

Islam withstand academic critique? The diversity (lack of homogeneity) within the German-Muslim community makes all of this very difficult and dangerous.

I found myself reflecting on the possibility that we Westerners have become so diluted by relativism that we may no longer believe in *truth*. Have we become so blindsided by Western, secularized education, so secularized by this Enlightenment model, that we have lost our cutting edge of spirituality? Are we threatened by the Muslim “true believer” who reveals our spiritual, theological weakness?

In all, this is a well written and rewarding book for the serious student of the current theo-political scene.

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Levterov, Theodore N. *The Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of Ellen G. White's Prophetic Gift, 1844–1889*. American University Studies, Series 7: Theology and Religion 347. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. xviii + 252 pp. Hardcover, \$87.95.

Theodore Levterov is assistant professor at the School of Religion and director of the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office at Loma Linda University. He has previously published several articles and book chapters on Adventist history and Ellen G. White studies, yet the current volume constitutes his first published book and contains his doctoral dissertation, which he submitted to the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 2011. Whereas four more recent publications offer an encyclopedic, cultural, documentary, and apologetic look at Ellen G. White (1827–1915), a major visionary and author in nineteenth century American Christianity, Levterov's work presents a different perspective in evaluating and analyzing the development of Seventh-day Adventists' understanding of the doctrine of the gift of prophecy and White's particular prophetic claim from 1844 to 1889 (see D. Fortin and J. Moon, eds., *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013]; T. D. Aamodt, G. Land, and R. L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014]; T. L. Poirier, K. H. Wood, and W. A. Fagal, eds., *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: Volume 1, 1845–1859* [Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2014]; M. D. Burt, ed., *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press; Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2015]).

The book consists of four chapters, preceded by a preface typical of dissertations and succeeded by a summary and conclusion. Chapter 1 describes the background to the study by looking at general Protestant, Millerite, and early Sabbatarian Adventist attitudes towards charismatic and visionary experiences in mid-nineteenth century America up to about 1850. Levterov points out that while Protestants were generally quite hospitable to such manifestations, the Millerite attitude was somewhat more complex. The leaders of the Millerite movement usually responded negatively to these

manifestations among fanatical elements of the movement. Sabbatarian Adventists, however, were compelled to investigate that issue more closely as one of their members, Ellen White (née Harmon), claimed to receive visions and dreams. In order to base her experience on Scripture and to distinguish it from other charismatic claimants, they developed biblical-theological and practical-experiential arguments to substantiate the divine origin and authority of her experience.

Chapter 2 deals with the development of the Sabbatarian Adventist understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift from 1851 to 1862. Leverov points out that during this time her prophetic gift was mostly accepted among Sabbatarian Adventists but not really promoted. Criticism from the first offshoots of the movement, the Messenger Party and the Age to Come movement, made it necessary to vindicate their belief in Ellen White's gift and to respond to specific objections. Thus, they clarified the differences between her gift and the Bible, stressed the biblical support for a continuity of the prophetic gift until the end of time, and began to see the presence of the gift of prophecy as a necessary characteristic of the remnant people of God. In addition, they emphasized the practical-experiential arguments, and, thus, the positive outcome of the gift, even more. The year 1855 seems to mark a "turning point" because Sabbatarian Adventists began to promote the gift more openly and to see it as a "test," albeit only for those who accepted its divine origin.

Chapter 3 covers the development of the understanding of White's prophetic gift from 1863 to 1881. During this period, Seventh-day Adventists had to counter attacks from both internal and external critics. Leverov suggests that many of the arguments against her were not new, yet some additional nuances appeared. One of these nuances was the claim that many of her earlier writings had been "suppressed" because of doctrinal inconsistencies with current Adventist teachings. Seventh-day Adventist responses illustrated their different understanding of how inspiration operated. Now they became more intentional in their promotion of White's writings and in explaining her role as well as in their efforts to distinguish Ellen White from contemporary prophetic claimants. While her own understanding of her prophetic gift did not change from the previous period, she added some theological insights on how she perceived the gift.

