

2008

Adventist Views on Inspiration

Alberto R. Timm

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

 Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Timm, Alberto R. (2008) "Adventist Views on Inspiration," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol13/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

ADVENTIST VIEWS ON INSPIRATION

The nature of inspiration has provided an ongoing discussion among Adventist scholars since the very beginning of the church.

Seventh-day Adventists represent a modern eschatological movement born out of the study of the Holy Scriptures. Their specific mission is to proclaim the Word of God “to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6, NRSV).

In many places around the world, Seventh-day Adventists have actually been known as the “people of the Book.” As a people, Adventists have always held—and presently hold—high respect for the authority of the Bible. At times in the denomination’s history, however, church leaders have held different views on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture.

The Adventist understanding of

inspiration as it relates to both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White is important for two reasons: (1) Though their basic function differs, Adventists have generally assumed that both sets of writings were produced by the same *modus operandi* of inspiration; and (2) the views on each overlap in the development of an understanding of the Bible’s inspiration.

Terminology of biblical inspiration is often confusing. Such techni-

*Alberto R. Timm, Ph., D., is Director of the Brazilian Ellen G. White Research Center and Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Brazil Adventist College (Central Campus).

cal expressions as “mechanical inspiration,” “verbal inspiration,” “plenary inspiration,” and “thought inspiration” have carried different meanings. It is important to have a basic understanding of those terms.

“Mechanical inspiration” is usually associated with the theory that all the words of Scripture, even down to the Hebrew vowel points, were actually dictated by the Holy Spirit. This virtually negates the human element of Scripture.

“Verbal inspiration” normally is understood by its advocates to mean the Holy Spirit guided the writers not only in receiving a divine message but also in communicating it, without completely eliminating the personality and the style of the writers. The emphasis, however, is on the end-product of the whole inspiration process, namely, on the words of Scripture.

The term “plenary inspiration” denotes that Scripture in its entirety is inspired, making no distinction between alleged inspired and noninspired words. Some authors prefer this term to distinguish their position from any mechanical understanding of inspiration, which may at times be associated with verbal inspiration.

Last, “thought inspiration” is proposed to indicate that it is the writer who is inspired. The Holy Spirit transmits God’s thoughts to the writer, who then chooses the proper words to express those thoughts

under the continued guidance of the Spirit.

Some authors use these terms without defining them, taking for granted that their meaning is common knowledge.

The Millerite Legacy

Seventh-day Adventists inherited their early views of Scripture from their former denominations and the Millerites. William Miller had accepted Deism as a young man. At that time he actually gave up his faith in the Scriptures. He questioned the Bible’s inspiration because of what he considered its discrepancies.

After 12 years in deistic circles, Miller experienced conversion, after which he began a two-year period of intensive study of Scripture. His basic assumption was that “if the Bible was the word of God, every thing contained therein might be understood, and all its parts be made to harmonize.”¹ At the end of his intensive Bible study, Miller asserted that the inconsistencies that he had earlier seen in the Scriptures were gone.

In his 1822 statement of faith, Miller expressed his conviction that “the Bible is given by God to man” as “a revelation of God to man.”² In 1836 he asserted that “there never was a book written that has a better connection and harmony than the Bible,” which has “a general connection through the whole.”³

While dealing with some difficulties in the Bible, Miller even preferred to blame its translators rather than to admit obscurities and inconsistencies in the original text. In other words, he came to accept the full authority and inspiration of the Bible because he became convinced of the harmony and unity of its content. For him, inspiration affected the actual text of Scripture and not just the general ideas. When he finally concluded that Scripture was clear and consistent, he accepted its ultimate authority for the rest of his life.

