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ADVENTIST VIEWS ON INSPIRATION

**The last half of the 20th century provided
a continuation of the debate in the Adventist Church
over the nature of inspiration.**

A significant number of publications came out during the 1950s uplifting the reliability of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Of the books dealing with Ellen White, Francis D. Nichol's *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (1951) was the most outstanding. In this 702-page volume, Nichol responded to almost all charges raised against Ellen White since the days of Canright.

It was also during the 1950s that a group of Seventh-day Adventist scholars combined their efforts to produce a *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953-1957). With the help of such groups as the Committee on Bible Chronology and the Committee on Problems in Bible Transla-

tions, the commentary integrated in a single project the views of its various contributors. It was stated that while rejecting the position that "the writers of Scripture wrote under verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit," the commentary was carried out under the assumption that the writers of Scripture "spoke and wrote according to their own individualities and characteristics, as is indicated by the varied styles of writing that they display, but free of

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The first edition of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (1966) came off the press with a specific entry on the “Inspiration of Scripture.” After quoting the statement on the “Holy Scriptures” of the Fundamental Beliefs that had been officially accepted since 1931, the entry stated that Seventh-day Adventists “do not believe in verbal inspiration, according to the usual meaning of the term, but in what may properly be called thought inspiration.”

the errors found in other writings.”¹

In the mid-1950s, Carl W. Daggy completed his M.A. in which he explicitly suggested that Seventh-day Adventists were not in full agreement with the Fundamentalist view of inspiration. According to Daggy, “Fundamentalists and Seventh-day Adventists are in agreement that the Bible is the Christian’s sole unerring rule of faith and practice. They sharply disagree, however, on the question of verbal inspiration. The Fundamentalists generally take the position that the words of Scriptures, as such, were inspired by God. Seventh-day Adventists, on the other hand, believe that inspiration functioned in the minds of the Bible writers, but that their choice of words was their own. At the same time, they insist that this choice was guarded so that the writers did not express error.”²

In 1957, the book *Questions on Doctrine* came out affirming that Sev-

enth-day Adventists believed that the Bible “not merely *contains* the word of God, but *is* the word of God.”³

In the following year (1958) Ellen White’s *Selected Messages*, Book 1, came off the press with an insightful section compiled from the author’s writings on inspiration.

Although Seventh-day Adventists had traditionally held the propositional view of revelation, a perceivable move toward the encounter view of revelation was taken by Frederick E. J. Harder in his 506-page Ph.D. dissertation, “Revelation, a Source of Knowledge as Conceived by Ellen G. White,” defended in 1960 at New York University. In this dissertation, Harder studied Ellen G. White’s concept of revelation in the light of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Augustus Strong, and Emil Brunner.

In interpreting Ellen White’s concept of revelation, Harder suggested that “White agreed with Brunner’s

emphasis on the personal content of revelation—that it consists in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship in which God communicates Himself to man. She did not share Brunner’s hesitancy to accept the revelation of specific truths, for these, she believed, contribute to the ultimate reconciliation between man and God.”⁴

While acknowledging that Ellen White recognized the communication of specific truths in the process of revelation, Harder did not emphasize her understanding of that communication as an actual impartation of propositional truths. Although “the line between the natural and the supernatural is almost nonexistent so far as the attainment of knowledge is concerned,” there is still a need for the Word of God because that Word was “communicated by methods less subject to the distortions of sin” than in natural revelation.⁵

In regard to the inspiration of Scripture, Harder stated that for Ellen White “inspiration reveals thought, but it does not set the mold for its form of expression.”⁶ Harder recognized, however, that for Ellen White the Bible was “a correct record” of biography and history because (1) “the scribes wrote under direction of the Holy Spirit,” and (2) “this influence counteracted the human biases which cause biographers to gloss over many derogatory facts about their heroes and thus present only a partial truth.”⁷ “Inasmuch as both science

and the Bible have the same author, there can be no conflict between them when they are rightly understood.”⁸ Varieties of “styles and subject matters” are seen by Ellen White as “a strength rather than weakness,” because they provide “varying emphases” to the many aspects of truth “which would not be presented in a toughly uniform work.”⁹

Another slight move toward encounter revelation was taken by Jack W. Provonsha, professor of Christian Ethics at Loma Linda University, in his article “Revelation and Inspiration,” published in 1964 in the *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. In this article, Provonsha spoke of encounter revelation in a much friendlier way than previous traditional Seventh-day Adventists. The overall tenor of the article seemed even to suggest a certain via-media position between the propositional concept of revelation and the encounter revelation theory.

