

**“STUDY TO SHOW YOURSELF APPROVED”:
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM’S LEGACY OF
CAREFUL BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

GINGER HANKS HARWOOD

La Sierra University (Ret.)

BEVERLY BEEM

Walla Walla University (Ret.)

Abstract

This article, based largely on the writings of early Adventist leaders, examines the sources of Adventist hermeneutics primarily as they are revealed through the articles of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and the writings of Ellen G. White. It briefly surveys the interpretative methods of William Miller, recognizing the influence that his contemporary cultural setting had upon him, and identifying major practices that characterized early Adventist biblical interpretation. The article’s focus is on the hermeneutical practices of the nineteenth-century Sabbatarian/Seventh-day Adventist spokespersons and the importance they gave to honest inquiry, the role of reason and revelation, and the practices of contextualization and harmonization in what they deemed adequate Bible study. It also reflects briefly on their understanding of divine and human roles in the production of Scripture, their understanding of inspiration and progressive revelation, and the importance of individual study and the freedom of conscience in the interpretation of Scripture. These principles have shaped the Adventist community and separated it from some other conservative Christian circles in their approach to scriptural interpretation. Most notably, early Adventist hermeneutical practices have been markedly distinct from those employed by groups caught up in the waves of fundamentalism that have become popular from the nineteenth century to the present.

Keywords: hermeneutics, fundamentalism, William Miller, Early Adventism, progressive revelation, inspiration

Introduction

The research reported in this article was conducted in order to ascertain the hermeneutical principles of the early Sabbatarian Adventist movement, identifying their sources, and placing them within their contemporary setting.

William Miller's utilization of interpretive methods is briefly described,¹ with an analysis of the influence that his cultural and theological setting had upon him.² It is demonstrated that the hermeneutical principles of Adventists, initially appropriated from the Millerite movement, were enhanced as the group pressed forward, all the while discovering that they needed to provide a fuller description of their interpretive practices. This article is heavily dependent on articles printed in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald (AR)*, produced by the early leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and supplemented by other published writings of James and Ellen White. Finally, in order to demonstrate the firm establishment of Adventist hermeneutical principles, (adopted from their Millerite experience, refined to their context, and then assimilated to the group culture), the article includes some brief references to statements on hermeneutics made by prominent twentieth-century Adventist leaders.

¹ While this study looks at Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutical principles, and their continuity with practices utilized by William Miller and other leaders in the Second Advent Movement, this is not to ignore the fact that Miller and his contemporaries were products of their own time and the religious/cultural milieu in which they operated. Significant research on the movement and its relationship to its cultural base appears in a multitude of scholarly studies. Readers interested in a broader view of the context may wish to review texts covering the Second Great Awakening, Restorationism, Millenarianism, and the impact of Jacksonian democracy on American thought. Helpful examples of these writings include: Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Jerome L. Clark's three volume series on *1844*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1968). See also Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Illustrated from Writers of the Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978; repr., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Bryan W. Ball, *The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Clarke, 2014); and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950). For overviews more specific to Adventism, see George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993); George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010); Edwin Scott Gaustad, ed., *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994); and Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and The American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001); Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957).

² A very helpful review of the significant literature on this topic is provided by Denis Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880–1930)" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016).

Most specifically, this article traces the importance of honest inquiry, the role of reason and revelation, and the practices of contextualization and harmonization as essential steps in adequate Bible study. It also briefly reflects on the Adventist pioneers eventual formulation of the connection of these practices with their understandings of the divine and human roles in the transmission and understanding of Scripture, along with the importance of freedom of religious conscience, and the nature of progressive revelation and inspiration. The careful praxis that they refined during the nineteenth century shaped the Adventist community and its study of the Bible and separated it from the hermeneutical practices that later became associated with a fundamentalist hermeneutic.³ This article concludes with a brief

³ Fundamentalism, the roots of which can be traced back into the nineteenth century or even to Puritan ideology, began its serious rise during the 1880s and crystallized during the earliest part of the twentieth century. According to James Davison Hunter, this was a shift from general Christian assumptions of *sola Scriptura* that had characterized American Protestantism, and the common acceptance of the Bible as reliable on all points, functioning as the ultimate authority and guide to Christian life. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, dramatic changes in the cultural milieu and the rise of scientism resulted in a split in Protestantism according to their position on the new “scientific” information: some responded by an accommodation with science, while others rejected it as a plot to destroy the very fundamentals of their faith. Conservative Christians felt threatened by a host of scientific approaches to the explanation of the created world, and the steady encroachment on the acceptance of biblical explanations for the natural, social, and legal arrangements viewed by these Christians as God-ordained. At this point, they sought to “resist the cultural pressures of the emerging secular order principally through a deliberate effort to reassert and defend the theological boundaries of the historic faith.” James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 20, 56–58. Particularly galling was the German introduction of the historical-critical method of Bible study, which subjected biblical accounts to scientific scrutiny, raising questions about accepted Christian beliefs surrounding miracles, the virgin birth, the historicity of the biblical accounts of the flood, the conquest of Canaan, and even the authenticity of the accounts of Jesus’s life, teachings, and the meaning of his death. The results of this approach led to confusion among Christians as to the authority of the Bible as the reliable guide to morality. In reaction, the rising fundamentalist movement embraced biblical inerrancy and infallibility, and promoted a literalistic, proof-texting approach to the Bible. “At the heart of the defense and maintenance of conservative Protestantism in the past century has been the tenacious insistence on the intrinsic faultlessness of the Bible as the Word of God. . . . Inerrancy as a formal doctrine, however, really did not become part of the folk religion of Protestantism until the late 1800s. . . . The doctrine of inerrancy came to mean that the statements and teachings of the Bible . . . are completely without error of any kind; the Bible is absolutely and exclusively true. . . . Finally, though not designed as a historical and scientific text, where it makes historical and scientific statements, it is again entirely accurate and true. . . . Part and parcel of the doctrine of inerrancy has been a particular hermeneutic, or method of interpreting the biblical literature. The method

discussion of implications for the future of Christian hermeneutics, generally, and Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutics, in particular.

Early Adventist Hermeneutics

Seventh-day Adventists, whose pioneers were part of the nineteenth-century “Advent Near” movement led by William Miller, inherited from him a distinct approach to the biblical text. Miller came to his conclusions based on his study of Scripture. It was Miller’s careful consideration of principles of biblical interpretation, and their eschatological applications, that drew the attention and respect of, first, his neighbors and then, multitudes of clergy and laity alike.

William Miller arrived on the religious stage during the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790–1840s), a period in which the Bible was generally held in high regard as the revelation of God’s will for human behavior—a view he embraced completely. Yet, Miller differed from other great preachers of the age by his lack of charismatic presence or methods in the meetings he held.⁴ He kept the lectures focused on the text rather than the speaker. Unlike

is essentially literalistic, meaning that the Bible should be interpreted at face value whenever possible” (Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 20–22). Such an approach to the Bible created a very superficial method of Bible study with the result of misunderstanding the author’s points or arguments in any particular biblical book or on any particular subject. For an adequate understanding of fundamentalism and the identified sources of Hunter’s summary of fundamentalism and its origins, see the studies offered by outstanding scholars, such as George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*, Harper Torchbooks, TB 1931 (New York: HarperCollins, 1977); James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983). For a closer look at the role various churches played in the establishment of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and infallibility, with special emphasis on Princeton Seminary as the nineteenth-century stronghold of these conservative ideas, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 805–824. After stating that a new rigidity was imposing itself in Presbyterian and other conservative circles around the question of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, Ahlstrom identifies the five key points that emerged as the heart of the fundamentalist movement: the inerrant, inspired Bible, the Virgin Birth, the “Satisfaction Theory” of the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the miracles of Jesus (814).

⁴ This is not to say that William Miller did not have an emotional impact on his audience. His sincerity, careful study, and earnest appeal to be ready for the soon

others, he did not rely on dynamic sermons or emotional appeals to captivate and convince his audiences. He neither charmed nor intimidated his listeners into accepting his ideas, shunning typical forms of group manipulation such as appeal to fears, hope of reward, or any claims to unquestionable authority. Instead, he presented his views through a calm and carefully reasoned presentation of the Scriptures which he thought illuminated the topic. His approach was scholarly and asked that individuals suspend previously held ideas or convictions as they examined the text together. While it was obvious that he was a farmer and did not belong to the elite circles of prominent clergy or trained theologians, many listeners were struck by the years he had devoted to intense study of the Scripture prophecies and his desire to share his conclusions in an organized and rational manner.⁵

It is worth noting that many of his presentations were billed and referred to as lectures rather than sermons. At the same time, the meetings he held and the lectures he gave were shaped by the message that Christ's return was near and that people needed to be ready to stand before their Creator. This added a spiritual intensity to the study sessions, as eternal life was at stake. While his presentations were carefully reasoned, based on diligent study, and designed to appeal strictly to the intellect, the subject matter pointed the participants to the present, and even urgent, necessity of dealing with the spiritual aspect of their lives.⁶

appearance of Christ all tended to create an atmosphere of solemnity and deep consideration of religious and spiritual matters. See footnote 6 for Ellen White's comment on this point.

⁵ George Knight offers a collection of remarks on William Miller as a person, preacher/lecturer, and biblical student, all gathered from newspaper editorials that appeared in the various New England towns after he had given his series on the "Advent Near." See George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 40–42. Everett N. Dick also offers a wealth of quotations from the periodicals of the time in *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 10–16. For earlier reflections on the subject of William Miller's impressions on his listeners and critics and his caring for them, see Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Yarmouth, ME: Isaac C. Wellcome, 1874), 75; and Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller, Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 206, 217, see also 125. James White drew from Bliss's book in his account of the life of William Miller, *Sketches of the Christian Life and Public Labors of William Miller, Gathered from His Memoir by the Late Sylvester Bliss, and from Other Sources* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875). Adventistarchives.org/books/LWM1875.