Early Adventist Views (1844-1883)

Sabbatarian Adventists retained William Miller's high view of Scripture. James White stated in 1847 that "the [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation" and "our only rule of faith and practice."⁴ The third article of the 1872 statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs composed by Uriah Smith asserted similarly that "the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice."⁵

Apart from such concise statements, Seventh-day Adventists dealt little with the nature of its inspiration up to the early 1880s. The major Seventh-day Adventist concern on the subject of the Bible during this early period was to defend its divine origin

from deist attacks. Such defenses of the Bible provide, however, insightful evidences of early Adventist views on the infallibility of Scripture.

In 1863, Moses Hull, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, made the first significant Seventh-day Adventist response to infidel attacks on Scripture in his book, *The Bible From Heaven*. Hull advocated the authenticity, integrity, and credibility of the Bible, insisting that nothing in the Bible contradicts any of the sciences of "physiology, anatomy, hygiene, materia medica, chemistry, astronomy, or geology."⁶

In 1867, the *Review and Herald* published a series of 22 responses to what deists were asserting as "self contradictions" of the Bible. Those responses dealt, for example, with such issues as whether one woman or two went to Christ's sepulcher (John 20:1; Matt. 28:1); whether Christ ascended from Mount Olivet or from Bethany (Acts 1:9, 12; Luke 24:50, 51); and whether 24,000 or 23,000 Israelites died by the plague in Shittim (Num. 25:9; 1 Cor. 10:8).

A. T. Jones, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, penned another significant defense of the Bible through a series, "A Review of Paine's 'Age of Reason,'" which appeared in the *Review and Herald* in 1880.

Sparse statements on inspiration can be found also in the articles and books penned during that period (1844-1883) about the prophetic gift

Up to the early 1900s, no clear discussion of the doctrine of inspiration is found in Seventh-day Adventist literature. While responding to attacks against the trustworthiness of the Bible, Seventh-day Adventists demonstrated their commitment to a view of Scripture similar to Miller's. Early Seventh-day Adventists were convinced that the process of inspiration preserved the actual text of the Scriptures from factual errors and contradictions.

of Ellen White. Those statements, however, were more concerned about proving the inspiration of her writings than in discussing the actual nature of inspiration.

Up to the early 1900s, no clear discussion of the doctrine of inspiration is found in Seventh-day Adventist literature. While responding to attacks against the trustworthiness of the Bible, Seventh-day Adventists demonstrated their commitment to a view of Scripture similar to Miller's. Early Seventh-day Adventists were convinced that the process of inspiration preserved the actual text of the Scriptures from factual errors and contradictions.

Focus on the Nature of Inspiration (1883-1915)

Before 1883, Seventh-day Adventists had been mainly concerned with defending the divine inspiration of the Bible from outside infidel challenges. Some internal crises re-

garding the nature and authority of Ellen White's writings, however, pushed Seventh-day Adventists in the 1800s into a more thoughtful discussion of the doctrine. During that period two major questions were raised: (1) Are there degrees of inspiration? (2) Did the Holy Spirit dictate the actual words of the inspired writings?

Are there degrees of inspiration? Administrative problems and conflicts of personality at Battle Creek College led Ellen White to send a few testimonies to Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald* and president of the college board, reproving him for some unwise decisions. Resentment against such reproofs was one factor that led Smith to the assumption that not all her writings were equally inspired. By the spring of 1883, Smith was convinced that while Mrs. White's visions were truly inspired, her testimonies were not.

It seems that to harmonize such is-

Assuming that inspiration varies according to the various forms of revelation, Butler argued that the Scriptures “are inspired just in the degree that the person is inspired who writes them.” Since Scripture resulted from different forms of revelation, according to Butler, there likewise had to be distinct degrees of inspiration, of authority, and of imperfection. For him, the Scriptures “are authoritative in proportion to the degrees of inspiration.”

sues over the trustworthiness of Ellen White’s testimonies, George I. Butler, General Conference president, wrote for the *Review and Herald* a series of 10 articles on “Inspiration,” in which he sought to provide a biblical rationale for the theory of “degrees of inspiration.” According to E. K. Vande Vere, if Butler “could show that the Bible contained human elements, then by implication, the Testimonies contained many more human elements” and could not be regarded as absolutely perfect.⁷