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was followed by some quotations from Ellen White's writings.

Also in 1966, Arthur L. White, secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate and grandson of Ellen White, presented a lecture at Andrews University under the title "Toward a Factual Concept of Inspiration" (published in 1973). In that lecture, he stated that "Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely fortunate in approaching the question of the inspiration of the prophets. We are not left to find our way, drawing all our conclusions from writings of two thousand years or more ago that have come down to us through varied transcriptions and translations. With us it is an almost contemporary matter, for we have had a prophet in our midst. It is generally granted by the careful student of her works that the experience of Ellen G. White was not different from that of the prophets of old."¹¹

Arthur White also said that "Ellen G. White's statements concerning the Bible and her work indicate that the concept of verbal inspiration is without support in either the Bible writers' or her own word."¹² He declared also that while "the Scriptures provide an infallible revelation," "the language used in imparting it to mankind is not infallible."¹³ He admitted the existence of factual discrepancies in "details of minor consequence."¹⁴

The Sabbath school lesson for October 11, 1969, stated, however, that not only "the actual impartation

of the divine revelation of truth came to the prophet under the Spirit's guidance and control" (cf. Num. 12:6; Hosea 12:10; Rev. 1:10, 11), but also that "the communication to the people of the light received by the prophet, was also directed by the Holy Spirit" (cf. 2 Peter 1:21; Rev. 1:2, 11).¹⁵

Aware of the new critical trends that were slowly leading Seventh-day Adventism into a crisis on inspiration, Edward Heppenstall, professor of systematic theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, pointed out in *Ministry* magazine for July 1970 that Seventh-day Adventists had simply aligned themselves "with the evangelical or traditional position," without having a "clearly defined and developed doctrine of revelation and inspiration."¹⁶

After blaming the encounter theory of revelation for confusing revelation with regeneration, Heppenstall affirmed that "God's communication is addressed to the mind of man in rational concepts and verbal propositions." "By inspiration," according to Heppenstall, "God kept the Bible writers within the conceptual truths of His revelation," so that "both the writers and the message were God directed" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Heppenstall affirmed also that Scripture is "without error in what it teaches, in the historical facts basic to the truths they are intended to unfold," but not

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necessarily in "the accuracy of words per se."¹⁷

Thus, the years 1950 to 1970 saw the emergence of some moves toward encounter revelation and a thought view of inspiration that was largely informed by a particular understanding of Ellen White's phenomena. Not until the 1970s and early 1980s, however, did these trends reach their climactic expression.

Challenges of the Historicization of Inspired Writings (1970-1991)

While conflicting views of inspiration had been previously nurtured within Seventh-day Adventism, it was in the early 1970s that Seventh-day Adventist scholars became more controversially divided on this particular doctrine. The main forums to foster those discussions were the Association of Adventist Forums (officially established in the fall of 1967) and its *Spectrum* magazine (first issued in the winter of 1969).

As a non-official church publication, *Spectrum* assumed a revisionist-

critical stand, which would eventually be denounced by Neal C. Wilson, General Conference president, at the 1984 Annual Council of the General Conference. Several articles advocating encounter revelation and the use of the historical-critical method came out in *Spectrum*, setting the agenda for many discussions on inspiration during the period 1970-1991.

Encounter Revelation. The theory of encounter revelation was a neo-orthodox reaction to the traditional concept of propositional revelation. It perceives revelation as a subjective personal divine-human encounter rather than as an objective communication of propositional truth. The Bible is, therefore, reduced to a mere human testimony of that encounter.

