

**TRUST AND DOUBT: PERCEPTIONS OF DIVINE INSPIRATION
IN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST HISTORY (1880–1930)**

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Topic

The belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture came under scrutiny in North America during a period that stretched from the 1850s to the 1920s, as critical scholars questioned traditional hermeneutical presuppositions and conservative Protestant theologians retreated into more strict theories of inspiration. In that context, various Seventh-day Adventist leaders formulated their individual understandings of the nature, manner, and result of the inspiration of the Bible writers and Adventist visionary, Ellen G. White.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the views that selected influential Seventh-day Adventist thinkers held concerning the divine inspiration of the Bible writers and Ellen G. White from 1880 to 1930. In order to outline such a history of Adventist perceptions of divine inspiration, based on a study of selected individuals, it was necessary to describe each thinker's affirmations and objections, underlying sources and influences, and the historical context in which they made their statements.

Sources

This was a documentary study based primarily on published and unpublished primary sources produced by selected Seventh-day Adventists between 1845 and 1930. Both primary and secondary sources were used for background, historical context, and perspective. The most heavily used primary sources were periodicals, the correspondence collections of the Ellen G. White Estate, and other archives containing Adventist resources.

Conclusions

The study identified five general stages in the development of Seventh-day Adventist perceptions of divine inspiration. (1) From 1845 to 1883, they believed in the divine inspiration of both Scripture and Ellen G. White's writings without clarifying the particulars. Scripture was nevertheless seen as having supreme authority, being the only basis for faith and practice. (2) From 1883 to 1888, the theory of degrees of inspiration gained some influence within the denomination in the attempt to vindicate White's writings against critics. (3) That theory experienced its demise after 1888, when various people connected to *The Signs of the Times* advocated the verbal inspiration of Scripture and, in some cases, of White's writings. (4) White's return to the United States of America in 1900 and the subsequent Kellogg crisis

urged several advocates of verbal inspiration either to modify their view or to reject her inspiration altogether. (5) After the controversy over the correct interpretation of the *tāmīd* (continual, daily) in Dan 8 and the revision of the Great Controversy in 1911, relations of the proponents of verbal and thought inspiration swayed between severe tensions and collegial cooperation. Adventist discussions about inspiration revolved primarily around perceptions of White's inspiration. Throughout her life, Ellen G. White maintained, however, a dynamic view that allowed for diverse nondominating operations of the Holy Spirit, which did not fit any particular theory of inspiration.