Assuming that inspiration varies according to the various forms of revelation, Butler argued that the Scriptures “are inspired just in the degree that the person is inspired who writes them.”⁸ Since Scripture resulted from different forms of revelation, according to Butler, there likewise had to be distinct degrees of inspiration, of authority, and of imperfection. For him, the Scriptures

“are authoritative in proportion to the degrees of inspiration,”⁹ and are perfect only as they are necessary for achieving the purpose for which they were given—“to make us ‘wise unto salvation’” (2 Tim. 3:15, KJV).¹⁰

Such a theory of inspiration led Butler to suggest a hierarchy within the biblical canon, in which, generally, “the books of Moses and the words of Christ” appeared in the first and highest level; “the writings of the prophets and apostles and a portion, at least, of the Psalms” in the second level; “the historical books” in the third level; and “the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and the book of Job” in the last and lowest level.¹¹ Thus, under the assumption that different forms of revelation implied distinct degrees of inspiration, Butler ended with a hierarchy within the biblical canon, and in fact even rejected some texts as uninspired.

Although the theory of degrees of inspiration was advocated outside Adventist circles, this was the first time such a theory was advanced in an official Seventh-day Adventist publication. There are indications that it was so influential that some people were prompted to almost completely disregard Ellen White's testimony at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis.

The theory of degrees of inspiration continued into the late 1880s in some Seventh-day Adventist circles. In response to this, Ellen White penned a letter to R. A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference, disclosing that it was shown to her that "the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review*." Since "to criticize the Word of God" is to "venture on sacred, holy ground," no human being should ever "pronounce judgment" on God's Word, "selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as un-inspired." She explained also that "the testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this."¹²

In a similar manner, the senior Sabbath school lesson for January 7, 1893, also denied the possibility of "different degrees of inspiration," for the reason that "such a view destroys the authority of God's word and gives to each one a Bible made by himself."¹³

Did the Holy Spirit dictate the actual words? Another discussion that

engaged Seventh-day Adventists between 1883 and 1915 concerned whether the Holy Spirit dictated the actual words of inspired writings.

A partial response to this issue came from the 1883 General Conference Session, which suggested a grammatical revision of Ellen White's *Testimonies for the Church*. At that time, the General Conference appointed a committee of five individuals—W. C. White (chair), Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, and George I. Butler—to supervise that revision.

While opposing the theory of mechanical inspiration, the motion did not mention any factual error in the content of the *Testimonies*. Only grammatical "imperfections" should be corrected, without changing the thought "in any measure." George W. Morse stated that "by the inspiration of the Scriptures is not meant the inspiration of the words and phrases, but the general purpose and use of the same."¹⁴

Uriah Smith, who had been a member of the committee for revising the *Testimonies*, proposed, however, a via-media solution to the tensions between the theories of mechanical inspiration and thought inspiration. He suggested that if the words were "spoken directly by the Lord," then "the words are inspired." If the words did not come directly from the Lord, then "the words may not be inspired," but only "the ideas,

the facts, the truth, which those words convey.”¹⁵

Leaning evidently toward a more mechanical view of inspiration, D. M. Canright, ex-Seventh-day Adventist minister and writer, began to attack the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings after he left the church in early 1887. Already in the 1888 edition of his book, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, Canright stated that Ellen White was “not inspired” because, among other things, (1) she herself changed the wording of previous drafts of her own writings; (2) she incorporated suggestions from her husband and secretaries in the process of correcting the grammar and improving the style of her writings; and (3) she often copied “without credit or sign of quotation” from other non-inspired authors.¹⁶