The Autumn 1970 issue of *Spectrum* came out with several articles dealing with Ellen White. Among those articles was one by F. E. J. Harder, dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Andrews University, in which he further elaborated some basic concepts of his Ph.D. disserta-

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tion (1960). Seventh-day Adventists were challenged by Harder’s article to move beyond the 19th-century Protestant view of special revelation “as propositionally embedded within an ancient book.” For Harder, special revelation was a “continuing conversation and communion between God and living people” in personal and communal bases.¹⁸

In 1975, Herold Weiss, chairman of the Department of Religious Studies of St. Mary’s College, Indiana, and former assistant professor of New Testament at Andrews University, moved even more explicitly toward the encounter theology of neo-orthodoxy in his *Spectrum* article entitled “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration.” Under the assumption that “both revelation and inspiration take place outside and prior to the Bible,” Weiss argued that “to equate God’s Word with a book is the work of a corrupted faith that sets up for itself an idol. The words of the book are the words of the prophets which only tangentially reflect the

Word of God. Nothing on earth is the ultimate expression of God. To make the Bible such is bibliolatry, just another form of idolatry.”¹⁹

Weiss rejected the “verbal inspiration” idea that “the Bible has one Author” because “historical, grammatical and literary” studies have shown that “it is impossible to lump all the books of the Bible under one author.” Based on such an assumption. Weiss argued that “the Bible as a book can and must be studied as any other book.”²⁰

Meanwhile, the most significant Seventh-day Adventist critical responses to the encounter revelation theory were penned by Raoul Dederen during the 1970s. In a paper entitled “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” which came out in the Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics (1974), Dederen qualified the idea of setting “revelation-encounter over against revelation-doctrine” as a false dichotomy. While admitting that revelation is indeed “an event, an encounter,” Dederen also ex-

plained that “one’s encounter with Christ is effected only through hearing the prophetic and apostolic proclamation consigned to Scriptures. These fragile words of Scripture passed down to us from the OT and the NT writers are intrinsic to the revelational process. They are as true as the Christ event they explicate, and they share in the ‘once-for-all’ character of the divine revelation.”²¹

After describing how “the age of enlightenment” questioned the Christian traditional view of Scripture as “a divine communication to man cast in written form under the express inflow of the Holy Spirit,” Dederen qualified any attempt to reject “the testimony of Scripture regarding itself” as “unscientific.”²²

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The Historical-Critical Method. The historical-critical method is a method of literary analysis used to study documents from the perspective of their indebtedness to the particular socio-cultural milieu in which they were produced. The method grew out of the Enlightenment assumption (or basic presupposition)

that history can be understood without taking into consideration supernatural intervention.

The question whether the method is adequate for the study of “inspired” writings divided Seventh-day Adventist scholars eventually into three major groups: (1) Those who accept the method with its basic presupposition; (2) those who believe that a modified version of the method can be used apart from its basic presupposition; and (3) those who hold that the method is unacceptable because it cannot be isolated from its basic presupposition.

The existence of so-called “modified” versions of the classical historical-critical method would require a much more detailed study to identify particular understandings of the method by different Seventh-day Adventist scholars. However, no classification of such variant understandings are provided in the present article beyond the endeavor of pointing out a few Seventh-day Adventist studies that attempt to foster the use of the method and criticisms of those attempts.

Historical-critical studies of Ellen White’s writings were encouraged by the Autumn 1970 *Spectrum* article “Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship,” written by Roy Branson, then assistant professor of Christian ethics at Andrews University, and Herold D. Weiss, then assistant professor of New Tes-

tament at the same university. In that article, Branson and Weiss challenged Seventh-day Adventists scholars to study Ellen White's writings with a four-step historical-critical hermeneutics, intended (1) "to discover the nature of Mrs. White's relationship to other authors," (2) "to recover the social and intellectual milieu in which she lived and wrote," (3) "to give close attention to the development of Ellen White's writings within her own lifetime, and also to the development of the church," and (4) "to apply in our day the words she spoke in her day."²⁴

Such hermeneutics set the trend for several historical-critical studies that came out during this period (1970-1991) charging Ellen White with historical errors, plagiarism, psychological trances, and theological pitfalls.