⁶ Ellen G. White, later describing the meetings, noted that, "No wild excitement attended the meetings, but a deep solemnity pervaded the minds of those who heard. . . . Mr. Miller traced down the prophecies with an exactness that struck conviction to the hearts of his hearers. He dwelt upon the prophetic periods, and brought

William Miller's Method of Bible Study

As he expounded his beliefs concerning the Second Advent, William Miller transferred more than a knowledge of doctrine to those who embraced his thought: he also modeled a process for biblical study. His account of his own personal Bible study served as a paradigm for his followers:

I determined to lay aside all my presuppositions, to thoroughly compare Scripture with Scripture, and to pursue its study in a regular and methodical manner. I commenced with Genesis, and read verse by verse, proceeding no faster than the meaning of the several passages should be so unfolded as to leave me free from embarrassment respecting any mysticisms or contradictions. Whenever I found anything obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages; and, by the help of Cruden [Cruden's Concordance], I examined all the texts of Scripture in which were found any of the prominent words contained in any obscure portion. Then, by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty.⁷

His description of method contained several points eventually adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The steps included the following: (1) laying aside preconceptions concerning meaning of a text or biblical teaching on a particular subject; (2) comparing Scripture to Scripture; (3) intentional pursuit of each topic in a regular and methodical manner; (4) word study, and (5) harmonizing all collateral texts.⁸ Underlying his methodology was the assumption that diligent study and application of human reason can together reveal the meaning of Scripture, as long as truth is more important to an individual than tradition or personal prejudice.⁹ In keeping with the Scottish

many proofs to strengthen his position. Then his solemn and powerful appeals and admonitions to those who were unprepared, held the crowds as if spellbound." Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White; Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 as Written by Herself, with a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and of Her Last Sickness Compiled from Original Sources*, Christian Home Library (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 20.

⁷ Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, 69. William Miller, *Wm. Miller's Apology and Defence* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, August, 1845), 6, quoted in James White, *William Miller*, 47–48.

⁸ For Miller's full list of rules of biblical interpretation, see "Rules of Interpretation," in *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology, Selected from Manuscripts of William Miller with a Memoir of His Life*, ed. Joshua V. Himes (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 20–24.

⁹ As Douglas Morgan has noted, "In the tradition of Common Sense Realism so influential in America, Miller believed that the human mind could directly apprehend the message of the Bible, undistorted by the interposition of subjective structures of the mind itself or cultural variables. One of the most crucial ramifications of this

Common Sense Realism that was the prevalent attitude toward Scriptural interpretation at that time, the role of the intellect and the power of reason was central in the method he modeled for discovering Bible knowledge and truth. In this method, wooden literalism, a practice of pulling out a single verse from the midst of a larger argument and utilizing it as the final arbiter of God's pronouncement on a subject, or even doing so with a collection of "proof texts," was replaced by a comparison of collateral texts, with the purpose of creating an interpretation larger than that supplied by looking at the surface meaning of particular texts.

William Miller's procedure extended beyond these techniques employed for individual Bible study. He modeled two additional steps necessary in gaining biblical knowledge: (1) the willingness to present the insights garnered through study to other believers for confirmation or rebuttal, and (2) the readiness to be instructed by others' interpretations of the same material.¹⁰ These last two steps moved the search for understanding from private investigation and reflection, to the community arena, where intellect was set against intellect to inspect the evidence used and to judge the logic of the analyses and conclusions that were reached. These steps provided the basis for Christians from various denominations to engage in the joint project of searching the Scriptures. A series of Advent Conferences (some fifteen in all) were called and held between 1840 and 1842, under the spreading influence and organizing talent of Christian Connexion minister Joshua V. Himes,¹¹ for the purpose of extended examination of Miller's views and the pooling

point for understanding Seventh-day Adventist thought is that apocalyptic imagery, no matter how cryptic it may appear, could be understood if one worked at it hard enough" (*Adventism*, 21).

¹⁰ The call to attend a "general conference" of those interested in reviewing Miller's views on the imminent return of Christ included the following advisement: "The object of the Conference will not be to form a new organization in the faith of Christ; nor to assail others of our brethren who differ from us in regard to the period and manner of the advent; but to discuss the whole subject faithfully and fairly, in the exercise of that spirit of Christ in which it will be safe immediately to meet him at the judgment seat." Wellcome, *Second Advent Message*, 177. Ironically, Miller himself was ill and unable to attend this first conference, which was chaired by Henry Dana Ward, a congregational minister with a master's degree from Harvard. The possible upside of this was that it placed other clergy and lay leaders at the forefront of the movement, relieving part of the burden for William Miller, and lending these leaders' reputation, spheres of influence, and credibility to the movement. For a later example of Miller's willingness to change a personal opinion in deference to another's conclusions, see footnote 12, which references his eventual capitulation to Samuel Snow's date for Christ's return on 22 October 1844.

¹¹ For a brief overview of the role played by Himes in the creation of the movement, see Everett N. Dick, "The Millerite Movement, 1830–1845," in *Adventism in America: A History*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1–35.

of corporate perceptions on the prophetic Scriptures that referred to Christ's Advent. Recognized clergy and leaders from several denominations chaired the conferences, as well as the "Advent Near" camp meetings from 1842 to 1844.¹² Clergy and laity assembled to review the Scriptures and study the Jewish calendar and ceremony, struggling with difficult passages and responding with further disciplined study. Since Miller saw religious belief as a subject of study, needing to be accountable to rational investigation, he believed that scriptural "truth" could be pursued in a public forum where the close application of intellect served as the common ground for individuals with widely divergent beliefs on any particular topic.¹³ The key to their progress was their concentration on a single topic: "the Advent Near of Jesus Christ and all the Scriptures that addressed the issue of his return."

This invitation for Christians to study doctrines together carried over into early Sabbatarian Adventism, as demonstrated in the Sabbath Conferences held by the tiny band of adherents during 1848–1849. Later, after the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organized in 1863 and had moved past the "shut-door"¹⁴ understanding that the time to choose salvation

¹² The setting of 22 October 1844 as the date of Christ's return was based on the study and interpretation of Advent believer Samuel Snow, not William Miller. Miller was slow to embrace the idea, but became convinced shortly before the set date. For an account of this incident, see George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventism*, Adventist Heritage Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1999), 22–24.

¹³ With regard to Miller's success in promoting his views, Knight has pointed out how Miller's approach coincided neatly with the current religious sentiment and trend of the "restorationist imperative to get back to the New Testament by bypassing human interpretations. It also linked up with the Jacksonian faith in the ability of the common man to understand the Bible without the aid of experts" (*Millennial Fever*, 40–41).

¹⁴ The notion that the door to salvation had been shut to all who had not responded to the call to prepare for the Second Advent before 22 October 1844 was originally promoted by William Miller. He saw the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom were not ready for the bridegroom to arrive and subsequently found the door to the wedding banquet shut to them, as an allegory of what was then the current situation. The message had gone out to prepare to meet the Lord, and while some people had readied themselves, others had failed to respond. Advent believers equipped themselves for the moment when the bridegroom would appear and faithfully awaited his arrival. While Christ had not physically returned on 22 October 1844, it was believed that the period of human probation had closed at that time, and that the door to salvation was shut. In Miller's mind, everything possible had been done to warn sinners and the Christian church as a whole before it was too late to repent. All had received an opportunity to enter into the kingdom. For his own account of this, see William Miller, *Evidence from Scripture and History* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 237. Although the bulk of Adventists gave up the doctrine after the great disappointment of October 1844, sabbatarians, including the leaders, Joseph Bates

passed on 22 October 1844, early Adventist evangelists called meetings in various towns and invited the gathered crowds to judge the cogency of the Adventist arguments, particularly concerning the prophecies and the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁵ Baptism was typically offered after a profession of faith and a series of studies in which the basic beliefs were examined and compared with those of other denominations.¹⁶ William Miller's approach to Scripture was adopted by the movement, although as noted above, it evolved somewhat in the first thirty years to include study that involved further reaching scholarly endeavors, as discussed below.

and James and Ellen White, held onto the notion for several years. One good source of information is Ellen White's vision in Topsham, Maine, in 1849, which reflected the group's changing understanding on the issue. See Ellen G. White, "The Open and Shut Door," in *Early Writings of Mrs. White: Experience and Views, and Spiritual Gifts*, 2nd ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald; Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 1:34–37. By 1851, James White would say, "Now the door is open almost everywhere to present the truth, and many are prepared to read the publications who have formerly had no interest to investigate," [James White], "Our Present Work," *AR* 2.2 (19 August 1851): 12–13. For an account of the shut door idea from a pioneer who was part of the inner circle of the early Adventist movement, see J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1905), 440–442. While the book was published at the very beginning of the twentieth century, it is a primary source whose author wrote about the group's experience in the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ For a general overview of the outreach during the 1850s and 1860s, see M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1926), 223–244. P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) is also an excellent source for a history of the development of outreach after sabbatarian Adventists embraced an "open-door" position.

¹⁶ At the beginning of organized Seventh-day Adventism, members simply indicated that they believed in keeping the commandments of God, including the seventh-day Sabbath, and had the faith of Jesus. They agreed that his return was imminent. See, for example, the *AR* report on the formal organization of the earliest state conference (Michigan). Rejecting a creed, the delegates there agreed to adopt a covenant proposed by James White that read: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ." Joseph Bates, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *AR* 18.19 (8 October 1861): 148–149.