Meanwhile, several Seventh-day Adventist authors stressed that the process of inspiration had actually exercised a controlling influence on the whole writing of Scripture. In 1890, for instance, the *Signs of the Times* stated that “the New Testament does not speak of inspiration as being given to men, or of men being inspired. It was the writings which were inspired, or, literally, ‘God-breathed.’ The New Testament declares this repeatedly of the Old Testament. See 2 Timothy 3:15, 16; Acts 1:16; Hebrews 3:7; 1 Peter 1:11. Peter classes Paul’s writings with the Scriptures, and Paul declares that his words were given by

the Spirit of God. 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13.”¹⁷

While denying the “verbal inspiration of translations,” the *Signs of the Times* in 1909 emphasized the verbal inspiration of the words of Scripture in the original Hebrew, Chaldaic [Aramaic], and Greek languages. “These words,” it was stated, “were the words inspired by the Spirit of God.”¹⁸

A more mechanical view of inspiration was stressed by Dr. David Paulson, founding president of Hinsdale Sanitarium, in a 1906 letter to Ellen White: “I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments.”¹⁹

That Ellen White did not endorse such a mechanical view of inspiration is evident from her response to Paulson, in which she clearly stated that neither she nor the other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers “ever made such claims.”²⁰

During this period, Ellen White penned some of her more significant statements on inspiration. For Ellen White, the inspiration of Scripture is a mystery that parallels the incarnation of Christ. She declared that as Christ was at the same time divine and human (John 1:14), so “the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of

Ellen White declared that as Christ was at the same time divine and human (John 1:14), so “the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human.” So organically merged are the two elements throughout Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) that “the utterances of the man are the word of God.”

men, presents a union of the divine with the human.”²¹ So organically merged are the two elements throughout Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) that “the utterances of the man are the word of God,”²² and no one should ever attempt to tell “that which is inspired and that which is not inspired”²³ or to point out “degrees of inspiration.”²⁴

In opposition to the theory of mechanical inspiration, Ellen White asserted in 1886 that “the writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.” She explained it further: “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind.”²⁵

In opposition to the theory of seminal thought inspiration, i.e., that only general thoughts were inspired, Ellen White explained that “the scribes of God wrote as they

were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves,”²⁶ and that she herself was “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision.”²⁷

The tension between those statements is harmonized in the following quotation: “Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”²⁸

Although Ellen White recognized the existence of transmission errors and difficulties in Scripture, she does not appear to mention specific factual errors in Scripture. As silent as the writers of the New Testament had been in pointing out factual errors in the Old Testament, so was Ellen White in regard to the total canon of Scripture.

The difficulties of Scripture were regarded by her not as an argument

Noteworthy is the fact that Ellen White made use of different versions of the Bible in her writings. The use of different versions was also supported by other contemporary Seventh-day Adventists. This is a significant point because later on the issue of the reliability of certain English translations of the Bible would be raised in Seventh-day Adventist circles.

against the Bible but as “the strongest evidences of its divine inspiration.”²⁹ While “the way of salvation” is discernable even to “the humble and uncultured,” there are in Scripture mysteries that challenge “the most highly cultivated minds.”³⁰ Speaking about such mysteries, she warned that “men of ability have devoted a lifetime of study and prayer to the searching of the Scriptures, and yet there are many portions of the Bible that have not been fully explored. Some passages of Scripture will never be perfectly comprehended until in the future life Christ shall explain them. There are mysteries to be unraveled, statements that human minds cannot harmonize. And the enemy will seek to arouse argument upon these points, which might better remain undiscussed.”³¹

Though admitting that the human language of Scripture is “imperfect,” she still held that God’s Word “is infallible” and should be accepted “as it reads.”³² She stated, for instance, that

in Scripture the history of Israel was traced by “the unerring pen of inspiration” “with exact fidelity.”³³ She regarded the Bible as the “unerring standard” by which “men’s ideas of science” should be tested.³⁴ Therefore, “the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will.”³⁵

Noteworthy also is the fact that Ellen White made use of different versions of the Bible in her writings. The use of different versions was also supported by other contemporary Seventh-day Adventists. This is a significant point because later on the issue of the reliability of certain English translations of the Bible would be raised in Seventh-day Adventist circles.

