

“If God gives me strength, I shall be in the cities”
Ellen G. White, “outpost centers,”
and mission work in cities

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In December 1952, the sprawling metropolis of London, Europe’s largest city, was brought to a standstill for five days by an extraordinary conjunction of meteorological event and pollution. Winter fogs were a London common-place; indeed, they had been immortalized in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literary works like the Sherlock Holmes stories; but this was the ultimate London fog. For five successive cold December days, a heavy natural fog, the product of winter weather, combined with sulphurous fumes from vehicle exhaust, the smokestacks of factories and power plants, and the city’s millions of chimneys, out of which billowed forth the smoke of the coal fires that almost all of London’s citizens relied on for warmth. The result was a dense blanket of toxic smog that reduced visibility to a few feet. Professional football matches were cancelled because the goals could not be seen from the halfway line. Traffic ground to a halt. People who then abandoned buses found that even on foot they struggled to find their way home in the thick, dark miasma.

The smog not only blocked the sun, stopped public events, and brought London’s street life to a standstill; it was also a public health catastrophe. The 1952 “big smoke” was the worst air pollution crisis in European history. Initial reports estimated that about 4,000 died prematurely during and immediately after the five days of fog, mostly from respiratory ailments, but many in traffic accidents. Deaths from bronchitis and pneumonia were more than 700 percent greater than the usual annual average. In London’s East End, an area characterized by slums and industry, the increase in deaths was 900 percent. The detrimental effects lingered, moreover, and mortality rates remained well above normal into the summer of

1953, because of the lasting effects on Londoners' lungs. The usual death toll given for the Great Smog is now 8,000 lives, but recently experts have estimated that perhaps as many as 12,000 died—victims of mid-twentieth-century life in big cities.¹

It is not surprising, then, that in the middle of the twentieth century, just six years before London was afflicted by the great smog, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a compilation of Ellen White's writings on the virtues of rural, as opposed to the evils of urban, life. The book, *Country Living*, published in 1946, proved immensely influential. Its counsel was, or seemed to be, unambiguous, unmistakable, and could probably be quoted by many of you: "'Out of the cities; out of the cities!'"—this is the message the Lord has been giving me", wrote the Lord's messenger, who then declares: "The earthquakes will come; the floods will come; and we are not to establish ourselves in the wicked cities, where the enemy is served in every way, and where God is so often forgotten." This is from an article that first appeared in the *Review and Herald* in July 1906.² It was probably based on a sermon she had given at the dedication of Loma Linda Sanitarium three months before, which included the stirring admonition: "'Out of the cities! Out of the cities!'"—this has been my message for many years."³ And indeed, as early as 1882 she had published a testimony encouraging Adventist families to move out of cities, so it had truly been Mrs. White's message for many years.⁴

And yet against that are equally ringing statements, equally unequivocal. Two years after her 1882 testimony she posed a rhetorical question to church leaders, asking "shall the prince of darkness be left in undisputed possession of our great cities because it costs something to sustain missions?" She gave the answer: "Let those who would follow Christ fully come up to the work, even if it be over the heads of ministers and presidents."⁵ And three years after her Loma Linda statements, she declared: "There is no change in the messages that God has sent

¹ Christopher Klein, "The Great Smog of 1952", History.com website, Dec. 6, 2012: <http://www.history.com/news/the-killer-fog-that-blanketed-london-60-years-ago>.

² *Country Living*, 31; first publ. in book form in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (1915), 409; orig. in *Review & Herald*, July 5, 1906.

³ EGW, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, 403.

⁴ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:232.

⁵ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:369.

in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time.”⁶ Working in cities is the essential work for the end time. These are familiar words or have become so in the last seven years, because they have been oft repeated by my colleagues in Adventist Mission! But they are not exceptional—far from it.