Biblical Interpretation in Early Seventh-day Adventist Circles

A perusal of nineteenth-century articles in the *AR*, the paper begun by James White to circulate the views of Sabbatarian Adventists, reveals the continuation of Miller's methods of biblical interpretation in the discussions of specific texts under question, as well as the formation of practices for the fledgling group, and arguments on how to approach biblical study. Another equally essential component of the process, both for Miller and for Sabbatarian Adventists, was to proceed in a humble spirit with prayer and the desire to be guided by the Holy Spirit: "Begin every reading with a prayer for a teachable spirit, and that God would open the eyes of your understanding to behold the wondrous things in his law. . . . And it will do no harm to utter some brief appropriate petition at the end of each passage."¹⁷

Proper scriptural study involved laying aside preconceived notions of the meaning of a text, practicing/embracing the harmonization of Scripture,¹⁸ the study of each topic in a methodical manner, word study, and the comparison of all Scriptures that pertained to an issue.¹⁹ Further, students were expected

¹⁷ As noted in Anonymous, "How to Read the Bible," *AR* 9.12 (22 January 1857): 89.

¹⁸ The way Adventist pioneers utilized this principle is strikingly clear in their consistent rebuttal of those who would limit the role women played in the church meetings. One prime example of this appears in the opening lines of an 1881 article, N. J. Bowers, "May Women Publicly Labor in the Cause of Christ?" *AR* 57.27 (14 June 1881): 372, when he answers the question asked in the article's title with the reply: "Some think not, because Paul says, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches;' and, 'It is a shame for women to speak in the church.' 1 Cor. 14:34, 35. Standing alone, and severed from their connections and other related scriptures, these statements seem to justify such conclusion; but we must not forget to bring into the investigation what the author of the language has elsewhere said directly or indirectly touching the matter of Christian teaching and Christian labor, and also what the Bible elsewhere instructs us in regard to the question." The rest of the article traces biblical examples that run counter to the premise that God wills that women's roles are limited and employs logic and reason to make sense of what Paul has said in isolated passages. An 1871 article written by I. Fetterhoof addressed the question of the women's roles in church services by citing the numerous biblical examples of God's call to women to lead and speak. Through this article, Fetterhoof is asking that the understanding of what Paul stated in select passages that seemed to limit the roles of women be brought into harmony with the rest of the Bible. See I. Fetterhoof, "Women Laboring in Public," *AR* 38.8 (8 August 1871): 58–59.

¹⁹ One example of this principle was illustrated in a statement offered by an early sabbatarian leader when he said, "But the candid reader of the sacred pages will find other declarations of the same apostle that must be brought to harmonize with this in order to get a clear understanding of the Apostle's meaning in 1 Cor. xiv. It is the custom with all Bible students to find all the important texts that bear on any one subject, and compare them together until they come to a satisfactory understanding

to examine the place and context in which a scriptural admonition or teaching was given. As stated in an 1857 *AR* article, "There is also incalculable benefit in searching into *the times and circumstances* in which a prophecy was written, *the occasion* which called it forth; and in receiving every word as from God, worthy of God, and certainly in harmony with all else he has revealed."²⁰ To fully grasp their hermeneutic approach, one has to appreciate the value they gave to the application of reason in the understanding of Scripture. Thus, an adequate grasp of any topic relied on the employment of reason when probing the meaning of scriptural statements. As noted in an 1857 *AR* article, "The Former and the Latter Rain," "But to produce conviction, a view must draw plain credentials from both reason and revelation."²¹

Many articles reveal the Millerite approach to biblical interpretation woven throughout the arguments in question and the attempts to reach a consensus on how to deal with various issues concerning church praxis and belief.²² Just as William Miller had accepted the Bible as authoritative

of what the inspired penman means." D. Hewitt, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *AR* 10.24 (15 October 1857): 190.

²⁰ Anonymous, "How Do You Read the Prophets?" *AR* 9.19 (12 March 1857): 145

²¹ Anonymous, "The Former and the Latter Rain," *AR* 9.17 (26 February 1857): 132.

²² It should be noted that Ellen G. White and her visions on specific topics were occasionally used to support a particular view or help the group arrive at a consensus on a topic. The utilization of her visions was met with ambivalence within the group and perceived as a stumbling block to evangelizing outsiders. As Arthur L. White noted in his chapter titled "Later Attitudes toward the Gift," in *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1959), 51, "the most noticeable adjustment" to the improved openness toward hearing the Sabbatarian Advent message was "made to avert prejudice, and for this reason, all reference to the visions and the Spirit of prophecy was left out of the regular issues of the church paper." He references James White's editorial note in an Extra of the *AR*, "But as many are prejudiced against visions, we think best at present not to insert anything of the kind in the regular paper. We will therefore publish the visions by themselves for the benefit of those who believe that God can fulfill his word and give visions *in the last days*," [James White, Untitled Note], *AR* 2.01e (21 July 1851): 4. Arthur White, later church leader and the grandson of James and Ellen White, while reflecting on the 1851 determination to exclude from the paper Ellen White's insights or comments on the group's developing theology, noted that "Pursuant to this announced policy, the *AR* for four years [1851–1855] was very nearly silent on the visions." Arthur L. White, *Messenger to the Remnant*, 51. During this period, James White repeatedly made statements to defend the group against the charges that its beliefs were based on Ellen White's vision or authority, clarifying that "Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for

and its own interpreter, sabbatarian Adventists were very clear that all their doctrinal conclusions were based on the careful study of the Bible. Additional instruction that was given in the article “How to Read the Bible” included, “Endeavor to complete a subject or a paragraph each time . . . A small amount carefully read and digested is of more value than much, hurriedly glanced over. The chapters are often not the proper divisions of the sacred text.” The article also points out that the student should, “Read according to system. Do not pick up the Bible, and read a few verses here or there, wherever it happens to open,” and furthermore, “In addition to every Sabbath’s own readings, you should carefully review the parts read during the past week.”²³

Due to their emphasis on the Bible as the sole source of their beliefs, Sabbatarians reacted strongly to any suggestion that they were using any other source. James White could respond with a fiery retort when individuals intimated that Ellen White was the author or source of group beliefs. By 1855, James White would emphatically respond to the critique that the group was following Ellen White rather than the Bible. On one occasion he retorted,

his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position.” “The Gifts of the Gospel Church,” *AR* 1.9 (21 April 1851): 69–70. Later, contradicting those who were claiming that the group’s doctrines originated in the visions, James White reiterated that the Bible alone is the rule of faith. He wrote, “It should be here understood that all these views as held by the body of Sabbath-keepers, were brought out from the Scriptures before Mrs. W. had any view in regard to them. These sentiments are founded upon the Scriptures as their only basis.” “A Test,” *AR* 7.8 (16 October 1855): 61–62. Arthur White notes that during this period, there was a decline in frequency of the visions, and the eventual recognition that unless the gift was appreciated, it might be withdrawn altogether. To remedy this situation, during the business session of the General Conference held in Battle Creek in December of 1855, a statement was prepared that confessed the neglect of the gift, while again reiterating that the visions or gifts were not to take the place of the Bible: “Nor do we, as some contend, exalt these gifts or their manifestations, above the Bible; on the contrary, we test them by the Bible, making it the great rule of judgment in all things; so that whatever is not in accordance with it, in its spirit and its teachings, we unhesitatingly reject.” This action signaled a turning point for the group, as it allowed a larger role for Ellen White’s testimonies to the group as legitimate and treasured, even though not replacing the Bible as the only test of “faith and duty.” Joseph Bates, J. H. W. Waggoner, M. E. Cornell, “Address: Of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich, Nov. 16th, 1855,” *AR* 7.10 (10 December 1855): 78–79. See Arthur White, “Later Attitudes,” in *Messenger to the Remnant*, 52–53 for full documentation and analysis of the results of this action.

²³ Anonymous, “How to Read the Bible,” 90. Another article focused on the importance of systematic reading of Scripture for spiritual growth, “No other study or meditation will answer the purpose of the word of Christ, dwelling in us richly in all wisdom.” Anonymous, “Systematic Reading of the Bible,” *AR* 27.3 (19 December 1865): 18–19.

There is a class of persons who are determined to have it that the *Review* and its conductors make the views of Mrs. White a Test of doctrine and christian fellowship. It may be duty to notice these persons on account of the part they are acting, which is calculated to deceive some. What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. W's views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the *Review* has ever referred to them as authority on any point. The *Review* for five years has not published one of them. Its motto has been, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty."²⁴

The pages of the *AR* provided a vehicle for the Sabbatarian group to communicate their interpretation of prophetic Scriptures as they struggled to establish a community of faith and continue the quest for truth. J. N. Andrews's series on the Sabbath in the *AR*, as well as his collegial relationship with members from the Seventh-day Baptist and other denominations, provide an example of the perpetuation of willingness to collaborate with church scholars outside of the Adventist circle and to engage in a thorough examination of a topic.²⁵ This was particularly important as they endeavored to retain their belief in, and spiritual readiness for, the Advent.²⁶ As such, they

²⁴ James White, "A Test" *AR* 7.8 (16 October 1855): 61–62. This position, cited here, is one that James White had often repeated. In 1854, for example, he had said in an editorial note on the reprinting of his previous 1851 article, "The position that *the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and duty* [italics in original] does not shut out the gifts which God set in the church. To reject them is shutting out that part of the Bible which presents them. We say, let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty." "Gifts of the Gospel Church," *AR* 6.8 (3 October 1854): 62.

²⁵ As a sample of the articles he prepared on the subject of the Sabbath, see J. N. Andrews, "Thoughts on the Sabbath," *AR* 1.2 (1 December 1850): 10; "The Perpetuity of the Law of God," *AR* 1.5 (1 January 1851): 33–37; and *AR* 1.6 (1 February 1851): 41–43. In his series on questions concerning the Sabbath, he engaged with first-day ministers and former Millerite associates to present the logic of respecting the seventh-day Sabbath. See also, J. N. Andrews, "Discourse with Brother Carver," *AR* 2.4 (16 September 1851): 28–30.