That by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Seventh-day Adventists still regarded the Scriptures as the infallible and trustworthy Word of God is evident from their responses to higher criticism. For example, Charles M. Snow, editor of

Liberty magazine and associate editor of the *Review and Herald*, stated in 1912 that the assumption that “the Word of God is “inspired, but not infallible,” is the reiteration on Earth of Satan’s challenge to God in heaven. When man sets himself up as a judge of the words and works of God, the rebellion in heaven is reproduced in the Earth.³⁶

As previously seen, it was during the period 1883-1915 that Seventh-day Adventists began to face an internal crisis on the nature of inspiration. Significantly, it was during this period that Ellen White penned some of her most deliberate statements on the subject. These would be studied again and again by Seventh-day Adventists as they continued the study of the biblical teaching of inspiration after her passing on July 16, 1915.

The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy (1915-1950)

Since its very inception, Seventh-day Adventism had developed under the stabilizing influence of Ellen White. From 1915 on, however, her influence was largely confined to the legacy of her writings. This transition contributed to the development of an identity crisis about the nature and authority of those writings that had been obviously nourished by the revision of the *Testimonies* in the mid-1880s and of *The Great Controversy* in the early 1910s. That crisis

reached its climactic expression in the summer of 1919 in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy that challenged a large number of North American denominations. While Modernists, under the influence of Darwinian evolutionism, challenged the historicity of the biblical accounts of creation and of other supernatural divine interventions, Fundamentalists were defending the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture in response to those challenges.

Three significant events took place in mid-1919 in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of inspiration. First, Francis M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review*, published in the June 19 issue of that periodical a large report on the “Christian Fundamentals” Conference, which he had attended in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in late May. Second, a Bible conference for denominational editors, college teachers of Bible and history, and members of the General Conference Committee was held in Washington, D.C., from July 1 to 21, 1919. Third, D. M. Canright’s *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* came off the press also in July 1919, as the author’s final criticism of Ellen White.

Of special significance were the sections of July 30 and August 1 of the Bible and History Teachers’ Council that followed immediately after the 1919 Bible Conference. Dealing respectively with “The Use

of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History” and “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” those sessions were generally question-answer discussions chaired by Arthur G. Daniells, president of the General Conference. The focal points of these discussions were the issues of “verbal inspiration” and “infallibility” of prophetic writings.

Regarding the subject of verbal inspiration of Ellen White’s testimonies, A. G. Daniells stated that neither Ellen White, nor James White, nor W. C. White, nor anyone of “the persons who helped to prepare those Testimonies” ever claimed it.³⁷

As far as infallibility is concerned, A. G. Daniells stated that it is not right to regard the Spirit of Prophecy as “the only safe interpreter of the Bible.”³⁸ He argued also that Ellen White “never claimed to be an authority on history” or “a dogmatic teacher on theology”³⁹ and that she never regarded her “historical quotations” as infallible.⁴⁰

That the church leadership at large did not follow Daniells’ views of inspiration is evident not only from the fact that the records of the 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers’ Council were not brought to public attention during the years that followed that conference, but also from the fact that his views were not reflected in the content of the sev-

eral books and pamphlets or the Sabbath school quarterly published during the 1920s and 1930s in defense of the Bible as the Word of God.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Seventh-day Adventists supported Fundamentalism in uplifting the trustworthiness of the Bible in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. That Seventh-day Adventists had historically held to a view of Scripture that had much in common with Fundamentalism is evident from their former responses to “infidels” and to higher criticism. Thus, F. M. Wilcox asserted that “Seventh-day Adventists, with their historical belief in the Divine Word, should count themselves the chief of Fundamentalists today.”⁴¹

On July 15, 1920, the *Review and Herald* published a report on the second Conference of Christian Fundamentals, held in Chicago, Illinois. Leon A. Smith, literary editor of the Press Bureau of the General Conference, reported that “the conference affirmed its belief in the verbal inspiration of the Old and New Testaments as first penned by the Bible writers.” For Smith, “all this was good.”