Chapter 4 looks at the years from 1882 to 1889, and shows a further refinement of the Adventist understanding of White's prophetic gift. In these years some of the most influential critical works were published against her, focusing particularly on the "suppression" and "plagiarism" charges. Adventist responses did not only clarify these issues but also their concept of White's inspiration. Ellen White's own explanations did not suggest any change in her own understanding, yet she responded to the charges of A. C. Long and D. M. Canright, a diversion from her previous practice to let others speak. At the end of this period some of the clearest and most precise statements about her view of inspiration appeared from her pen—"true inspiration is based on 'thought' rather than 'verbal' or 'word' inspiration" (189).

The author chose to look at the primary sources through the lens of objections raised by opponents of Ellen White and responses to these objections by Seventh-day Adventist writers. One may wonder if all primary sources and all statements really fit this paradigm of opposition and defense. At any rate, this paradigm provides the basic organizational structure for chapters 2–4. In each of these chapters, Levterov first discusses the objections of those opposed to White’s prophetic claim and then analyzes the responses Sabbatarian/Seventh-day Adventists made against these objections. While the first part is always divided into a discussion of the historical overview of the opposition and the specific objections raised during that time, the second part always provides a historical overview of the Adventist responses to the opposition, Adventist responses to particular objections, responses issued through General Conference resolutions, and Ellen White’s own understanding of her prophetic gift. Thus, the reader is led over the same ground of events and arguments at least four times, in addition to the overview in the beginning and the summary at the end of a chapter. The resulting redundancy causes the reader to wonder if the author could not have used a less repetitive structure for his study, for example, a chronological sequence. Such a chronological study may have nevertheless clouded Levterov’s clear list of issues and arguments employed by opponents and proponents of Ellen White.

I would suggest the existence of some imperfections.

1. Levterov states that Smith considered “I saw” phrases as the distinctive feature for differentiating between visions and testimonies, yet this phrase does not appear in the source he gives nor in any other communication from Uriah Smith. Also, the letter discussing that differentiation was written by Smith to D. M. Canright on Aug. 6, 1883 and not on Mar. 22, 1883, as Levterov suggests (184, 236 n. 213).

2. Further, he mistakenly suggests that Ellen White’s letter to Smith on July 31, 1883 was “affirmative,” apparently distinguishing it from her testimonies to the Battle Creek Church in the previous year. He further seems to argue that Smith was “affected by the new critical objections” of others “against her inspiration.” However, while in that letter she took him to task for his lack of support against the bitter accusations of Long, Green, and others, she also pointed out in her correspondence during the previous year that Smith was the root of the criticism and opposition (174; cf. E. G. White, *Testimony for the Battle Creek Church* [84-pp. ed.] [Oakland: Pacific Press, 1882]; idem, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 31 [Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1882]).

3. Levterov identifies Smith as chair of the committee on the revisions of the *Testimonies* (179), yet the business proceedings clearly refer to G. I. Butler as chair of the committee who was empowered to choose the other four members (see G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,” *Review and Herald* [Nov. 27, 1883]: 742; Butler and Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-second Annual Session,” *Review and Herald* [Nov. 20, 1883]: 732).

4. He interprets G. W. Morse's statement in early 1888 on the non-inspired status of specific words and phrases in the book of Job as a rejection of the theory of mechanical inspiration (167). Yet, he overlooks that Morse argued that the Holy Spirit did not inspire the false words and phrases of Job's friends, but rather he moved the inspired writer of the book to quote their sayings in order to teach some truth or illustrate a principle. Morse nevertheless failed to qualify the type of inspiration in general (see G. W. Morse, "Scripture Questions," *Review and Herald* [Mar. 6, 1888]: 155).

5. Levterov seems to suggest that Smith did not address Canright's "suppression" or "plagiarism" charges because his article in the *Review Extra* failed to mention them, yet he apparently overlooks Smith's article in the October 18, 1887 issue of the *Review* and his July 19, 1887 article dealing specifically with the "suppression" charge, even though this second article was not directed against Canright (156).