²⁶ A Sister Bucklin wrote into the *AR* reflecting the isolation of many of the early sabbatarian believers: "While many such are on his Holy Day gathered together in small companies, speaking freely to each other, exhorting and comforting each other, mingling their voices and faith at the mercy seat, and realizing the faithfulness of the 'Coming One' who has said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst.' [sic] There are others scattered up and down the earth, who are like myself sitting in solitary places, and whose language emphatically is 'I'm a lonely traveler here,'" Sister U. Bucklin, "From Sister Bucklin" *AR* 5.5 (21 February 1854): 39. For an appreciation of the importance the *AR* played in keeping alive the sabbatarian movement, see Ginger Hanks Harwood, "Like the Leaves of

offer the scholar today the best insight into the established hermeneutics of Advent pioneers. These pioneers intentionally set aside the authority given to accumulated traditions that had entrenched themselves in Christian creeds and teachings in their effort to establish a belief system that was unrestricted by dogmatic institutional formulas and propositions. They believed that freed from creeds and traditions, they would be in a better position to perceive and receive God's guidance and direction as they grew into spiritual maturity. A prime example of this is supplied by R. F. Cottrell, an early and very vocal church leader, when he announced,

The only way open before us is to return to the fountain of living waters, the written word which God has given us, and no longer hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Let vain traditions go, and embrace and heartily obey the truth, and it is possible that we may yet be saved. Who will do so? Who will renounce the false traditions of men, and cleave to God alone and obey his word?²⁷

In the Adventist endeavor to understand the Bible and receive its messages as the "primitive" church had received or heard them, they rejected the allegorical forms of interpretation that characterized the hermeneutics of the church through medieval times and opted instead for a "plain reading of the text."²⁸

Autumn: The Utilization of the Press to Maintain Millennial Expectations in the Wake of Prophetic Failure," *Journal for Millennial Studies* 1.1 (2001) <http://www.mille.org/publications/winter2001/Harwood.html>.

²⁷ R. F. Cottrell, "Tradition Preferred to Truth," *AR* 31.17 (7 April 1868): 268.

²⁸ It is not surprising that this became a theme in early Advent writings, as many Millerites and sabbatarian Adventists (including Joshua V. Himes and James White) were drawn away from the Christian Connexion. The Christian Connexion was a congregational style church that was part of the Restorationist movement that endeavored to rid itself and Christianity of all accumulated human traditions that were associated with organized churches, and return to the earliest days of Christianity, which they referred to as the "primitive" church. This meant jettisoning the authority of creeds and the authority of individuals in religious hierarchy and replacing the responsibility for discerning God's will back on the committed individual who looked to the Bible and Holy Spirit for their guidance. When James White left teaching to become a Millerite preacher, he was credentialed by the Christian Connexion Church, the group with which his parents were affiliated, according to Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 24. For information on the link between the Christian Connexion Church, see Bert Haloviak, "A Heritage of Freedom: The Christian Connection Roots to Seventh-day Adventism," (Unpublished Paper, General Conference Archives, 1995) <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/conferences/Docs/UnspecifiedConferences/AHeritageOfFreedom.pdf>. The Christian Connexion influence on the early Sabbatarian movement is also discussed in George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), and Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2003).

In so doing, they separated themselves from those theologians with assumptions that the meaning of Scripture was only available to the few and subject to the decree of the Church. Initially the key concerns for the fledgling group were not to argue with or against the merits of the various approaches to interpretation being heralded by German or Scottish theologians, as much as to defend the idea of the “Advent Near” and proclaim the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath. However, their hermeneutical practices are revealed clearly in the manner in which they made their arguments. Although they did not frame their method in these terms, their stance can be traced back to Martin Luther who, most notably in his arguments with Erasmus, maintained that any person could discern the gospel message from careful Bible study.²⁹ Adventists drew on the widely adopted philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism³⁰ which holds that the surface of the text produces its essential meaning and is accessible to vigorous study. Adventists advocated what they called a “plain reading” or “literal” approach to Scripture.³¹ An 1858 *AR* article, “Principles of Interpretation,” presented the significance of abandoning the mystical and allegorical approaches to interpretation. The anonymous author is careful to define what is meant by “literal,” and quoting John Pye Smith, explains:

Dr. John Pye Smith defines the literal sense as “The common rule of all rational interpretation, viz.: the *sense* afforded by a cautious and critical

²⁹ Carl B. Trueman, “Scripture and Exegesis in Early Modern Reformed Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*, eds. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A.G. Roeber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 182.

³⁰ Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 14–16.

³¹ It is critical to note that the nineteenth-century use of the term “literal” or “literally,” when referring to the method of reading and understanding Scripture, did not have the same meaning as it is given today. The meaning of the term in the nineteenth century must not be confused with the *biblicism* that is meant by the term after the rise of the fundamentalist movement. This later use of the term “literalism” infers that it is possible to understand the meaning of any Scripture, and that the message God intended to convey on any topic is available by taking the words of any verse at face value without harmonizing the verse with other discussions or themes of the Bible. “Biblicism” is defined as “adherence to the letter of the Bible,” see “Biblicism,” *Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>. For classic depictions of modern fundamentalism, see noted scholarly descriptions such as those provided by Marsden, *Fundamentalism*; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, History of Evangelicalism (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983); and James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

examination of the terms of the passage, and an impartial construction of the whole sentence, according to the known usage of the language and the writer." Such is the system adopted in this volume, it being regarded as the only safe principle of interpreting the Bible.³²

The article provides further substantiation for this method through quotations selected from recognized and accomplished theologians, such as Jeremy Taylor, Prof. J. A. Ernest, Vitringa, and Martin Luther. The method is carefully contrasted against the approaches of Origin, Jerome, and the Alexandrian and Egyptian schools. The principles of the method are summarized by one identified only as Rosenmuller, who insisted: "All ingenuous and unprejudiced persons will grant me this position, that there is no method of removing difficulties more secure than that of an accurate interpretation derived from the words of the texts themselves, and from their true and legitimate meaning, and depending upon no hypothesis."³³

Towards the later end of the nineteenth century, Ellen White would stress the importance of Adventist efforts to continue to seek deeper understanding of Scripture as a continuation of the spirit of the Reformation.³⁴ She, along with other leading Adventists, believed that new insight was available because the Holy Spirit was at work within the human heart and mind to interpret the Bible. They believed that the Bible served as its own interpreter and that passages unfold their meaning in relation to Christ.³⁵ Adventists looked to the Bible as the revelation of God and as the guide to appropriate human response to him. Further, they re-examined established beliefs, even the traditions instituted by the Reformers and the churches that they had established. An 1859 article by B. F. Robbins, provides a clear example of this perceived need to reexamine doctrines and discard both beliefs and practices that advent believers had brought with them into the movement from churches in which they had previously been indoctrinated. Robbins states, "I know that the most of us have been gathered into the message of the third angel from the sectarian churches where we received our religious training, which we now, in the clear light of God's truth see was defective, both in doctrine and practice."³⁶

³² Anonymous, "Principles of Interpretation," *AR* 12.1 (20 May 1858): 3, from *Voice of the Church*.

³³ Anonymous, "Principles of Interpretation," 3.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*, rev. and enl. ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald; Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 120–170. See especially chs. 7 and 8 on Martin Luther.

³⁵ See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 83.

³⁶ B. F. Robbins, "To The Female Disciples in the Third Angel's Message," *AR* 15.3 (8 December 1859): 21–22.

With regard to the question of the participation of women in ministry,³⁷ Robbins continued by acknowledging that “many of you feel the embarrassing influence of our former associations,” and invited his readers to reflect on the scenes recorded in the Book of Acts, asking, “and did not the tongue of fire descend alike upon them as upon their brethren? Assuredly it did.”³⁸ He

³⁷ The question of the role of women in church and society has received major emphasis in fundamentalist circles from the early nineteenth century to the present. This serves as an outstanding example of the fundamentalist hermeneutical method at work. Richard Antoun views the importance that fundamentalists give to a reversal of changes in acceptable domains for women and a prescribed return to patripotestal power (the power and dominance of the father, first of all, in the home and then extending elsewhere) as part of the move toward what he calls “traditioning” – the attempt to return social and domestic order to an earlier state in order to reduce the tensions and stress created by change. He cites the manner in which Ephesians 5:22–24 RSV (“Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands”) serves as a prime example of the utilization of Scripture to achieve the tension-reduction that many scholars see as a driving force behind the movement for the present and future. (Richard T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2001), 63. Whether or not his analysis is correct, scrutiny of the arguments utilized by fundamentalists to restrict women’s roles clearly reveals the hermeneutical principles used, and has created fertile ground for scholars exploring fundamentalist approaches to Scripture. For a detailed analysis of fundamentalism and gender issues, see Margaret Lamberts Roberts, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Brenda E. Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Margaret Lambert Bendroth, “The Search for Woman’s Role in American Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Carol Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman, eds., *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston: Beacon, 1986); Janet Stocks, “Voices from the Margins: Evangelical Feminist Negotiation in the Public Debate of a Small Denomination in the United States,” in *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross Culturally*, eds. Judy Brink and Joan Mencher (New York: Routledge, 1997), 59–72; Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1987); and Karen McCarthy Brown, “Fundamentalism and the Control of Women,” in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For an overview of more recent developments in the fundamentalist inclination within religious orthodoxy from a sociological perspective, see Robert Wuthnow, “The Great Divide: Toward Religious Realignment,” and “Mobilization on The Right,” in *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*, Studies in Church and State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 132–214.

