff that have used writings in research without the approval of the trustees.

SDAnonymous respect the high responsibilities that the White Estate holds. At the same time, we recognize that these positions are held by fallible men and feel it must be stated that the inspiration given to Ellen White does not extend to those who hold her writings in trust. We believe that it is possible to simultaneously hold a respect for the position of the White Estate and a strong disagreement over policy and actions of that body.

Concerning the White Estate’s Intentions to Release the Writings

Through the providence of God, the 1990’s saw a change in policy towards releasing the entire writings. Between 1995 and 2001, William Fagal, Director of the Andrews University Branch Office, answered several email queries regarding the unpublished writings with the promise that the complete letters and manuscripts were being prepared as a searchable CD-ROM. Affidavits from the White Estate prove that this was completed on Folio Infobase in 2002 – the same format as the Complete Published CD-ROM.

During this same period, the trustees commissioned the book “Messenger of the Lord” by Herbert E. Douglass, published in 1998. This book carries approval by the “Board of Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.” in the preface. In this book, Douglass reveals, “With the passage of time, and increased research needs, the release policy of the White Estate was changed from asking, ‘Why should it be published?’ to ‘Why not publish it?’ This eventually led to the decision to make all of Ellen White’s letters and manuscripts available on CD-ROM.” (page 529)

The position of SDAanonymous is that the trustees acknowledged the time to release these writings as fulfilled in the 1990s. We stand by the spirit of that decision.

Concerning the Delay

Sometime in 2002-2003, just as the CD-ROM was completed, the policy of the White Estate changed again. A new plan was formed to release print copies of chronological volumes of the manuscripts and letters, heavily annotated. The initial volume containing the first thirteen years of writings (1847-1859) was first announced to have been due for completion for 2005 in the Adventist Review of that year. The project has been continually delayed from that time until now. The affidavits of the White Estate claim that a total of \$1 million has been spent so far on preparing just this first volume. It is a fact that there are some single later years of Ellen White's life which contain almost as much literary output as these first 13 years combined.

SDAanonymous do not devalue the historical context an annotated edition would provide. We welcome any contributions to understanding the Adventist Heritage. We do disagree with the newer policy to wait until the annotation project is complete to release the writings to the people of the church. We see no reason why the writings cannot be released immediately while an annotation project is forthcoming.

We are concerned that the delay may lead to suspicions that the trustees are trying to control the way the writings are interpreted to reinforce the policy of the church. At the rate the annotation project is going, even if it speeds up considerably as more documentary evidence is available for later years, it could foreseeably be many decades before the project can be hoped to be completed. We suggest that the help of volunteer research efforts may speed the project up if the CD-ROM is released to any who wish to research these writings.

Concerning Copyright

US copyright laws limit the copyright term for unpublished writings as extending from the death of the author to an addition of 70 years. For those writings not in public domain before the 1976 Copyright Act, an extension brought the term of copyright for Ellen White's writings to January 1, 2003. Under US copyright laws, even the compilations do not create copyright in the pre-existing letters and manuscripts. As such, all the manuscripts and letters became public domain a decade ago. Had the White Estate released the entire manuscripts and letters on CD-ROM in 2002, they would have retained copyright of these writings.

The Berne Convention provides that these writings are likewise deemed as out of copyright in all other subscribing countries. Even by the stricter Australian copyright laws, the movement of copyright ownership to the public domain in other countries is recognized. SDAanonymous believe that the copyright ownership of these writings now matches the true beneficiaries of Ellen White's will in the Public Domain.

Concerning Acquisition of the Writings

SDAanonymous began as a few online friends almost a decade ago who began collecting manuscripts and letters from the Ellen White Research Centers of the seminaries they attended. The group has grown globally since that time to include several dozen individuals. Sometime last year, a staff

member from one of these Centers revealed to a member of SDAnonymous the online location of the letters and manuscripts as well as some ways they might be retrieved. As SDAnonymous only had a couple thousand documents at that time, it seemed a much quicker way to complete the collection.

The database of unpublished writings was accessed through a backdoor in the egwwritings.org website. This action has been incorrectly portrayed in the media as “theft” or “stealing”. Legally, theft or stealing requires, as part of the action, the permanent depriving of the property of another person. As such, copying documents even through overcoming technological protection, is not theft. Furthermore, theft implies ownership. You cannot truly steal something you already own. The position of SDAnonymous is that the writings held in trust by the White Estate are truly owned by the real beneficiaries of her will – the believers who hold her writings as instructive. For these reasons, the position of SDAnonymous is that the acquisition of these documents is not theft, but restoration.

Concerning Brendan Knudson

Brendan Knudson is a relatively new addition to SDAnonymous. He contributed a sizeable quantity of scanned documents acquired through his own researches. He is the only non-member of the Seventh-day Adventist church within SDAnonymous. When the idea was given to retrieve the remaining writings from the database, Brendan consented to have the digital trail lead to him to save the rest of SDAnonymous from internal discipline. This included the use of similar usernames to his in seeking advice on website vulnerabilities.