In the fall of 1979, Benjamin McArthur, professor of American history at Southern Missionary College, pointed out in his *Spectrum* article, "Where Are Historians Taking the Church?" that Seventh-day Adventism was "witnessing the first great age of Adventist historical revisionism." McArthur explained that the new generation of Seventh-day Adventist revisionists worked under the common presupposition that "the cultural milieu in which Ellen White lived and worked to a large degree shaped her writings on history, prophecy, health and, by impli-

cation, every other topic she discussed." As a result, "the nature of her inspiration" and "her authority in the church" were at issue.²⁵

McArthur explained that since "orthodox belief and critical historical judgment are incompatible," "the problem is not that the Adventist historian lacks faith in God's providential leading, but that there is no way for him to include it in historical explanation."²⁶ Thus, the use of the historical-critical method led Seventh-day Adventist revisionists not only to deal with Ellen White's writings as "historically conditioned"²⁷ but also to a large extent to give up the Great Controversy theme as a philosophy of history.

In March 1980, Donald McAdams, president of Southwestern Adventist College, published an article in *Spectrum* under the explanatory title "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s." In that article, McAdams explained how critical studies of Ellen White during the 1970s tried to show that her works were "not entirely original" (because she "copied from other sources") and were "not infallible" (because she "made statements that were not correct").²⁸

The use of the historical-critical method was also encouraged in regard to the study of Scripture. Of special significance was the section entitled "Ways to Read the Bible" of the December 1982 issue of *Spec-*

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trum magazine. There, John C. Brunt, professor of New Testament at Walla Walla College, argued that the use of the historical-critical method does not necessarily lead to “liberal conclusions.” Brunt further suggested that “virtually all Adventist exegetes [sic] of Scripture do use historical-critical methodology, even if they are not willing to use the term. The historical-critical method deserves a place in the armamentarium of Adventists who are serious about understanding their Bibles.”²⁹

Larry G. Herr, then professor of Old Testament in the seminary of the Far Eastern Division in the Philippines, argued in the same line that “the ‘historical-critical’ method of Bible study, used properly, can be a valid and powerful tool for Seventh-day Adventists.”³⁰

Meanwhile, some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist criticisms of the historical-critical method were penned by E. Edward Zinke and Gerhard F. Hasel. During the 1970s, Zinke, then research assis-

tant and assistant secretary of the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference, came out with several articles on the subject. Of special significance was his supplement to *Ministry* magazine of October 1977, entitled “A Conservative Approach to Theology.” After surveying different approaches to theology from a historical perspective, Zinke stated that “method in theology must not be determined by an *a priori* consideration of the nature of man, of the universe, or of any aspect of these two. Rather, method must be determined totally by Scripture itself. The method by which Scripture is studied must not be the same as that applied to human literature. Since God’s revelation is distinct from that which takes place within the human sphere, the method applied to its interpretation is not the same as that which is applied to what is produced within the human sphere. Thus the nature of revelation itself must be considered within the context of the method for

Concerns about the use of the historical-critical method by Seventh-day Adventist scholars also led the 1986 Annual Council of the General Conference, which convened in Rio de Janeiro, to vote a document on “Methods of Bible Study.” In this official document, Adventist Bible students were urged “to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.”

its interpretation.”³¹

In 1980, Gerhard F. Hasel, professor of Old Testament and biblical theology at Andrews University, published his book *Understanding the Living Word of God*, in which he criticized the historical-critical method for its “totally immanent view of history on the horizontal level without any vertical, transcendent dimension.”³² Hasel not only charged that method with undermining the authority of the Scriptures, but also argued in favor of an approach to Scripture that could recognize its divine, supernatural element.

In 1985 the Biblical Research Institute published Hasel’s book, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, in which the author strongly criticized the historical-critical method for “disallowing divine, supernatural intervention in history.”³³ Under the assumption that “the Bible must remain the master and the method the servant,” Hasel argued that in the study of Scripture

the “method must always be subject to the judgment of Scripture.” Thus “the study of Scripture must follow a method that derives its philosophical conceptuality, its norms and procedures from Scripture itself.”³⁴

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unacceptable to Adventists.”³⁵

The use of the historical-critical method was also criticized in several articles by Gerhard F. Hasel, Leon I. Mashchak, Richard M. Davidson, and Mario Veloso.