³⁸ Robbins, “Female Disciples,” 22.

appealed to reason, reminding his audience that the women, as well as the men, prophesied, setting an example for Spirit-filled Adventist women. His basic argument went beyond the words of the statement in question, and invited readers to consider what they knew about the situation and draw on reason, then applying it to the issue at stake. His address encouraged Adventists to go beyond the teachings and practices of the churches in which they had been formed, and use the study and reasoned contemplation of Scripture to reform Christian practice, rejecting established traditions and adopting a more biblically informed praxis. As J. Clarke noted in the *AR*, “The reformers only began the work: it falls to the lot of the present generation to fully complete what was then so gloriously begun.”³⁹

“Study to Show Yourself Approved”

The work of reclaiming the meaning of Scripture was an extension of Miller’s project and an application of his methods to the theological and practical issues facing sabbatarian Adventism as a nascent movement. It required commitment to careful scholarship,⁴⁰ as well as openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit and relinquishment of previously held ideas.⁴¹

Faced with a diverse set of theological beliefs and practices, reflecting the variety of religious traditions represented in the Advent movement, the creation of consensus had to be founded on more than “a war of texts,” where the former members of different groups asserted the surface meanings assigned to specific texts as they had been taught them in their original church homes. Thus, a major component in the theory and practice of Adventist hermeneutics is: contextualizing and harmonizing any particular text with its setting, with other pronouncements by the same author on the subject under

³⁹ J. Clarke, “The Reformation,” *AR* 19.6 (7 January 1863): 46–47.

⁴⁰ H. L. Hastings provided an example of the appeal to scholarship in an article, “How Old Is the New Testament?” *AR* 71.15 (10 April 1894): 231. He discussed the contribution of scholarly research to the foundation of a faith built on informed reason. He noted that, “We have better proof of the antiquity, the authenticity, the integrity, and the veracity of the New Testament, than of any other ancient book in the world.” He continued to build on this theme as he pointed to the value of ancient manuscripts and their translation into readable languages. He asserted that much could be learned by a manuscript’s style and date and location in the ancient world.

⁴¹ M. Cornell gives us a fine example of the pioneer’s willingness to abandon strongly held convictions when finding out that their previous understanding of an issue was incorrect. In stating his changed position on the heated topic of whether to organize the Sabbatarian movement into a church and formally adopt a name, he said, “My conclusion is that we should give up no scripture truth, but that our false applications and interpretations of scripture, and consequent false ideas of order and propriety, should be given up as fast as possible.” M. E. Cornell, “Making Us a Name,” *AR* 16.1 & 2 (29 May 1860): 9.

consideration, and finally, with the teachings and message of the Bible as a whole. As Elder G. C. Tenney would remark in 1892 concerning the distress caused by church practices that were at variance with certain Bible verses, "The difficulty with these texts is almost entirely chargeable to immature conclusions reached in regard to them. It is manifestly illogical and unfair to give to any passage of Scripture an unqualified radical meaning that is at variance with the main tenor of the Bible, and directly in conflict with its plain teachings. The Bible may be reconciled in all its parts without going outside the lines of consistent interpretation. But great difficulty is likely to be experienced by those who interpret isolated passages in an independent light according to the ideas they happen to entertain upon them."⁴²

The principle of harmonizing any text with the rest of Scripture is woven throughout the nineteenth-century *AR* articles. As early as 1857, well-respected church pioneer David Hewitt outlined the importance of this accepted Adventist approach to interpretation:

It is a custom with all Bible students to find all the important texts that bear on any one subject, and compare them together until they come to a satisfactory understanding of what the inspired penman means. No one should found a theory on one single isolated passage, for this mode of proving things has produced many discordant theories in the world.⁴³

In the same article, Hewitt contended that, when trying to understand the meaning of any particular Pauline statement, "the candid reader of the sacred pages will find other declarations of the same apostle that must be brought to harmonize with this in order to get a clear understanding of the Apostle's meaning in 1 Cor. xiv."⁴⁴ James White extended this understanding further.

⁴² G. C. Tenney, "Woman's Relation to the Cause of Christ," *AR* 69.21 (24 May 1892): 328.

⁴³ D[avid] Hewitt, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *AR* 10.24 (15 October 1857): 190.

⁴⁴ Hewitt, "Women Keep Silence," 190. Another example of the application of the "harmonization" principle is found in an article submitted by M. E. Cornell, an early evangelist to Woodland, California, who complained that the work was impeded there by the notion that women should not take an active role in church meetings, based on a faulty interpretation of certain Pauline verses. The evangelist argued for full participation, stating: "But the Scriptures seem clear on the point. Not one word in the whole Bible is ever found with which to oppose it, except in the writings of the apostle Paul. And a careful comparison of all Paul's statements on the subject shows that he had reference only to unbecoming conduct of women in the public assembly, such as contradicting, altercating, and assuming authority over men in business meetings of the church." M. E. Cornell, "Woodland, Cal.," *AR* 41.25 (3 June 1873): 198.

In his short article, “Paul Says So,” James White challenged the readers to (1) examine what they bring to the text as an assumption of its meaning; (2) ask if the answer is contained completely in one text; (3) demand that it be harmonized with both the remainder of Paul’s decrees on similar issues and his recorded practices; (4) see that it is harmonized with the rest of Scripture; and finally, (5) be subjected to critical thinking on the issue. James White was insistent that an interpretive position on a text must “harmonize with both revelation and reason.”⁴⁵

It is worth noting that all Adventists, not just church leaders, were expected to engage in scriptural study: study that involved more than simply picking up an English version of the Bible and accepting the apparent meaning of the text without further study. This expectation was affirmed by Ellen White, who recommended it. While she also received divine revelation through visions, she encouraged a faith with reason built upon mental discipline and logic. Reflecting the ethos of the “Advent Near” movement, Ellen White was not content with faith built on superficial, sentimental, or casual study of Scripture. As she instructed the flock:

We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood, but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. There must be careful research and prayerful reflection.⁴⁶

The utilization of intellectual ability to construct a logical argument for any particular belief and the rational investigation of alternatives was woven into her views on the nature of biblical interpretation.⁴⁷ Bible study was to be taken as a serious endeavor, not a casual perusal and acceptance of texts simply as one ran across them. As noted in an 1857 article, “How Do You Read the Prophets?,” along with “*prayerful attention* and a docile, childlike spirit. . . . There is also incalculable benefit in searching into *the times and circumstances* in which a prophecy was written; *the occasion* which called it forth; and in receiving every word as from God, worthy of God, and certainly

⁴⁵ James White, “Paul Says So,” *AR* 10.19 (10 September 1857): 152. This is only one of many articles that are used to argue that selecting isolated and decontextualized passages to limit the role of women in the church is evidence of an unsound hermeneutic. These articles challenge readers to consider all that Paul says about women in the church and in various forms of ministry, and consider the context of the passage, as well as Paul’s other statements on the topic and his own practice. James White steadfastly maintained that those who “do not like to hear the Marys preach a risen or coming Saviour” need to take a position on the text “which will harmonize with both revelation and reason.”

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 90–91.

⁴⁷ This is not to ignore the fundamental Adventist belief that the Holy Spirit was present to guide the process and speak to the minds and hearts of Bible students.

in harmony with all else he has revealed.”⁴⁸

Sabbatarian Bible students were expected to utilize the basic tools for biblical study, such as commentaries and concordances, and study all aspects of the text. Noted scholars' and commentators' works were utilized to provide information where they could supplement the readers' knowledge with information concerning alternative meanings of key words in their original language, or shed light on cultural or textual contexts.⁴⁹ Questions going beyond the knowledge base of the general group or involving textual nuances not accessible to the average student were often referred to J. N. Andrews, whom Ellen White characterized as “the ablest man in all our ranks.”⁵⁰ He brought a thorough understanding of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin to his studies. He is credited with being able to “read the Bible in seven languages,” as well as being able to “reproduce the New Testament from memory.”⁵¹ Andrews, viewed by many as the church leader most prepared to explore and tease out scriptural nuances, offered the group not only information concerning alternative word translations, but also a careful examination of the social and cultural context in which statements were created, as well as a reasoned response on how the situation did or did not apply to his contemporary

⁴⁸ Anonymous, “How Do You Read the Prophets?” *AR* 9.19 (12 March 1857): 145 (Italics original).

⁴⁹ One example of this use of scholarly resources is found in an article by J. A. Mowatt, where he examined biblical texts utilized to keep women silent and then cited Dr. Adam Clarke's commentary on them (“Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” *AR* 18.9 (30 July 1861): 65–66. Dr. Clarke was considered a noted and trustworthy authority on Scripture in the Christian community at the time. Another example of the examination of the original language is found in G. C. Tenney, “Woman's Relation,” 26, where he goes over the three different Greek words translated “to speak” and how understanding of the words as applied to frequently cited passages affects the meaning of the verses.

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White to Dear Brethren in Switzerland, 29 August 1878 (Letter 2a, 1878), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. The editors of the *AR* provide an example of this practice of referring difficult questions to Andrews when they refer “A Query” about the apparent contradiction between the *AR*'s publications on women speaking in public and Paul's teachings. They answer that, “We understand the subject involved in the above request has lately been up for investigation in the Bible Class at Waukon, Iowa. We hope to hear from Bro. Andrews soon concerning it.—Ed.” “A Query—Bro. Smith,” *AR* 15.8 (12 January 1860): 64.

⁵¹ “Andrews, John Nevins,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, 68–69. As an example of his proficiency in languages, Andrews reported from Switzerland his need to prepare for work in this field, “I have now to educate my ear to distinguish, and my tongue to utter, the sounds of the French language. . . . I have for years as I have had the opportunity, read French works with some degree of satisfaction as I have sought to gain information not otherwise to be found.” J. N. Andrews, “Our Arrival in Switzerland,” *AR* 44.21 (17 November 1874): 166.

setting.⁵² This approach diverges strongly from the practice of biblicism, the assumption that a superficial reading of a text reveals its full meaning.⁵³

It is critical to understand that Adventists searched the Scriptures with a specific purpose in mind: they desired an encounter with Christ, as their goal was ultimate union with him.⁵⁴ Their most cherished hope was to meet the Savior face-to-face, and their greatest desire was to be ready to accompany him to the heavenly home when he returned.⁵⁵ As Sister Whitney commented in her letter to the *AR*, “O, I long to see Jesus, that I may be like him.”⁵⁶ Until that time, they were seeking to grow in grace and knowledge, committed to their belief in God’s Word and the fruitfulness of careful scriptural study for their spiritual growth.⁵⁷ They were pilgrims on a journey towards a heavenly destination, and the journey necessitated leaving behind the comforts of

⁵² One clear example of this treatment of cultural context is seen in Andrews’s 1879 article, “May Women Speak in Meeting?” where he addressed the Pauline admonitions to the Corinthian church, where a state of great disorder existed. He characterized Paul’s statements as situational and concluded that “what the apostle says to women in such a church as this, and in such a state of things, is not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and in other times.” J. N. Andrews, “May Women Speak in Meeting?” *AR* 53.1 (2 January 1879): 4.