6. He suggests that Butler had noted that church leaders decided "to republish all of Ellen White's Testimonies" as a result of the "suppression charges" (155). As the revision of the Testimonies commenced as early as 1881, Butler probably did not refer to the suppression charges raised by Long in 1883. Also, it seems that Butler's statement served only as an argument, as he wondered why these charges were raised against *Early Writings*, and not also against the *Testimonies*, which had appeared in abridged form in 1864 but were now about to be republished in full (see J. Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White: The Relationship Between The Prophet and Her Son* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1995], 122–23; G. I. Butler, "Early Writings and Suppression," *Review and Herald* [Aug. 14, 1883]: 5).

7. When Levterov states, quoting from *Testimony*, no. 32, "In addressing ministers in 1885 she again noted that 'God impressed the mind' of his messenger 'with ideas' to meet those who needed help," he misquotes White's statement and misreads it as an affirmation of the concept of thought inspiration (180). She was addressing the guidance that the Holy Spirit lends to the church's ministers when she wrote, "The Spirit of *God*, if allowed to do its work, *will impress the mind with ideas* calculated to meet the cases of those who need help" (*Testimonies for the Church* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948], 5:251 [emphasis supplied to highlight the original text of the quote]).

8. He also seems to overlook that the resolution on the revision of the Testimonies in late 1883 presented a compromise between the Whites and those who preferred to change nothing at all (166, 170, see W. C. White to M. K. White, Nov. 10, 1883; idem, Nov. 20, 1883).

9. Levterov places the section on the nature and influence of the testimonies in *Testimony for the Church*, no. 33, (1889) in the context of "the controversial climate" of the Canright crisis but overlooks the opposition against Ellen White ignited by Butler and Smith in the aftermath of the Minneapolis conference (178–79). Later, he concurs, however, with the observation that *Testimony*, no. 33, responded to the views of Butler and Smith (185).

10. He concludes that White believed "God inspires the thoughts of His messengers, [but] He did not dictate the actual words" (189). While

his suggestion seems to be generally true, there are other statements from her suggesting that the Holy Spirit operates in various modes. He shows scenes, gives thoughts, provides explanations, revives the memory, suggests words, etc. Sometimes several modes operate simultaneously; at other times the Spirit only uses one mode (see, e.g., E. G. White, MS 31, 1889; idem, Letter 265, 1907; idem, *Spiritual Gifts* [Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1860], 2:292–93; idem, “Questions and Answers,” *Review and Herald* [Oct. 8, 1867], 260). Hence, Levterov’s distinction seems too static and absolute.

Poking around in someone else’s work is always easier than making a substantial contribution oneself. Despite some minor flaws, Theodore Levterov’s book stands as a seminal contribution to Adventist scholarship and self-understanding. It provides deep insights into the early Seventh-day Adventist efforts and challenges in understanding Ellen White’s prophetic ministry, her role in the church, and the differences in scope and authority between her writings and the Bible as the ultimate rule of faith and practice. The historical development of the arguments illustrates how these challenges turned the attention of early Adventists to particular issues, provoking them to study and come to a better, more precise, and more realistic understanding of the prophetic gift. Levterov needs to be commended for his scholarly work, and his work is recommended to everyone interested in Ellen White studies or early Adventist studies.

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Mermelstein, Ari, and Shalom E. Holtz, eds. *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 308 pp. Hardcover, \$115.00.

Dr. Ari Mermelstein holds a PhD from New York University and is assistant professor of Bible at Yeshiva University in New York. His first publication is *Creation, Covenant, and the Beginnings of Judaism: Reconceiving Historical Time in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Shalom E. Holtz gained his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania and is an Assyriologist and associate professor of Bible at Yeshiva University in New York. His most recent book is *Neo-Babylonian Trial Records* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

The *Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* contains contributions of twelve different scholars and an introduction written by the editors. The chapters are based on presentations delivered at a conference entitled, “The Divine Courtroom,” hosted by the Leonard and Bea Diener Institute of Jewish Law at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. The motif of the gods enacting divine justice is common to all religions, and the editors specifically offer this volume to demonstrate the need for interdisciplinary scholarship on this very diverse area.

Diversity truly is a feature of the book. Biblical studies are in the majority, but there are investigations of apocryphal, rabbinical, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Muslim literature as well. The book approaches divine justice from different angles, not only culturally, but also topically. While all of the twelve contributions in the present book are worth reading and are mentioned below,