Further Developments. Since 1970, a significant variety of definitions of inspiration have been proposed in Seventh-day Adventist circles. Those definitions have oscillated between attempts to accommodate apparent “discrepancies” of inspired writings and concerns of uplifting the infallibility of those writings against the challenges imposed by revisionist studies.

In 1972, Rene Noorbergen’s *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* described the prophetic ministry in strong terms. According to Noorbergen, a “true prophet is not a psychic who performs with the aid of a mental or ‘spiritual’ crutch, but is someone who has no degree of freedom either in turning in or controlling the prophetic impulses or prophetic recall. These impulses are superimposed over the prophet’s conscious mind by a supernatural personal being, having absolute knowledge of both past and future, making no allowance for error or human miscalculation.”³⁶

Also in 1972, Hans Heinz’ *Glaubenslehren der Heiligen Schrift* came out with a special chapter on “The Holy Scripture.” After rejecting the theory of verbal inspiration, Heinz defined inspiration as “a positive di-

vine impact on the mind, will, and imagination of the author, who uses his means in order to write as God desires, whereby the author is under the guidance of God, which prevents error.”³⁷

Of special significance was the 1974 Bible Conference, which was summoned “to focus on the Bible as the foundation of Adventist faith and doctrine, and to study sound principles of hermeneutics.”³⁸ The doctrine of inspiration was addressed in Raoul Dederen’s two papers, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics” and “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration.”

In the latter, Dederen defined inspiration as “the controlling influence that God exerts over the human instrument by whom His revelation is communicated. It has to do with the *reception*, by the prophet, of the divine revelation and the accuracy with which it is *transmitted*, whether in an oral or a written form. At the same time it gives the record of revelation its authority and validity for us.”³⁹

To this he added, “We can hardly believe that God, having performed the mighty acts and revealed their true meaning and import to the minds of prophets and apostles would leave the prophetic and apostolic ministry to take care of itself. The same Holy Spirit, we hold, who called them to share God’s knowledge and plans, also aided their ef-

forts to convey such a revelation to those to whom they ministered.”⁴⁰

Dederen also pointed out the existence of a tendency in certain circles “to caricature” as “some sort of a dictation theory” the position of those who believed that the Bible was “fully inspired” “in all its parts.” While recognizing that on “some occasions” God actually spoke and man just recorded the words (Gen. 22:15-18; Ex. 20:1-17), Dederen stated that “in the main” inspiration functioned in such a flexible way as to allow for “human personalities.”⁴¹

After quoting Ellen White’s classic statement, “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired” from *Selected Messages*, Book 1, page 21, Dederen raised the crucial question, “Since the thoughts rather than the words are inspired, shall we conclude that we are at liberty to treat the text of Scripture as being of little importance?” Answering the question, he explained that “some, in fact, do maintain that God suggested the thoughts and the general trend of His revelation, leaving the prophet free to express them in his own language, as he liked. Quite apart from the fact that ideas are not most usually transferred by means other than words, this scheme ignores the fact that if the thought communicated to a prophet is of the essence of a revelation, the form in which it is expressed is of prime sig-

nificance. The exegetical study of the Scriptures in their original language would lose much of its meaning if God has not guided the prophet in the writing of his message.”⁴²

In regard to Ellen White’s position on the matter, Dederen asserted that “Ellen White herself, who so clearly emphasizes that the thoughts rather than the words of a prophet are inspired, stipulates: ‘While I am writing out important matters, He is beside me helping me . . . and when I am puzzled for a fit word to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind.’ ‘I tremble for fear,’ adds the servant of the Lord, ‘lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words . . . Who is sufficient for these things?’ Everything points to the fact that God who imbued the prophets’ minds with thoughts and inspired them in the fulfillment of their task also watched over them in their attempts to express ‘infinite ideas’ and embody them in ‘finite vehicles’ of human language.”⁴³

Such a view of inspiration “does not nullify,” according to Dederen, “the significant human authorship of the biblical writings. It simply affirms that the prophetic message as we find it in Scripture is the testimony of God.”⁴⁴

In 1977, Dederen came out with an insert in *Ministry*, under the title “Ellen White’s Doctrine of Scripture.” While declaring that Ellen

[Arthur] White admitted that while “the revelation of God’s will is authoritative and infallible,” “the language used in imparting it to mankind is human and hence is imperfect.” He saw the prophet as under the influence of the Spirit of God not only in receiving “his message through the visions” but also in bearing testimony.