Ellen White wrote those words in 1909, but in 1908 she had written of “the unworked cities in Europe, Australia, and America, and in the regions beyond” (the latter, in her writings, typically means Asia, Africa and the islands of the Pacific). She continues in that letter: “These cities have been neglected for years.”⁷ In a letter of 1909, to the General Conference officers, she firmly admonishes them: “As I look over the past testimonies, I see that for years the importance of working the cities has been urged. But . . . excuses have been made, and this great work has been sadly neglected.”⁸ In 1910, in a testimony dedicated to city ministry, she writes: “For years the work in the cities has been presented before me and has been urged upon our people. . . . Before this time, every large city should have heard the testing message, and thousands should have been brought to a knowledge of the truth. Wake up the churches, take the light from under the bushel.”⁹ In 1911, again, she writes: “We must throw ourselves with more earnestness into the work of giving the truth to those in the cities. For years the Lord has been calling our attention to this work”.¹⁰

So, Mrs. White’s “message for many years”, her words, from at least 1882 to around 1907, was to *get out of the cities*; but for what she describes as years and years, from at least 1884 until at least 1911, she urged Adventists to go *into* cities to work for those who dwelt in them. How are we to make sense of this? For cynics, it’s easy: Ellen White quite simply was not inspired and so we should not be surprised that she is inconsistent. Well, I take a different view, and for two reasons. First, at times in her writings, Ellen White is setting out principles, but at other times

⁶ EGW, “To Brethren”, Lt. 47 (June 9), 1909; publ. in *Review & Herald*, Nov. 17, 1910, 7; *Medical Ministry* (1932), 304; *Ministry to the Cities* (2012), 28 (citing original source as Lt. 46, 1910, but it has now been re-cataloged).

⁷ EGW, “The regions beyond”, Feb. 15, 1908, St Helena, Calif., MS 11, 1908; publ. in *Evangelism* (1946), 428.

⁸ EGW, Lt. 47 (June 9), 1909.

⁹ EGW, June 22, 1910 “A call to labor in the great cities”, MS 21, 1910; publ. *Medical Ministry*, 302, 303.

¹⁰ EGW, Fragment, MS 55 (Nov. 19), 1911.

she was addressing a particular set of circumstances. At times, too, she uses figures of speech, including moderate exaggeration, and neither intended nor expected to be taken absolutely literally. One must be very careful in applying this, but if we bear these points in mind, it helps to clarify her views on cities.

Second, I suggest to you that Ellen White was very well balanced, though that is often not how she emerges from the way we quote her. She spent much of her career arguing against the extremists of either side, which helped keep Adventism in the middle of the road and from adopting extreme positions. This was a immensely important service to the remnant Church. But the problem with arguing against first one extreme and then the other is that half the time one can sound as though one is from the other extreme. This is why it's so vital to look not at one or two statements from the Spirit of Prophecy, but rather to study wholistically what Sister White wrote on a subject, viewing it in the round. As we will see in a moment, if one does that for Ellen White's writings on cities, then the impression of inconsistency dissolves.

Examples of Sister White addressing a specific situation and of using overstatement to make a rhetorical point come in one letter that she wrote from Australia to Stephen N. Haskell, himself a pioneer of city mission, as we will see in a moment. She tells Haskell, who had evidently offered advice on where to buy a house: "I have a few words to say in regard to what you say about building a home in Stanmore [which was an inner suburb of Sydney]. This, my brother, will never be. The bubonic plague is in Sydney, and is steadily developing. There are fresh cases every day. From the experience I have recently had, nothing could induce me to locate in Sydney or any of the suburbs."¹¹ Now, her fears were not exaggerated. According to historians of medicine: "There were 12 major plague outbreaks in Australia between 1900 and 1925 as ships imported wave after wave of infection" from Asia, where the plague was still common. Cases were recorded in other Australian port cities, such as "Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle", but "Sydney was hit hardest": 103 people died in the 1900 outbreak, which is notorious in Australian history.¹²

¹¹ EGW to S. N. Haskell, April 9, 1900, Lt 57, 1900.