In 1926, Benjamin L. House, professor of Bible and Homiletics at Pacific Union College, devoted a special section of his *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges* to the topic of “The Inspiration of the Bible.” One

During the 1920s and 1930s, Seventh-day Adventists supported Fundamentalism in uplifting the trustworthiness of the Bible in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. That Seventh-day Adventists had historically held to a view of Scripture that had much in common with Fundamentalism is evident from their former responses to “infidels” and to higher criticism. Thus, F. M. Wilcox asserted that “Seventh-day Adventists, with their historical belief in the Divine Word, should count themselves the chief of Fundamentalists today.”

of the first paragraphs of that section was a quotation from the non-Adventist author William Evans, stating that since inspiration is “God speaking through men,” the Old Testament is “just as much the Word of God as though God spake every single word of it with His own lips.”⁴²

Later on in the book, House defined more clearly his own concept of inspiration. He distinguished inspiration from revelation by postulating that while revelation is the “act of God by which He directly communicates truth to man,” inspiration “refers to the divine superintendence which has been given in speaking or writing all of the records found in the Bible.” Therefore, “all ‘revelation’ is ‘inspired,’ but all that is ‘inspired’ did not come by ‘revelation.’”⁴³

Holding the view of “Verbal or

Plenary Inspiration,” House rejected the theories (1) of partial inspiration, for implying that “the Bible contains much that is not inspired”; (2) of concept or thought inspiration, for leaving the Bible writers “absolutely to themselves in the choice of words they should use”; (3) of mechanical or dynamic inspiration, for not accounting for “the different style of the various writers” and for “the material secured from historical records”; (4) of natural inspiration, for denying “the supernatural and the mysterious in the Bible”; and (5) of illumination or universal Christian inspiration, for holding that “the Christians of every age have been inspired just the same as the Bible writers.”⁴⁴

According to House, the theory of “Verbal or Plenary Inspiration”

In 1935, Carlyle B. Haynes, then president of the Michigan Conference, came out with his 222-page God's Book, expanding considerably his previous arguments on inspiration. In this new book, Haynes spoke of revelation as "the informing process" and inspiration as "the imparting process." He argued that as the information recorded by inspired writers does not always come from supernatural revelation, so individuals who sometimes receive divine revelations do not necessarily become inspired prophets.

holds that "all Scripture is inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, that the selection of the very words of Scripture in the original languages was overruled by the Holy Spirit in some [way] . . . , and that the writers did experience the guiding and controlling influence of the divine Spirit in the choice of material. He guided the writer even in the choice of what imperial decrees, genealogies, official letters, state papers, or historical matters he might find necessary for recording the divine message of salvation."⁴⁵

Although Ellen White and other Seventh-day Adventist authors had endorsed the use of different English versions of the Bible, in 1930, Benjamin G. Wilkinson, dean of the School of Theology and professor of Biblical exegesis at Washington Missionary College, in Takoma Park, Maryland, published his *Our Autho-*

rized Bible Vindicated, advocating the reliability of the King James Version and blaming other modern versions for being distorted by Modernist influence. Such assertions were responded to by a committee from the General Conference, to which Wilkinson, in turn, replied.