White did not support the views of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the original autographs, Dederen explained that Ellen White’s concept of inspiration is that “the whole man is inspired, not just his words.”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Arthur White prepared two series of articles for the *Review*, trying to counteract some of the tensions unleashed by revisionist studies of Ellen White. The first series came out in early 1978, under the general title “Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration.” In this series, Arthur White suggested again that Seventh-day Adventists were in a better position to understand the *modus operandi* of inspiration, because they still had the autographs of a modern prophet (Ellen White), while those of the Bible were no longer available.

White admitted that while “the revelation of God’s will is authoritative and infallible,” “the language used in imparting it to mankind is human and hence is imperfect.”⁴⁶ He saw the prophet as under the influence of the

Spirit of God not only in receiving “his message through the visions” but also in bearing testimony. Despite certain occasions in which “the very words to be used are impressed upon his mind by the Spirit of God,” the influence of the Spirit does not lead the prophet to “the point of being mechanically controlled, or of being forced into a mold.”⁴⁷

Arthur White began his second series, “The E. G. White Historical Writings” (summer of 1979), explaining in a euphemistic way that probably never before, since the death of Ellen White in 1915, had Seventh-day Adventists been so interested in the questions of “inspiration in general and the inspiration of Ellen White in particular,” as well as “Ellen White’s ‘sources’ for the Conflict of the Ages books in general, and *The Great Controversy* and *The Desire of Ages* in particular.” He promised that this series of articles would lead the readers “some distance from the narrow concepts held by some of a mechanical, verbal inspiration according to which

Kenneth Wood, editor of the Review, suggested that readers keep in mind “four facts”: (1) “Inspired writings do not come to us ‘untouched by human hands’; (2) “in communicating with the human family, God inspired persons, not writings”; (3) “inspiration involves a variety of methods in communicating truth and God’s will”; and (4) “the message of an inspired writer does not depend for its authority on whether it is accompanied by the label, ‘This is God’s Word.’”

Ellen White wrote only what was revealed to her in vision or dictated to her by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

In recommending this series, Kenneth Wood, editor of the *Review*, suggested that readers keep in mind “four facts”: (1) “*Inspired writings do not come to us ‘untouched by human hands’*”; (2) “*in communicating with the human family, God inspired persons, not writings*”; (3) “*inspiration involves a variety of methods in communicating truth and God’s will*”; and (4) “*the message of an inspired writer does not depend for its authority on whether it is accompanied by the label, ‘This is God’s Word.’*” Wood also pointed out that “because Satan is today making supreme efforts to undermine confidence in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, we feel convinced that the end of all things is near.”⁴⁹

Within the context of the contemporary revisionist challenges,

Seventh-day Adventists published, in 1980, two major consensus documents in order to confirm their faith in the trustworthiness of the inspired writings. The first one, titled “Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible,” was produced “over a period of several years, involving scientists, theologians, administrators, teachers, and others throughout the world church.” Although “numerous revisions” in its text had been made taking into consideration the suggestions received, the document appeared in the *Adventist Review* of January 17 with a special note asking for additional “comments and suggestions” to be addressed to W. Duncan Eva, a vice-president of the General Conference.