¹² "Bubonic plague comes to Sydney in 1900", University of Sydney Medical School, Online Museum & Archive, https://sydney.edu.au/medicine/museum/mwmuseum/index.php/Bubonic_Plague_comes_to_Sydney_in_1900. See Gillian McNally, "Bubonic plague Sydney:

Just 18 days after writing to Haskell, however, and declaring that nothing could induce her to live even in Sydney's suburbs, Ellen White wrote a letter to other friends—and in it, she praises Wahroonga, where the Sydney sanitarium was to be located, as “the most desirable of all the suburbs of Sydney”!¹³ Now, to be sure, she explains that part of Wahroonga's attraction is that it “afford[s] the benefits of country life [while] being sufficiently near Sydney to secure the advantages of connection with the city”; clearly, though, in telling Haskell that “nothing could induce me to locate in Sydney or any of the suburbs”, she was engaging in pardonable exaggeration, motivated by the specific circumstance of plague in Sydney's port district. But circumstances change; and as Sister White told church members in California in 1904: “Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things”. She was moved to make this point, she told them, because “my mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, ‘Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so’ God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense.”¹⁴ Sister White thus herself tells us that we must be wary about being doctrinaire over specific words or turns of phrase, for she wrote stylish prose and sometimes precision is sacrificed to literary style.

Other examples of changing circumstances are found in Ellen White's frequent expostulations about trades unions. In October 1902, for example, she warns Adventist health leaders in southern California: “The turmoil and confusion that fill these cities, the conditions brought about by the labor unions and the strikes, would prove a great hindrance to our work.”¹⁵ A few months later, at the 1903 GC Session, White averred: “The trades unions and confederacies of the world are a snare. Keep out of them and away from them, brethren. Have nothing to do with them. Because of these unions and confederacies, it will soon be very difficult for

How a city survived the black death in 1900”, *Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 2, 2015: <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/bubonic-plague-sydney-how-a-city-survived-the-black-death-in-1900/news-story/f36b9184eba49c72ae9791c574f7b826>.

¹³ EGW to Mr. and Mrs. George O. Wellman, Apr. 27, 1900, Lt. 212, 1900. Similar points had been made in EGW, Jan. 31, 1900, “Who will help?”, MS 12, 1900.

¹⁴ EGW, MS 7, 1904.

¹⁵ EGW, Oct. 8, 1902, “An appeal for the work in Southern California”, MS 119, 1902; EGW to Directors of Los Angeles County Medical Missionary Benevolent Association, Oct. 13, 1902, Lt 157, 1902; repr. in *Country Living*, 11.

our institutions to carry on their work in the cities. My warning is: Keep out of the cities.”¹⁶ Nine months later, at the end of 1903, she wrote to John Burden, the founder of Loma Linda: “The forming of these unions is one of Satan’s last efforts. God calls upon His people to get out of the cities, isolating themselves from the world”.¹⁷ Today, in many western countries, the power of trades unions is in decline, and there are some Adventists who regard Ellen White’s strong stance on unions as unnecessary. But such an attitude ignores the major importance of unions for much of the twentieth century; and the fact that, in some nations, trade unions continue to wield considerable power in the twenty-first century. Moreover, unions’ power has invariably been based in big cities, as this is where large numbers of workers congregate together. So, Sister White’s counsel made sense in America in the early 1900s and still makes sense in some countries today—and will in others in the future

A final example of how circumstances change, altering conditions and the relation of things (as Ellen White put it), is found in the ways that public health conditions have evolved, at least in the Western World, over the 135 years that Ellen White wrote directly about cities.

Cities were horrible places in the nineteenth century and indeed up to the middle of the twentieth century, as London’s killer fog illustrates. In 1902, Dr. Laretta Kress wrote to Ellen White from Cooranbong, the rural location of Avondale, observing: “Every time I come home from Sydney this place seems like Heaven almost. The air is so pure. There is none of the tobacco smoke & black dust you get in Sydney and it is so quiet. One feels they can rest undisturbed here. I can see more and more why our institutions are better in the country away from the city. There is the quiet, pure air and nothing to contaminate them with the filth of city life. . . . I am sure God saw all this where He instructed when to build sanitariums.”¹⁸ Ellen White agreed, without doubt, for she replied to Laretta and her husband, also a physician, Dr. Daniel Kress: “We have received your good letter.