Brendan was responsible for setting up the web presence of SDAnonymous. Being remotely located in Armenia, he also set up a proxy server for all our activities in retrieving the database. This has been largely the limits of his activities with our acquisition process. Brendan holds to a Non-Trinitarian view of God similar to many of the early Pioneers. While not all in SDAnonymous agree with his views on this matter, we have not made agreement on every particular a prerequisite for our group. Such judgmentalism is not in accordance with our philosophy.

Concerning the White Estate Lawsuits

The White Estate initiated civil action against Brendan Knudson in the Australia on August 3, 2012 seeking an injunction against all actions of Brendan regarding the writings of Ellen White with the first hearing on the 6th. A private investigator working for the White Estate’s legal counsel mistook the visit of one of Brendan’s brothers to his mother’s house as Brendan’s location at that place. Service of legal papers was made upon Brendan’s autistic brother while no one else was home causing considerable distress.

On August 9, a settlement offer was sent to Brendan to be accepted within 7 days. In discussions with legal counsel for the White Estate in Australia, Brendan was told that the White Estate wished to negotiate and settle peaceably. Brendan conferred with SDAnonymous and replied on the 13th with a counter-offer accepting and even exceeding most of the White Estate’s terms on several conditions required by SDAnonymous, including that the writings are released on CD-ROM by the end of 2012. On the 23rd, communication was received indicating the White Estate rejected all terms of the counter-offer. Brendan immediately drafted a reply asking whether the White Estate were

really interested in negotiating or dictating a settlement. 48 hours (later extended to one week) was offered for the White Estate to give a more amicable response. The White Estate have now exceeded that time period and we are currently awaiting word on the White Estate's decision.

While claiming to desire to negotiate and settle peaceably, the White Estate initiated simultaneous civil action in the US with DMCA takedown notices sent to hosting and domain registration companies Brendan used. On August 16, a civil suit was officially filed with Maryland District Court. Papers have not been officially served upon Brendan for this action in the US.

At no point before August 3 was Brendan Knudson or SDAanonymous contacted through any desire to dialogue with White Estate officials prior to action being taken.

It is estimated that tens of thousands of dollars in church money has already been spent by the White Estate in pursuing legal action in this matter. Some of this money comes from tithes and offerings. By neglecting to communicate through easily accessible online contacts, large mistakes have been made including not being aware of Brendan's geographic location. As a result, it is likely that much of the legal action will be dismissed as outside of court jurisdiction.

Concerning Lawsuits Between Believers

The White Estate, in aggressively seeking to defend their perceived ownership of the writings of Ellen White, are apparently completely contradicting the teachings they hold in trust. Chapter 37 of Selected Messages, Volume 3, contains much counsel against lawsuits between believers. Here are a couple of selections:

"To lean upon the arm of the law is a disgrace to Christians; yet this evil has been brought in and cherished among the Lord's chosen people. Worldly principles have been stealthily introduced, until in practice many of our workers are becoming like the Laodiceans--half-hearted, because so much dependence is placed on lawyers and legal documents and agreements. Such a condition of things is abhorrent to God." (Manuscript 128, 1903; in Selected Messages, Volume 3, p. 303)

"I have written largely in regard to Christians who believe the truth placing their cases in courts of law to obtain redress. In doing this, they are biting and devouring one another in every sense of the word, "to be consumed one of another." They cast aside the inspired counsel God has given, and in the face of the message He gives they do the very thing He has told them not to do. Such men may as well stop praying to God, for He will not hear their prayers. They insult Jehovah, and He will leave them to become the subjects of Satan until they shall see their folly and seek the Lord by confession of their sins." (Manuscript 64, 1898; in Selected Messages, Volume 3, p. 302)

SDAanonymous believe that the actions of the White Estate in taking believers to court further breaks their sacred trust through disobedience to the writings they claim to uphold. The interest of SDAanonymous is that these civil actions are dismissed as soon as possible, so as to incur for the church the least costs of this unrighteous action. We appeal to the White Estate to return to their trust and rediscover the reason they exist – to provide a service for the beneficiaries of the Ellen White's writings. In the matter of its dealings with SDAanonymous and Brendan Knudson, we would welcome a peaceable resolution to this matter.

For those who wish to address their thoughts to the White Estate regarding either the release of the complete writings of Ellen White, or the action of taking believers to court, we encourage you to write to mail@whiteestate.org

For those who wish to support the worthy efforts of the White Estate to translate Ellen White's books into other languages, please visit <http://partner.egwwritings.org/>

Further Press Statements may arise depending on how settlement negotiations proceed with the White Estate.