⁵³ Elder William Covert reminded his readers that “When our Saviour would teach the Jews how to obtain an understanding of the Scriptures, he says, ‘Search’ them. The aimless reader knows not the joy that comes to the heart of the earnest searcher after these hidden treasures. Dear reader, stop to consider as you read the word of God. Dig down, and taste of its richness.” “Thoughts on Studying the Scriptures,” *AR* 61.5 (29 January 1884): 68. This principle was so firmly ingrained into Adventist mentality that it still appeared in official church statements in the middle of the twentieth century. “A superficial reading of the Scriptures will yield a superficial understanding of it. . . . Yet those open to the illumination of the Spirit of God, those willing to search for the hidden truths with patience and much prayer, will discover that the Bible evidences an underlying unity in what it teaches about the principles of salvation.” “The Word of God,” *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 2018), 20.

⁵⁴ For a fuller exploration and development of this pilgrimage theme, see Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “Pilgrims and Strangers: Adventist Spirituality, 1850–1863,” *Spectrum* 31.4 (2003): 67–75.

⁵⁵ Many readers wrote in to the *AR* to express sentiments such as those described by Sally Yucker as she described her goal as “not only to keep the Sabbath, but to keep myself unspotted from the world. I want on the whole armor, for I am looking for that day when the marriage supper of the Lamb will come. I want to be there; for all that are there will share in the glorious inheritance prepared for those that love God.” Sally Yucker, “From Sister Yucker,” *AR* 5.22 (4 July 1854): 176.

⁵⁶ S. Whitney, “From Sister Whitney,” *AR* 15.13 (16 February 1860): 103.

⁵⁷ One reflection of this theme is found in, Anonymous, “Drawing Near to God,” *AR* 10.25 (22 October 1857): 195.

theological institutions that had been their spiritual homelands.⁵⁸ And as any traveller knows, it is necessary to dispose of the nonessential and focus on items of paramount value.

Freedom and Responsibility

It would have been impossible to meld together Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, Christian Connexion preachers, and the host of other faith groups represented in the early Adventist body without their self identification as the heirs of the Reformation, believers in the primacy of the Bible. From the price the Reformers and their followers had paid to break from the religious authority and institutionalized requirements of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestants had learned to cherish the principles of individual spiritual freedom and the responsibility that accompanies it. In working together in the Millerite movement, Adventists had learned respect and tolerance for the religious views of others, and a willingness to study rather than rely on

⁵⁸ The letters found in the *AR* during the pioneer period of the 1850s and 1860s depicted some of the hardships of their experience as pilgrims and strangers, often referring to the loneliness and isolation that resulted from their separation from their home churches. For instance, Sister Sarah A. Jessup writes, "I am all alone in trying to keep all the commandments of God, and the testimony of Jesus—There are no sabbath keepers very near here." "From Sister Jessup," *AR* 4.3 (23 June 1853): 24; Sister M.A.E. Townsend reports, "I am as it were almost alone here, in reference to keeping the seventh-day Sabbath; . . . I have never had the privilege of hearing one of our faith preach." "From Sr. Townsend," *AR* 4.10 (13 September 1853): 78; and Sister Morinda G. Bartlett says, "There are none in this place who are in the present truth, but my trust is in God. His truth has separated me from the doctrines and precepts of men, he has established my goings and I feel that I am founded on the rock, Christ Jesus, and he is able to bring others out of darkness." "From Sister Bartlett," *AR* 5.11 (4 April 1854): 87.

The pilgrimage motif is woven throughout early Adventist productions. From Annie Smith's much loved hymns, "I Saw One Weary" and "How Far from Home" and Mary S. B. Dana's "I'm a Pilgrim, and I'm a Stranger," to numerous articles in the *AR*, the Advent people are characterized by their marginal status as sojourners rather than citizens of the world. Another example of this sentiment was expressed in a poem written by Brother Hyde who witnessed Ellen White's vision of the New Earth:

We have heard from the bright, the holy land;
 We have heard, and our hearts are glad;
 For we were a lonely pilgrim band,
 And weary, and worn, and sad.
 They tell us the saints have a dwelling there—
 No longer are homeless ones;
 And we know that the goodly land is fair,
 Where life's pure river runs

Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:70.

tradition or creed. The two theses of freedom and responsibility were linked together, since trust in the Bible as the ultimate guide meant that one had to be fair and honest with what it said, even if that went against what one had been taught or intuitively thought to be right.

It is not surprising, then, that these issues held a significant place in the guiding principles of the embryonic Seventh-day Adventist Church. J. N. Andrews captured the essence of the group's commitment to honest inquiry when he commented on the extensive work that he was going to present on the seventh-day Sabbath. In his words, "I desire to promote the cause of truth without mingling with that effort one particle of party spirit. The truth will stand on its own merits."⁵⁹ Church organizer James White noted in his reflections on these issues, "Christ never designed that human minds should be molded for Heaven by the influence merely of other human minds. 'The head of every man is Christ.' . . . However important organization may be for the protection of the church, and to secure harmony of action, it must not come in to take the disciple from the hands of the Master."⁶⁰ Addressing this same point concerning individual freedom and accountability, Ellen White argued, "We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves. If we allow others to do our thinking, we shall have crippled energies and contracted abilities."⁶¹ In her later writings, Ellen White linked submission of individual thought with Roman Catholic principles of believer orthodoxy, a grave charge among her contemporaries.

During the 1880s, when certain young ministers (A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner) were challenging the church's accepted understanding of the meaning of select prophetic features (the ten horns of Daniel 7) outlined by Uriah Smith,⁶² and propounding the doctrine of salvation through faith rather than law-keeping based on their understanding of Galatians, church members were torn between adhering to what had become accepted Adventist theology and abandoning established beliefs.⁶³ Despite many extenuating

⁵⁹ J. N. Andrews, "New History of the Sabbath," *AR* 32.22 (24 November 1868): 252–253. In this article, he asserts that in his desire to give a fair and complete review of the subject, he had reached out to individuals recognized for their commitment to the sacredness of the first day of the week, some of whom were his public opponents and critics. For an excellent insight into his assumptions concerning appropriate methodology and sources used, see his *AR* article, "The Preparation of the Sabbath History," *AR* 42.25 (2 December 1873): 196–197.

⁶⁰ James White, "Organization and Discipline," *AR* 57.1 (4 January 1881): 8–9.

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 89–90.

⁶² For a closer look at the attitudes and sentiments expressed by both Uriah Smith and A. T. Jones, see "The Conference," *AR* 65.42 (23 October 1888): 664.

⁶³ The choice was complicated by the fact that a national Sunday law (the Blair

and trying cultural circumstances, when Ellen White spoke to an Adventist audience and leadership resisted rethinking the church's interpretation of Daniel 7 and doctrine of salvation, she warned them against preferring tradition to study. She reminded them that asking individuals to simply accept what had been established by a religious institution when personal study had led to an alternative interpretation of Scripture had a long history, one which the Adventist Church stood firmly against. In this was a warning that the Adventist Church would be assuming characteristics that they vociferously condemned. As she noted,

Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the self-same principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings *as interpreted by the church*; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed, or the established teaching of their church.⁶⁴

Ellen White also promulgated Miller's attitude toward the value and responsibility of honest inquiry. The freedom of religious belief the Reformers had fought for meant little if subsequent generations backslid into simply accepting a new set of creeds based on the interpretation of others. She insisted on a spirit of continued openness towards divergent views and a willingness to examine beliefs without preconceived conclusions. The hallmark of honest inquiry in her perception was the willingness to break with accepted doctrines and give alternative scriptural interpretation a fair hearing. This responsibility was attendant to religious freedom. She reflected this view clearly when she said,

Truth is eternal, and conflict with error will only make manifest its strength. We should never refuse to examine the Scriptures with those who, we have reason to believe, desire to know what is truth as much as we do. Suppose

Bill) had been proposed, and some states were arresting and imprisoning those who violated the Sunday Sabbath. This led many to conclude that they were entering the very end times and changes could imperil their very souls. Church leaders, such as Uriah Smith, were focused on relieving those who had been arrested and challenging/resisting the national Sunday law. They had little time nor inclination to consider going over theological ground that they considered thoroughly studied and rightly established. For a brief discussion of this struggle against a Sunday law and also the question of national prohibition movement, see Richard R. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 241–245. Of interest to those who wish to look more closely into the conflict between Jones and Smith, and the national context, see George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A. T. Jones* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1987). J. N. Loughborough gave a brief overview of the origin and progress of the Sunday Law movement and how that affected the church. See Loughborough, 450–458.