¹⁶ EGW, address to GC Session, Apr. 3, 1903, “Our duty to leave Battle Creek”, MS 20, 1903, publ. *General Conference Bulletin*, Apr. 6, 1903, 84–88.

¹⁷ EGW to Brother and Sister J. A. Burden, Lt 26, Dec. 10, 1903.

¹⁸ L. Kress to EGW, Sept. 4, 1902, Ellen White Estate Incoming Correspondence Files (transcription by Ashlee Chism).

Thank you so much for writing. In regard to our schools and sanitariums being out of the cities, I had . . . written in almost exactly the same language that you used.”¹⁹

There is other evidence that the physical conditions of cities and their health implications was one of Ellen White’s reasons for urging Adventists out of cities. In 1905, in *Ministry of Healing*, she emphasizes: “The physical surroundings in the cities are often a peril to health. The constant liability to contact with disease, the prevalence of foul air, impure water, impure food, the crowded, dark, unhealthful dwellings, are some of the many evils to be met.”²⁰ In 1906, in another letter to her friends, the doctors Kress, she assures them “that the call is for our people to locate miles away from the large cities. . . . The very atmosphere of the city is polluted.”²¹

As a result of pollution of both the air and water supplies, life in the big cities was frequently nasty and short. Historical demographers, using US Census data, have shown that in 1830, life expectancy in cities in New England was 46.7 years, whereas in the rest of rural New England it was 52.5 years.²² Things actually got worse as the nineteenth century wore on, as a result of increasing industrialization. Thus, in 1900, in the United States as a whole, life expectancy for a white man was “44 years in urban areas and 54 years in rural places”; child mortality in cities was 13 percent higher than the national average and 23 percent higher above the average in the countryside.²³ Similar patterns obtained in Europe.²⁴

Contemporaries knew there was a difference and were in no doubt about the reasons why. In 1899, Adna Weber, a pioneering American statistician and economist, observed:

¹⁹ EGW to Brother and Sister D. H. Kress, Oct. 15, 1902, Lt. 161, 1902.

²⁰ EGW, *Ministry of Healing* (1905; 1942), 365.

²¹ EGW to Brother and Sister D. H. Kress, May 10, 1906, Lt. 158, 1906. A similar statement is in EGW to W. D. Salisbury, Feb. 5, 1907, Lt. 26, 1907.

²² Louis Cain and Sok Chul Hong. “Survival in 19th-century cities: The larger the city, the smaller your chances”, *Explorations in Economic History* 46 (Oct. 2009): 450–63 (from version available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2743429/>).

²³ Michael R. Haines, *The urban mortality transition in the United States, 1800–1940*, Historical Paper 134 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2001), 2; Cain and Hong, “Survival in 19th-century cities”.

²⁴ Samuel H. Preston and Etienne van de Walle, “Urban French mortality in the nineteenth century”, *Population Studies* 32 (July 1978): 275–97; W. H. Hubbard, “Urban penalty: Towns and mortality in nineteenth-century Norway”, *Continuity and change* 15 (2000): 331–50.

It is almost everywhere true that people die more rapidly in cities than in rural districts. . . . There is no inherent or eternal reason why men should die faster in large communities than in small hamlets. . . . [I]t may be affirmed that the excessive urban mortality is due to lack of pure air, water and sunlight, together with uncleanly habits of life induced thereby. Part cause, part effect, poverty, overcrowding, high rates of mortality, are found together in city tenements.²⁵

Interestingly, Ellen White had already made this point: “It is not in [God’s] order that people should be crowded into cities, huddled together in terraces and tenements.”²⁶ In 1900, she returned to this theme, which suggests its importance in her thought; she used the passage, but reshaped it, adding to it, in an appeal for support for the new sanitarium in Sydney; and five years later, she reused this passage in its entirety in *Ministry of Healing*. It reads: “It was not God’s purpose that people should be crowded into cities, huddled together in terraces and tenements. . . . The more nearly we come into harmony with God’s original plan, the more favorable will be our position to secure health of body, and mind, and soul.”²⁷

Now, eventually what scholars call the “urban penalty”, in which cities experienced higher child mortality and lower life expectancy, improved in the United States between 1900 and 1910 and improved again in 1920.²⁸ Yet, “As late as 1939, actuaries for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company reported [that] life expectancy at birth for white males was 64.07 years in rural areas as compared to 61.45 years in urban areas. For white females, the figures were 67.46 and 66.20 years, respectively.”²⁹

What can we conclude? Ellen White was not engaged in fear-mongering, not in nostalgia for the past, nor yet in sentimental yearning for a rural idyll. She was accurately diagnosing the public-health situation in large cities.