In June 1931, *Ministry* reprinted several paragraphs from the non-Adventist E. Kretzmann's article "Modern Views About Inspiration." This reprint stated, under the title "Valuable Quotations From Reliable Sources," that "all the thoughts" and "all the words of Scriptures" were inspired by the Holy Spirit. "Not only is every word of doctrine true, but there is also no mistake in the historical data offered, nor in any other point of divine or human knowledge." Since "the Holy Scripture consists of words," "if we do not accept

verbal inspiration, then it is senseless, nonsensical, to speak of an inspiration of the Bible.⁴⁶

The contemporary emphasis on the trustworthiness of the Bible was also reflected in the wording of the 1931 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” Instead of speaking of the Holy Scriptures as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice,” as both the 1872 and 1889 statements of beliefs did, the 1931 statement came out referring to Scripture as “the only *unerring* rule of faith and practice.”⁴⁷ The Sabbath school lesson for April 8, 1933, referred to Numbers 22:38 and Ezekiel 1:3; 2:7 in support of the idea that “inspiration does not leave a man to speak his own words.”⁴⁸

In 1935, Carlyle B. Haynes, then president of the Michigan Conference, came out with his 222-page *God’s Book*, expanding considerably his previous arguments on inspiration. In this new book, Haynes spoke of revelation as “the *informing* process” and inspiration as “the *imparting* process.” He argued that as the information recorded by inspired writers does not always come from supernatural revelation, so individuals who sometimes receive divine revelations do not necessarily become inspired prophets (See Ex. 19ff.).⁴⁹

Haynes stated that in Scripture “there is no mechanical dictation, but *inspiration*,” which “means more than

an *uninspired* account of *inspired* thoughts.” For him, inspiration was *plenary*, by which he suggested that “God’s inspiration includes the form as well as the substance,” and that it “extends to the words as well as the thoughts.” Haynes justified his position saying that “we cannot know God’s thoughts unless we know His words.”⁵⁰

Haynes argued also that the Bible writers “required *inspiration*” to produce a record “infallibly preserved” from “all error and mistake.”⁵¹ He regarded the Bible as infallibly accurate and precise not only in its historical accounts but also in its predictions of the future. For him, science and the Bible were in agreement.

In 1944, a new edition of F. M. Wilcox’s *Testimony of Jesus*, with an additional chapter on “The Inspiration of the Bible Writers,” came off the press. It was in this chapter that probably for the first time Ellen White’s Manuscript 16, 1888 (“The Inspiration of the Word of God”) and Manuscript 24, 1886 (“Objections to the Bible”) appeared in print. The second of these manuscripts would be quoted frequently in later discussions of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching of biblical inspiration.

Also during the period 1915 to 1950, some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist studies in geology, biblical archeology, and biblical chronology appeared in support of

the trustworthiness of the Bible. George M. Price, for instance, penned several books in which he used geological data to support the biblical accounts of Creation and the Flood. W. W. Prescott, Lynn H. Wood, and several others used archeology in confirming the historicity of Bible accounts. Edwin R. Thiele demonstrated in his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (1943), that many of the so-called historical discrepancies of the Bible could actually be synchronized.

Despite the seeds of disbelief in Ellen White's prophetic ministry that Ludwig R. Conradi sowed in Europe during the 1930s, several new books came of the press in both the United States and Europe (between 1915 and 1950) advocating the genuineness of her prophetic gift. Those books, however, were more concerned with proving the prophetic gift of Ellen White than in discussing the actual nature of her inspiration.

Up to the 1950s, Seventh-day Adventists were much concerned about defending the trustworthiness of Scripture from Modernist attacks. The inspiration of the Scriptures was largely defined during that period in terms of infallibility and verbal inspiration. From the 1950s on, however, Seventh-day Adventists would see the rise of new trends that would multiply during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Among those trends would be an increasing tendency to define inspiration from factual studies on the person and writings of Ellen White. □

This article is the first of three parts.