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), 596; emphasis original.

a brother held a view that differed from yours, and he should come to you, proposing that you sit down with him and make an investigation of that point in the Scriptures; should you rise up, filled with prejudice, and condemn his ideas, while refusing to give him a candid hearing? The only right way would be to sit down as Christians, and investigate the position presented in the light of God's word, which will reveal truth and unmask error. To ridicule his ideas would not weaken his position in the least if it were false, or strengthen your position if it were true. If the pillar of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it. There must be no spirit of Phariseeism cherished among us.⁶⁵

Ellen White's adoption of Miller's approach gave the church a decisive endorsement of a cognitive approach to Scriptural study and with it the freedom and binding responsibility that accompanies religious study. This legacy of continued independent scholarship has functioned to mediate the tension between established Adventist beliefs and the evolving understanding of Scripture. It is significant to note that, despite the tendency of sects to degenerate into creedal bodies, it promoted independent Bible studies and was still a motivating factor for Adventist scholars a hundred years later, still reflected in their statements. One such scholar, Edward Heppenstall, says,

Freedom belongs to man on religious grounds. Freedom is the gift of God. . . . Religion that is afraid of investigation and scholarship tends towards superstition and emotionalism . . . Blind credulity as to the truth one holds is the refuge of sluggish minds. It relieves the individual from the real study of God's word. It settles all differences by silencing all opposing voices and denying the right to ask questions. This takes the meaning out of religion, leaving it ignorant, superficial, intolerant.⁶⁶

This process was defended and perpetuated in the church by the writings of Ellen White, who utilized and commended it. She depended on Miller's model of scriptural interpretation that required individual responsibility for personal religious beliefs. This component can only be maintained today, as long as congregants are active participants in negotiating belief, and both the individuals and the collective group value careful study and individual freedom to explore and interpret the Bible. The group as a whole must maintain tolerance for diversity rather than uniformity of belief, continually resisting the formation of discussion-ending creeds. The acceptance of a creed effectually replaces individual responsibility with church authority.

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, "The Necessity of Dying to Self," *AR* 66.25 (18 June 1889): 385–386.

⁶⁶ Edward Heppenstall, "Academic Freedom and the Quest for Truth," *Spectrum* 4.1 (1972): 34–40.

Progressive Revelation

One further aspect of Adventist belief that influenced the group's drive towards the deeper study of Scripture was the understanding that God reveals truth incrementally. For early Adventists, this translated into a position of humility: they determined to remain open to further truth. As noted church leader and long-time editor of the *AR*, Uriah Smith commented in 1857 on the group's growth in scriptural understanding since the 1840s:

We have been enabled to rejoice in truths far in advance of what we then perceived. But we do not imagine that we yet have it all, by any means. We trust to progress still, our way growing continually brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Then let us maintain an inquiring frame of mind, seeking for more light, more truth endeavoring the while, to keep ourselves in the love of God, and the patient waiting for his Son from heaven.⁶⁷

On many occasions, these early Adventists experienced the move from a cherished belief when evidence of a better understanding became manifest. The change from welcoming the Sabbath at six o'clock in the evening to commencing its observance at sunset provides one example of this principle in action.⁶⁸ This change came as the result of study, discussion, and reflection, and James White viewed it as consistent with their stance to abandon any theological position when new light guided them in a different direction. He did not view this adjustment in belief and practice as an unexpected aberration, but rather declared that the group "would change on other points of their faith if they could see good reason to do so from the Scriptures."⁶⁹ It can be noted that these pioneers also had been led to relinquish their firm belief in the 22 October 1844 return of Jesus, along with attitudes towards the propriety of marriage in view of the approaching Advent,⁷⁰ and had abandoned the shut door theory.⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, another prime example of a change involved the formal organization of the church and the decision to obtain its status as a legal entity. At that point, Merritt Cornell gave a statement that neatly captured the idea of accepting progressive revelation, saying, "There

⁶⁷ [Uriah Smith], "The True Course," *AR* 9.26 (30 April 1857): 204–205.

⁶⁸ M. E. Cornell noted, "Once we taught with confidence that the time for commencing the Sabbath was at 6:00 o'clock, but we had to give it up, and now that position appears dark, and we wonder that we were ever so blind." ("Making Us a Name," 9).

⁶⁹ James White, "The Word," *AR* 7.19 (7 February 1856): 148–149.

⁷⁰ James White, "My Dear Bro. Jacobs," *The Day-Star* 7.12–13 (11 October 1845): 47; James White and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches: Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1888), 126. This topic is also discussed in "Accepting 'A Wile of the Devil,'" in Wheeler, *James White*, 37–45.

⁷¹ See footnote 14.

is danger of our being so over zealous to keep out of Babylon that we shall commit her most noted blunder – that of sticking a stake and refusing to pull it up and advance. When we cease to unlearn errors, we shall fall like those who have gone before us. We have learned much, and no doubt there is much more for us to learn.”⁷² In short, previous study and convictions on a theological point did not rule out the possibility that God would subsequently reveal their imperfect or flawed understanding on an established issue, requiring them to move forward with the new light received.

The idea of progressive revelation was derived from the Millerite and early Sabbatarian Adventist experiences. As the believers studied together, God impressed them with a new understanding and significance of certain passages. Ellen White addressed the changing nature and ongoing process of understanding God’s Word and will:

New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God.⁷³

Belief in progressive revelation worked against the formation of a creed that would close the door to the further growth of doctrinal or scriptural understanding. At the 1861 Sabbatarian meeting, where the first church conference was organized, John Loughborough argued, as reported by the chair, Joseph Bates, that, “the first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe.”⁷⁴ He went on to sketch the future of a group with a creed: it would eventually exclude and then persecute members who dared to disagree with established doctrines. As James White forcefully declared, “We reject everything in the form of a human creed.”⁷⁵ For James White and his contemporaries, a creed paralyzed a religious organization and prevented growth in biblical understanding, and the potential for spiritual growth that could accompany it. To them, the adoption of a creed was essentially a denial that they were on a spiritual journey, led by an active and engaged Lord who would reveal greater truths as the group was ready (sufficiently mature), and the time was right. It was assumed that God’s purposes are inscrutable, and so his choice to open up to or impress the minds of the diligent with further

⁷² Cornell, “Making Us a Name,” 8.

⁷³ Ellen G. White, “The Object of Sabbath School Work,” in *Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*, 53–54. Reprinted in *Counsels on Sabbath School Work: A Compilation From the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1938), 34.

⁷⁴ Bates, “Battle Creek Conference,” 148–149.

⁷⁵ Bates, “Battle Creek Conference,” 148–149.

light or truth depended on his sense of timing.

Their radical stance against setting a creed went further than simply admitting that their current knowledge base was incomplete, or that there was truth yet to be revealed. It also included the idea that some aspects of the message or “truth,” which were presented by the group in the past, could have ceased to provide adequate or complete “truth” for the present and/or the future. Ellen White addressed the changing nature of the message when church leaders opposed a change in emphasis being proposed by younger ministers with instructions that the group needed to stand by traditional Adventist teachings. She answered their position with a rebuke: “The gospel must be fulfilled in accordance with the messages God sends. That which God gives his servants today would not perhaps have been the present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time.”⁷⁶

Adventists were urged to look and move forward. In Adventist rhetoric, God is moving a people toward a fuller understanding of God’s ideals and standards for humanity. God is in the process of readying a people to stand at the end of time. Truth is manifest as God’s people are ready to receive it. Far from representing “truth” solely as a characteristic of a golden past—an age to which we must return—truth is also to be found in the future as we move beyond earlier understandings. As Ellen White remarked:

We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.⁷⁷

In her perspective, truth must be pursued through study and personal preparation, in order to receive further light as it comes along.⁷⁸ Both the corporate church community and individuals within the church are to stay engaged in an active quest for truth. As Ellen White stated: “There is no excuse for any one in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain

⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, “Counsel to Ministers,” 1888 (Manuscript 8a, 1888), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, “Search the Scriptures,” *AR* 69.30 (26 July 1892): 465–466.

⁷⁸ Ellen White expanded the significance of study and search for truth when she tied it with one’s ability to comprehend Scripture. She posited a mental law of use or atrophy, saying: “The mental powers will surely become contracted, and will lose their ability to grasp the deep meanings of the word of God, unless they are put vigorously and persistently to the task of searching for truth. The mind will enlarge, if it is employed in tracing out the relation of the subjects of the Bible, comparing scripture with scripture and spiritual things with spiritual. Go below the surface; the richest treasures of thought are waiting for the skillful and diligent student.” (“The Value of Bible Study,” *AR* 65.29 [17 July 1888]: 450).

doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible.”⁷⁹

Adventist Understanding of Inspiration

The Adventist understanding of how to study what God has revealed is influenced by their view of how God reveals Himself through inspiration. Early *AR* articles only occasionally addressed the inspiration of Scripture, since belief in the Bible as God’s word was assumed in the circles in which they conversed and from whom Adventists drew their readership. See the section of this paper, “Early Adventist Hermeneutics” for a fuller discussion of this point. The question of their view of inspiration was folded into their presentations concerning their acceptance of visions, particularly those of Ellen G. [Harmon] White.⁸⁰ The articles that addressed what they referred to as spiritual gifts or the gift of prophecy clarified the Adventist stance on the Bible as the ultimate source of knowing God’s will. These pieces were general responses to charges leveled by other Christians that sabbatarian Adventists were following the words of a human [Ellen White] or elevating her pronouncements over those of the Bible. Therefore, the articles affirmed that Adventists accepted the Bible as a trustworthy guide and focused on its promises for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the on-going gift of prophecy.⁸¹ To defend their recognition of Ellen White’s active voice in the movement, they frequently quoted Scripture found in Joel 2:28–29 and Acts 2:16–18, “Your daughters shall prophesy,” and so located Ellen White’s role and ecstatic visions within the holy texts.⁸² The topic of inspiration was articulated much more directly later in the century, particularly through Ellen White as she became a more experienced writer and was able to reflect on how God communicated to and through her. From the various articles and Ellen

⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Hope,” *AR* 69.50 (20 December 1892): 785–786.

⁸⁰ See, for example, James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4,” *AR* 11.9 (19 November 1858): 68–69, and B. F. Robbins, “The Promise of the Father,” *AR* 15.7 (5 January 1860), 53.

⁸¹ For a particularly useful discussion of this, see James White, “A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Present Truth,” *AR* 11.8 (31 December 1857): 61. He noted an incident where “the Lord worked in a special manner”: “The Spirit of the Lord rested on Mrs. W., and she was taken off in vision. The entire congregation believed that it was the work of God, and were deeply affected.”