²⁵ Quoted in Haines, *Urban mortality transition*, 3.

²⁶ EGW, June 5, 1899, “The Sanitarium: Where shall it be located?”, MS 85, 1899.

²⁷ EGW, Jan. 31, 1900, “Who will help?”, MS 12, 1900; *Ministry of Healing*, 365. The final sentence is underlined in my late father’s copy of *Ministry of Healing*.

²⁸ Haines, *Urban mortality transition*, 2.

²⁹ Cain and Hong, “Survival in 19th-century cities”.

Today, however, in the Western world, cities are far healthier, due to the reduction of pollution, a result both of stringent regulations and to the rise of cleaner energy sources, such as solar and wind power. It is reasonable to suppose that many of her concerns about big cities would not be expressed today, or would be less urgent. Many American tourists to London today are disappointed not to find thicker fogs; but the great smog of 1952 prompted the introduction of tough laws on air quality, including the banning of coal fires. The story with which we began could not be repeated today.

In contrast, in some cases, rural areas at the time she wrote now suffer from pollution. For example, in the autumn of 1902 she wrote: “Southern California is world-renowned as a health resort.”³⁰ If air pollution is not now as bad as it was in the 1960s and ’70s, before lead-free petrol was introduced, Southern California is thickly populated and heavily congested, its skies in late spring and summer an unchanging dirty brown color, due to smog. Its reputation now is not as a health resort but for traffic jams and poor air quality. Again, as circumstances change, we sometimes need to change how we understand Ellen G. White’s prophetic counsel.

Having said that, though, two points should be made. First, in contrast to the situation in much of Western Europe, North America, North Asia, or Australasia, the 21st-century reality in most of Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and Eastern Europe, is that big cities are still characterized by industry, over-crowding, and pollution. Large urban areas are still innately unhealthy. (And even London can still have bad air days in summer, when there is no breeze.) The second point is that Ellen White was concerned about moral as well as physical contamination. She warns that “cities are . . . hotbeds of vice”, with “the sights and sounds of evil” evident at “every hand.”³¹ She writes of “the contaminating influences of modern city life” and elsewhere of “the cities that are fast becoming as Sodom and Gomorrah . . . God desires us to leave the sin-polluted atmosphere of the cities.”³² Today, in the era of high-speed internet and the rampant availability of online pornography, with sexual addiction added to the traditional drug and alcohol addiction, farming areas and small towns are no longer

³⁰ EGW, MS 119, 1902 (see n. 15, above).

³¹ EGW, *Ministry of Healing*, 363.

³² EGW, July 25, 1906, “Behold, what manner of love!”, MS 107, 1906; EGW, July 29, 1901, “The Church School”, MS 67, 1901.

as free of moral pollution as they once were; and, at least in North America, rural areas are suffering an epidemic of opioid addiction. So just as some cities are not as bad as they used to be, so many small towns are not as wholesome as they once were. Yet is still the case that there is markedly greater availability of drugs, alcohol, and monetized sex, in big cities.

What, then, can we say about Ellen White's prophetic counsel about urban areas? It seems clear that she would be less negative and that, in consequence, we should have far fewer inhibitions about engaging in mission to cities. Yet it seems clear that Sister White would still have considerable reservations about big cities.

But about what, in particular? Here I want us to come back to the second point I made near the start: that in her testimonies, Ellen White is often writing to counteract extremist views, so that, in order for us to understand her, it is necessary to develop a rounded, fully contextual sense of her thought. This cannot be done by simple quotations of a few choice passages. However, this year, my staff and I have gone systematically through everything Sister White wrote about cities, both getting out of them and going into them. (And I want to pay tribute to Ashlee Chism of my department, who did much of the work of assembling all the various statements).