The document under consideration recognized that “the writers of the Holy Scripture were inspired by God with ideas and concepts,” but “He did not dictate His message to

them word by word, except in certain instances in which God or an angel spoke or voices were heard by the prophet.” In regard to the difficulties of the Bible, the same document warned that “it is well to remember that such difficulties in Scripture may be the result of imperfections of human understanding, or lack of knowledge of the circumstances involved. Some difficulties may be resolved by further research and discovery. Others may not be understood or resolved until the future life. However, we must guard against sitting in judgment on the Scriptures. No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said.”⁵⁰

The second document (far more influential than the first one) was the new 1980 “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” officially accepted by the delegates of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church at the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas. The new statement on the Scriptures (statement 1) of that document reads as follows: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the stan-

dard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”⁵¹

The new statement on the gift of prophecy (statement 17) affirmed the following: “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”⁵²

Also published in 1980, Gerhard F. Hasel’s book *Understanding the Living Word of God* included a whole chapter on the inspiration of Scripture. In that chapter, Hasel argued that the witnesses of Peter (2 Peter 1:19-21) and Paul (2 Tim. 3:16) attest that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” “Having received the divine revelation, the human penman was inspired,” according to Hasel, “by the Holy Spirit to communicate these divine ideas and thoughts accurately and authoritatively in the language of men.” The divine authorship of Scripture was seen as the source for both “the unity of Scripture” and “the supreme authority of Scripture.”⁵³

In 1981, William G. Johnsson, as-

sociate editor of the *Adventist Review*, stated in a *Ministry* article, "How Does God Speak?" that "defining inspiration is like catching a rainbow. When we have put forth our best efforts, there will remain an elusive factor, an element of mystery."⁵⁴

Also in 1981, Roger W. Coon, associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, began a three-part series on "Inspiration/Revelation" in *The Journal of Adventist Education*. In this series Coon advocated "plenary (thought) inspiration," in exclusion to both "verbal inspiration" and "encounter inspiration."⁵⁵

In addressing the subject of infallibility, Coon mentioned two theories: (1) The "strait-jacket" theory, in which true prophetic writings are regarded as "prevented from making any type of error," and (2) the "intervention" theory, which holds that "if in his humanity a prophet of God errs, *and* the nature of that error is sufficiently serious to materially affect (a) the direction of God's church, (b) the eternal destiny of one person, or (c) the purity of a doctrine, *then* (and only then) the Holy Spirit immediately moves the prophet to correct the error, so that no permanent damage is done."⁵⁶

Taking his stand on the side of the "intervention" theory, Coon stated that "in inspired writings, ancient [the Bible] and modern [the writings of Ellen White], there are

inconsequential errors of minor, insignificant detail." He then listed a few examples of "errors" in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White. Among the "errors" in Scripture he mentions: (1) the allusion to Jeremiah (instead of Zechariah) as the author of the quotation found in Matthew 27:9 and 10 (cf. Zech. 11:12, 13); and (2) the different wordings of the inscription placed at the top of the cross (cf. Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). The "errors" of Ellen White are seen as including (1) a reference to the Paradise Valley Sanitarium as having 40 rooms (instead of 38); and (2) a mentioning of the apostle Peter (instead of Paul) as the author of the saying, "the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14).⁵⁷

Rejecting the theory of "degrees of inspiration (or revelation)" and "degrees of authority," Coon stated that "Ellen G. White is best understood in the role of the literary but noncanonical prophets of the Bible." Thus, though the writings of Ellen White have the same level of inspiration and authority as the Bible, they are not "an addition to the sacred canon of Scripture."⁵⁸

In response to the charges of plagiarism raised against Ellen White, George E. Rice, then associate professor of New Testament at Andrews University, in 1983 published his book *Luke, a Plagiarist?* In this book he suggested that the inspiration of

While recognizing that Seventh-day Adventists tended to see the prophetic model as “a big umbrella under which we gather all of the books of the Bible,” George E. Rice pointed out that this model “is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait.”

Scripture can be fully understood only from the perspective of two distinctive models of inspiration.