REFERENCES

- ¹ William Miller, *Apology and Defence* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1845), pp. 5, 6.
- ² _____, ["Statement of Faith"], Sept. 5, 1822, ASC; Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), p. 77.
- ³ William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843* (Troy, N.Y.: Kemble & Hooper, 1836), p. 5.
- ⁴ James White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, Me.: James White, 1847), p. 13.
- ⁵ Uriah Smith, *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist [SDA] Publ. Assn., 1872), p. 5.
- ⁶ Moses Hull, *The Bible From Heaven: Or A Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity* (Battle Creek: Steam Press, 1863), pp. 168, 169.
- ⁷ Emmett K. Vande Vere, *Rugged Heart: The Story of George I. Butler* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publ. Assn., 1979), p. 66.
- ⁸ G. I. Butler, "Inspiration [—No. 1]," *Review and Herald* (hereafter referred to as *RH*) (Jan. 8, 1884), p. 24.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ G. I. Butler, "Inspiration [—No. 9]," *RH* (May 27, 1884), p. 344.
- ¹¹ G. I. Butler, "Inspiration [—No. 7]," *RH* (April 22, 1884), pp. 265, 266.
- ¹² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 22.
- ¹³ *Sabbath School Lessons for Senior Classes*, No. 98 (1st quarter 1893), p. 9.
- ¹⁴ G. W. Morse, "Scripture Questions," *RH* (March 6, 1888), p. 155.
- ¹⁵ Uriah Smith, "Which Are Revealed,

Words or Ideas?" *RH* (March 13, 1888), pp. 168, 169.

¹⁶ D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of 28 Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Kalamazoo Publ. Co., 1888), pp. 44, 45.

¹⁷ Editorial, "Questions on Inspiration," *Signs of the Times* (Oct. 27, 1890), p. 531.

¹⁸ Editorial, "2976.—Versions and Verbal Inspiration," Question Corner, *Signs of the Times* (Nov. 17, 1909), p. 2 (italics in the original).

¹⁹ Quoted in Ellen G. White in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 24. (The words *every*, *any*, and *all* are underlined in the original.)

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 24.

²¹ _____, *Great Controversy* (1888), p. vi.

²² _____, in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, Jan. 18, 1889, Ellen G. White Research Center—Andrews University (EGWRC—AU).

²⁵ Ellen G. White, in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21.

²⁶ _____, *Testimony for the Church*, No. 26 (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1876), in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 10.

²⁷ _____, *Spiritual Gifts, My Christian Experience, Views and Labors* (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1860), vol. 2, p. 293.

²⁸ _____, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 37.

²⁹ *Signs of the Times*, April 15, 1906.

³⁰ _____, *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892), p. 107.

³¹ _____, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1915), p. 312.

³² _____, "The Tasmanian Camp-meeting," *RH* (Feb. 11, 1896), p. 81.

³³ _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 369.

³⁴ _____, *Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 307.

³⁵ _____, *The Great Controversy* (1888), p. d; *ibid.* (1911), p. vii.

³⁶ C. M. Snow, "An Attack Upon God," *RH* (Oct. 24, 1912), p. 11.

³⁷ A. G. Daniells, in "Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible," 17, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, Aug. 1, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

³⁸ _____, in "Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History," 9, in 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, July 30, 1919, fld. 5, EGWRC-AU.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴¹ F. M. W[ilcox], "Forsaking the Foundations of Faith," *RH* (Nov. 28, 1929), p. 14.

Leon A. Smith, "The Chicago Conference of Christian Fundamentals," *RH* (July 15, 1920), p. 20.

⁴² William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1912), pp. 194, 195, in Benjamin L. House, *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges: A Course in Biblical Theology*, tentative ed. ([Washington, D.C.]: General Conference Department of Education, 1926), pp. 60-69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁶ P. E. Kretzmann, "Modern Views About Inspiration—and the Truth of Scriptures," *Princeton Theological Review* 27 (April 1929), in "Valuable Quotations From Reliable Sources," *Ministry* (June 1931), pp. 20, 21.

⁴⁷ *1931 Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn. [1931]), 377, art. 1 (italics supplied).

⁴⁸ *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, No. 152 (2nd quarter 1933), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Haynes, *God's Book*, p. 136 (italics in the original).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138 (italics in the original).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137 (italics in the original).