What struck me in going through Ellen G. White's writings about cities is this: there truly is no contradiction in her testimonies, for when she urges Adventists to depart the cities, she typically is discouraging the creation of colleges, schools, sanitarium, and hospitals in cities—because the young and the sick are the most susceptible to the negative influences typical of big cities, now as well as when she was writing.³³ Alternatively, she writes to encourage ordinary church members to live where they will be free of air and water pollution and where they can have contact with the soil, ideally growing their own fruit and vegetables. Today, that can be done in many suburbs, and certainly in “exurbs”, as well as in really rural areas. It is a significant point that suburban houses with reasonably large blocks of land only became common and affordable for ordinary people after Mrs. White's death in 1915. Here is another case where circumstances have changed. Today, I

³³ Many examples could be cited: e.g., MS 20, 1903 (see n. 16 above), repr. *Country Living*, 11; EGW diary, Oct. 1, 1896, in MS 55, 1896; Lt. 161, 1902 (see n 19, above); EGW to Brethren, Sep. 20, 1902, Lt. 182, 1902; EGW, Mar. 17, 1902, “The Southern California Sanitarium”, MS 43, 1902 (“A city is no place for a sanitarium”!); etc.

suspect that the Lord's messenger probably wouldn't be urging the complete abandonment of metropolitan areas, since most of the goals she had for church members in leaving cities could be achieved today by people living in suburbs; and indeed, as we saw earlier, she herself warmly approved of establishing Sydney Sanitarium in one of the city's outer suburbs.

In any case, while we cannot really know whether Sister White would today advocate church members moving to farms or just to suburbs or exurbs, what we do know is that she *always* wanted *some* Seventh-day Adventists to stay in cities. This is the final reason there is no inconsistency in the many passages in the Spirit of Prophecy on cities. Just as Ellen G. White did not believe that all Adventists needed to serve as foreign missionaries, but still actively encouraged as many as possible to go overseas, so, too, she wanted an active body of enthusiastic workers to go as missionaries into cities, even if the great mass of the membership got out of the cities. As she put it to John Burden, at Loma Linda: "I write you this that in a guarded but decided way you may advise our people to keep out of the cities. But the cities must be worked; yes, and our people have been asleep".³⁴

Furthermore, in some of her writings, she advances a unique idea about how city missionaries can evangelize the cities: the "outpost center." This is a concept that developed relatively late in her ministry, probably reflecting the fact that in the 1880s and 1890s, Adventists had many city missions, which were effective, but that in the 1900s, the number diminished and their ministry was circumscribed, meaning that prophetic guidance became more important. The first time White refers to an outpost center is in a 1902 letter to church medical leaders, when it is set out as a principle for city ministry:

We are to remember the cities that have been neglected and that must now be worked. The people in these cities must have the light of truth We are to be wise in securing advantages already provided that the Lord desires us to have. We are to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves in our efforts to secure country properties at a low figure, and from these outpost centers we are to work the cities."³⁵

³⁴ EGW to Brother and Sister J. A. Burden, Lt 26, Dec. 10, 1903.

³⁵ EGW, MS 119, 1902 and Lt. 157, 1902 (both cited in n. 15, above).

The principle, then, is that the church should secure country properties, which will become what Mrs. White terms “outpost centers”, from which “we are to work the cities”. What is unclear is just how cities are to be worked from outpost centers.³⁶