The first of those models was termed “prophetic model,” by which Rice referred to “divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams, visions, thought illumination as seen in the psalms and the wisdom literature, and the recording of these theophanies (divine manifestations) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁹

While recognizing that Seventh-day Adventists tended to see the prophetic model as “a big umbrella under which we gather all of the books of the Bible,” Rice pointed out that this model “is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait,” as well as the content of “1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and other Old Testament books.” Room was, therefore, left for a second model of inspiration that would function as “the complement to and companion of the prophetic model.”⁶⁰

That second model of inspiration is called the “Lucan model” (cf. Luke 1:1-4), which Rice saw as “based on

research—reading and oral interviews.”⁶¹ He explained that “the Bible writer who operated under this model was an author and a theologian in his own right. As an author he shaped and arranged the material he researched so that the end product expressed his interests. As a theologian he worked with the material so that the end product expressed his theological understanding. Yet the Spirit guided throughout the whole process.”⁶²

In 1985, Richard Rice, professor of theology at Loma Linda University, included a whole chapter on “The Doctrine of Revelation” in his book *The Reign of God*. Regarding inspiration as “one aspect” of “the larger dynamic of God’s communication to human beings,” the author pointed out that “the doctrine of revelation” should not be reduced “to the phenomenon of inspiration.”⁶³

Richard Rice saw the biblical doctrine of inspiration as containing two important ideas: (1) “The divine authority of Scripture,” and (2) “the divine-human character of Scrip-

In 1988, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference came out with a representative exposition of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, entitled Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . About Inspiration of the Scriptures, this book emphasized (1) that “God inspired men—not words”; (2) that “the Bible is the written Word of God”; (3) that “the Bible does not teach partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration”; and (4) that the guidance of the Holy Spirit “guarantees the Bible’s trustworthiness.” While the Bible is regarded as “the supreme standard,” the writings of Ellen White are seen as (1) “a guide to the Bible,” (2) “a guide in understanding the Bible,” and (3) “a guide to apply Bible principles.”

ture.” “The Bible,” according to Rice, “is not a combination of the words of God *and* the words of men” but rather “the word of God *in* the words of men.”⁶⁴

The same author regarded the doctrine of inerrancy as “unbiblical” because: (1) “It seems to overlook the human dimension of Scripture”; (2) “it sometimes leads to distorted and unconvincing interpretations of the Bible”; and (3) “it miscasts the fundamental purpose of Scripture.” He then stated that “Seventh-day Adventists have never advocated biblical inerrancy, although they supported the divine authority and complete reliability of the Scriptures.”⁶⁵

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tion of the General Conference came out with a representative exposition of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . About Inspiration of the Scriptures*, this book emphasized (1) that “God inspired men—not words”⁶⁶; (2) that “the Bible is the written Word of God”; (3) that “the Bible does not teach partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration”⁶⁷; and (4) that the guidance of the Holy Spirit “guarantees the Bible’s trustworthiness.”⁶⁸ While the Bible is regarded as “the supreme standard,” the writings of Ellen White are seen as (1) “a guide to the Bible,” (2) “a guide in understanding the Bible,” and (3) “a guide to apply Bible principles.”⁶⁹

Noteworthy also are a few theses

and dissertations defended at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among them is "Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield" (1987) by Peter van Bemmelen, which provided some insights on the relationship between the claims and the phenomena of Scripture: "Once Scripture is accepted as the only legitimate starting-point and source of reference in our quest, we must face up to the question whether the effort to establish the doctrine of inspiration by letting the Bible speak for itself should proceed primarily from the multifarious phenomena of the content and structure of Scripture or whether it should start from the explicit assertions of the Biblical writers or whether both should receive equal standing. It is evident that the decision we take at this junction is crucial. We suggest in view of considerations presented earlier that the inherent logic of the principle to let Scripture speak for itself requires that the teachings (or assertions, claims, or whatever other terms may be used) should be given priority over the phenomena. We use advisedly the word priority, for the phenomena cannot and should not be ignored. Whatever conclusions may be reached from a thorough study of the assertions must be examined and evaluated in the light of the phe-

nomena, but just as surely, the phenomena must be examined and evaluated in the light of the conclusions derived from the assertions."⁷⁰

But all those discussions previously mentioned have proved themselves unable to bring general agreement to the Seventh-day Adventist scholarly circles on the matter of inspiration. Those debates would actually continue through the 1990s. □

This article is the second of three parts.

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