Some insight is afforded, however, by a letter of 1906 to Dr. C. C. Nicola, superintendent of the New England Sanitarium. It was located in Melrose, a city eight miles north of Boston and today part of its metropolitan area. Mrs. White writes: “It was a wonderful providence that brought us into possession of the Melrose Sanitarium property. . . . It is to be an important outpost center from which to work the city of Boston. You, Brother Nicola, understand the instruction that the Lord has given regarding this matter.”³⁷ An outpost center, then, was to be not directly in a city, but relatively close to the city center. This is reinforced by counsel about the southern work in the United States, written in 1912, in which Sister White writes of “the advantages to be gained by the maintenance of a suitable outpost center from which a strong medical-evangelistic campaign can be carried forward in Nashville”, which seems to indicate that it must not be too far distant.³⁸ This point is made more or less explicit in a letter of 1910, in which Sister White shares her gratitude to God “that so many of our sanitariums are established in pleasing country locations, and yet within easy reach of important centers of population”.³⁹

In 1907 White wrote: “Boston has been pointed out to me as a place that must be faithfully worked. . . . This sanitarium is one of the greatest facilities that can be employed to reach Boston with the truth.” She also writes, however, in a telling passage: “The light must shine in the outskirts and in the inmost parts. . . . This city and its suburbs must hear the last message of mercy to be given to our world.”⁴⁰ This is noteworthy for the emphasis that the city missionary must not evangelize either in the city center or in the suburbs, but in both. The *whole city* is to be reached. Within a few years, the few remaining Adventist city missions were deliberately avoiding what Ellen White calls the “inmost parts” of cities and instead

³⁶ In August 1903, White, in offering counsel about creating city missions in Vicksburg and Nashville, in the US South, writes that Nashville would offer “outpost localities”, but the context makes it very difficult to know what is meant: EGW to Bro. and Sister Hughes, Aug. 1, 1903, Lt. 304, 1903.

³⁷ EGW to Dr. and Sister C. C. Nicolas, May 15, 1906, Lt. 150, 1906.

³⁸ EGW, Jan. 14, 1912, “Be not discouraged!”, MS 3, 1912.

³⁹ EGW to H. W. Cottrell, Jan 27, 1910, Lt. 12a, 1910

⁴⁰ EGW, January 22, 1907, “Extracts regarding the New England Sanitarium”, MS 27, 1907.

were focusing on the suburbs; but this is contrary to explicit guidance of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Now, it might be assumed that the point of outpost centers is for city missionaries to live in them, commuting in and out of the city each day. This would be consistent with the distances. But a close reading of Ellen White's counsel leads us to a different conclusion. In the summer of 1906, she penned a more general testimony in the introductory section to which she declares: "More and more, as wickedness increases in the great cities, we shall have to work these places from outpost centers." A little later she continues, significantly:

Soon we shall have to leave the cities. For years we have been instructed that our people, and especially families with children, should plan to leave the cities as soon as the way opens before them to do so. But until it is possible for them to leave, they should be most active in doing missionary work, however limited their sphere of influence may be. As they yield their talents and their all to God to be used as He may direct; as they live out their consecration by engaging in practical missionary work wherever opportunity affords, God will bless them .

. . .⁴¹

Here White is explicit: not everyone will move out of the cities right away. But also, one of the most powerful forms of "missionary work" is the living out of consecrated lives as members of communities. This is similar to a statement of 1907, in which she writes: "Wherever the people of God are placed, in the crowded cities . . . or among the country byways, there is a home mission field."⁴² Ellen White takes for granted that there will be people of God living in the crowded cities, since this is a *home* mission field.

This is in accord, too, with counsel Mrs. White gave to Allen Moon, one of the veteran leaders of city mission. Addressing the 1910 Annual Council, Moon, "spoke of an interview in which Sister White said that it was not so much by public evangelists that the work [in cities] was to be done as by seeking out the people one by one through Bible work and canvassing effort, and medical missionary work."⁴³ Bible work and canvassing effort meant door to door efforts; and this

⁴¹ EGW, MS 107, 1906 (see n. 32, above).

⁴² EGW, MS 87, 1907, in *Ministry to the Cities*, 27.

⁴³ General Conference Committee meeting, April 12, 1910, Minutes, 8:199.

could only be done effectively and people sought out (as she counselled), if the workers were actually living in the cities.

This is also consistent with a number of testimonies Ellen White wrote about vegetarian restaurants, urging that they be maintained in inner city areas and that treatment rooms be opened alongside them, since she affirmed that the two forms of ministry would complement each other.⁴⁴ But from the way she describes this linked outreach, Mrs. White clearly envisaged a labor-intensive approach. Moreover, where possible, she counselled that “a Bible school” be held, as part of a “well-balanced work”, in which those attending the school would receive “daily instruction”, while lectures would also be offered to patrons of the vegetarian restaurants “on the science of health and Christian temperance”. The buildings in which restaurants and treatment rooms were combined were to include lecture rooms, and Mrs. White urged that daily meetings should be held in those rooms, in which, she wrote, there should be “prayer and singing and talks, not only on health and temperance topics, but also on other appropriate Bible subjects.”⁴⁵ In theory, the workers responsible for this intensive range of activities could commute in and out daily from a sanitarium or other center of influence on the city outskirts; but the sheer level of activity that White envisages makes this highly improbable, as it would be simply impracticable. Her ideal curriculum presupposes that the workers would be living in the city.

Finally, this is of course what Stephen Haskell, Ellen White’s dear friend and pioneer of city mission did in New York City. He lived in the city and he received encouragement, as well as chastisement, in the mail from the prophetess. The fact that Haskell *lived in* the city affords a key insight into what Mrs. White intended to be understood by her frequent references to the need for Seventh-day Adventists to be *in* the cities. What did “in the city” mean? All the evidence suggests it meant not that city workers should be day trippers in and out from the outpost centers, but that they should live among the people they were trying to reach.

What, then, was the purpose of outpost centers? How did they permit cities “to be worked” in Ellen White’s phrase? In the case of the Melrose, Sydney, and Nashville Sanitariums (and Washington Sanitarium after the GC moved to Takoma

⁴⁴ Cf. EGW, *Testimonies*, 7: 60.

⁴⁵ EGW, *Gospel Workers* (1915), 364; *Testimonies*, 7: 115.

Park), they could provide medical resources and lecturers on health and temperance to the treatment rooms and hygienic restaurants in the city centers. In addition, however, we have to bear in mind Mrs. White's frequently repeated references to the contaminated air and water of cities, and the temptations that were offered in them; and, too, to the need for Adventists to have contact with the soil, with fresh food harvested from it, and with the fresh air and water that loomed so large in White's concept of the ministry of healing. This all suggests that the purpose of the outpost center was partly to provide periodic respites for weary city workers, worn down by the morally and physically polluted environment. The fact that many outpost centers were sanitariums meant they could literally provide a rest cure for those who had spent long spells in the dusty, dirty city. And indeed, Ellen White in *Testimonies* volume 7 affirms the need for city missionaries to get out of the cities to attend camp meetings, and she explicitly counsels: "our workers are not to think that they must remain in the cities to attend to various business matters connected with various lines of city work nor are they to hurry [back] in order to do this kind of work."⁴⁶ Here, again, residence in the city is taken for granted; but it is not, in Ellen White's thinking, to be a permanent residence. Rest and refreshment were—and still are—necessary if "the essential work for this time" is to be pushed forward successfully.

In conclusion: all too often we quote "Out of the cities, out of the cities!" as though it were Sister White's definitive statement on urban subjects. But it was certainly not her last word on the topic of city mission. Some years later, in the summer of 1909, after her retirement to Elmshaven, she penned a testimony entitled "Reaching the cities", in which she makes the following remarkable statement: "If God gives me strength now, at nearly eighty-two years old, I shall be in the cities."⁴⁷ In her ninth decade God's faithful servant was not thinking of rest, but of getting into the polluted, iniquitous cities, because they were full of people who needed to

⁴⁶ EGW, *Testimonies*, 7:252.

⁴⁷ EGW, July 27, 1909, "Reaching the cities", sermon given at Three Rivers Michigan, MS 127, 1909.

hear good news. She continues the testimony with a rhetorical question: "Now where are the people that will be ready to go out into the city?" In her own case, the spirit was enthusiastic, but the body was by this time too weak. Her question is still there, posed to you and to me this morning: Where are the people? May we be like Ellen G. White and say, "If God gives me strength, then I will be in the cities."