⁸² For a fuller discussion of their use of Scripture and their understanding of the gifts of the Spirit, see Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy’: James White, Uriah Smith, and the ‘Triumphant Vindication of the Right of the Sisters’ to Preach,” *AUSS* 43.1 (2005): 41–58; and Ginger Hanks Harwood and Beverly G. Beem “‘It Was Mary that First Preached a Risen Jesus’: Early Seventh-day Adventist Answers to Objections to Women as Public Spiritual Leaders,” *AUSS* 45.2 (2007): 221–245.

White's later works, the reader is able to obtain a clear view of the official Adventist understanding of inspiration, an understanding that had significant implications for hermeneutics.

It is clear that Adventists claimed divine authority for the Bible because its messages came from God. Consequently, they concluded that human wisdom must defer to the authority of the Bible. Such a position solidly situated Adventism within the conservative end of the theological spectrum.⁸³ Yet, this conservative, Bible-affirming position did not lead Adventists to a literalist approach.⁸⁴ Although committed to the elevated status of the Bible, the denomination rejected the "literalist" approach to Scripture, a point which should be differentiated from their "literal" or "plain reading" approach.⁸⁵ Adventists referred the authority of Scripture back to the God behind the words of the text.⁸⁶

Expressing a similar view, Ellen White stated that while the Bible is the Word of God, "God and heaven alone are infallible."⁸⁷ She distinguished between the God of the universe whose will and wisdom were infallible, and the specific words chosen by the fallible human beings he inspired and commissioned to translate his message into human language. Unlike the late nineteenth and twentieth-century fundamentalists who affirmed verbal inspiration—the belief that the Bible contains only the literal and actual words of God⁸⁸—Adventists opted historically to describe the writers, not the words, as

⁸³ Denis Kaiser offers an excellent description of approaches to inspiration used by various denominations in the nineteenth century, including the Wesleyan Methodists, the Restorationist Movement, and the Millerite Movement, all antecedents of Seventh-day Adventists. He also provides a fine overview of the other forces, such as geological and biological discoveries and German higher criticism which compelled Bible students to seek further clarity about the sound uses of the Bible and how to interpret it responsibly and with integrity. It is not surprising that Adventism itself had to start wrestling with this topic in a more disciplined manner by the end of the nineteenth century. For further research on this topic, see Kaiser's work and bibliography, "Trust and Doubt."

⁸⁴ The basic fundamentalist approach is summarized by Religious Right leader, Jerry Falwell, who claims, "The Bible is absolutely infallible, without error in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as well as in areas such as geography, science, history, etc." *Listen America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 63.

⁸⁵ For definitions and distinctions between literalism and a literal or plain reading, see the discussion of this difference in footnote 31.

⁸⁶ An early example of this is found in James White's article, "Paul Says So," 152. See also footnote 43.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White, "Search the Scriptures," 465–466.

⁸⁸ For a thorough discussion of fundamentalist belief concerning inspiration, see Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 103–131.

inspired by God.⁸⁹ This conservative position can be observed in the writings of church pioneers, founders, and spiritual leaders on the process of inspiration.⁹⁰ In 1883, the *AR* published the General Conference's officially adopted

⁸⁹ Uriah Smith, the editor of the *AR*, addressed the issue in a defense of Ellen White against those who would accuse her of claiming verbal inspiration. He wrote of "those who are making a specialty of opposing sister White and her work, Their stronghold is to place her in a false light, [and] misrepresent our position in reference to her work, . . . For instance, they say, 'We know her *words* are not inspired,' thus covertly implying that she claims and we hold that they are: and then they produce what they suppose to be a stunning fact that she sometimes herself changes the phraseology of her sentences, employs amanuenses to assist in preparing her works for the press, and inserts quotations from history. 'Are these all inspired, too?' they sneeringly ask." [Uriah Smith], "Which are Revealed, Words or Ideas? *AR* 65.11 (13 March 1888): 168–169. He continued his analysis of the arguments of Ellen White's critics who questioned whether the "historians she quotes were inspired too." They also questioned the inspiration of the translator who rendered the Hebrew text into English, and the other translators who used different words to render the text.?" He refers to an earlier article by Joseph Clarke, "Old Testament and New Testament," *AR* 64.41 (18 October 1887): 641–642. He speaks of the book of Revelation as "an inspired comment upon the book of Daniel, extending that Old Testament prophecy further, and with more clearness, into the future." He said that all the New Testament writers and even Jesus himself "drew their most powerful arguments from that great store-house of truth, the Old Testament." This does not elevate the Old Testament over the New, however it shows "that they are of equal importance." The rejection of the importance of the Old Testament led to great evils, including the persecution of the Jews and the rejection of the Sabbath, and "Ignorance of the Old Testament led to fanciful interpretations of the New, and these increasingly indefinitely, creeds have become as numerous as the weeds that infest our fields."

⁹⁰ In 1884, George I. Butler, the General Conference President, wrote a series of ten articles on degrees of inspiration. The first article, "Inspiration: Its Nature and Manner of Communication," *AR* 61.2 (8 January 1884): 24, described the project. "As inspiration comes from God, it must partake of the divine; and hence it must be too deep for finite minds to fully comprehend. But that which is 'revealed belongs unto us and our children.'" The issue was not whether or not the Bible is inspired, for "the readers of the *AR* long ago settled that point to their entire satisfaction." Rather, he was interested in the "nature of inspiration, the manner of its bestowal, the degree of its influence, and the purpose of God in it." He recognized that God could have written the whole Bible with his hand, as he did the Ten Commandments, or sent an angel to write it all out, but he did not do that. "God employs human agencies. He inspires them and moves them to write. . . . The Scriptures are the product of this combined action of the human and the Divine." This is the understanding that Ellen White shared, but Butler went on to develop a concept of the degrees of inspiration, deeming some works as more inspired than others. White disapproved of this. His series continued with No. 2, "Inspiration," *AR* 61.3 (15 January 1884), 41; No. 3, "Visions and Dreams," *AR* 61.4 (22 January 1884): 57–58; No. 4, "Light through

position on the issue: "We believe the light given by God to his servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed."⁹¹ Adventists clearly adopted the stance that God dealt with inspired people rather than dictating the actual words of the Bible. The statement refrained from attributing inerrancy to Scripture, but affirmed its centrality for understanding God's purposes, as well as Christian life and practice.⁹²

In addition to formal church statements of doctrine, Adventists have traditionally valued the guidance on such issues provided by the church co-founder, Ellen White. She directly addressed the issue of inspiration, both in the Scriptures and in the production of her own works. She left no doubt concerning her stand on the question of how the Scriptures were created either in her personal correspondence or in the statements on inspiration that she prepared for publication.

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.

Visions to Principal Sources of Biblical Inspiration," *AR* 61.5 (29 January 1884): 73; No. 5, "The Word of the Lord Came to Men Through Visions," *AR*, 61.6 (5 February 1884): 89–90; No. 6, "How Were the Poetic and Historical Books of the Bible Written?" *AR* 61.16 (15 April 1884): 249–250; No. 7, "The Books of Solomon, Job etc.," *AR* 61.17 (22 April 1884): 265–267; No. 8, "In What Sense are the Scriptures Inspired," *AR* 61.19 (6 May, 1884): 296–297; No. 9, "Is There Any Degree of Imperfection in the Revelations of God to Man?" *AR* 61.22 (27 May 1884): 344–346; and No. 10, "Final Conclusions and Reflections," *AR* 61.23 (3 June 1884): 361–362. Ellen White wrote her response five years later after seeing the impact this concept had on the students at Battle Creek. "I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *AR*, neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this." Ellen G. White to R. A. Underwood, 1889 (Letter 22, 1889), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. Reprinted in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:23. For a discussion of the setting of this series, see Frank M. Hasel, "Inspiration, Degrees of." *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 895–897.

⁹¹ G. I. Butler, "General Conference Proceedings (Concluded)," *AR* 60.47 (27 November 1883): 741.

⁹² For a late twentieth-century coverage of Adventist understanding of inspiration that stands in harmony with the principle laid out by Ellen White and the nineteenth-century Adventist pioneers, see Herbert E. Douglas, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 372–385.

The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.⁹³

Again, in the same manuscript, Ellen White clearly denied the verbal dictation theory concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures in her statement, “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”⁹⁴ She reflected similar sentiments in her 1888 edition of the book, *The Great Controversy*, when she wrote that,

The ten commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by his own hand. They are of divine, and not human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” John 1:14.⁹⁵

A close review of Ellen White’s writings reveals that she repeatedly stressed that God’s words come through human agents, leaving what could be called “human fingerprints” on Scripture.⁹⁶ While this results in a product that is a merging of the human and the Divine, it is this very fusion that makes the works comprehensible to human minds. Eternal verities are accessible and communicated to humans in language and symbols they can understand. She explained, “The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in

⁹³ Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” 1886 (Manuscript 24, 1886), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. Reprinted in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:19–21. Other Ellen White statements prepared in the 1880s include “The Inspiration of the Word of God,” 1888 (Manuscript 16, 1888), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. Reprinted in *Selected Messages*, 1:15–18, and “The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration,” *Testimonies*, 5:698–711. These statements helped clarify both her stance on the nature of biblical inspiration and how the process worked in her own writings. While chosen individuals were filled with the Holy Spirit, they retained the responsibility of finding words that most accurately expressed the message God had given to them.

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, “Inspiration.”

⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), c, d.

⁹⁶ The understanding of inspiration held by Ellen White and the other thought leaders of early Adventism has many practical implications for Bible students. It accounts for the changes in tone, voice, style, and level of literary sophistication from one book to the next. It allows for the differences in the Gospel accounts where writers describe the same events from diverse perspectives. It even helps eliminate the tension created by different ordering of events from one Gospel to another or the conflict between texts that tell the same story but give different details.

order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are."⁹⁷ Ellen White recognized that human beings live within an imperfect world, within culturally determined structures of thought and language. She was clear that God's condescension includes communicating through limited and fallible vehicles: "The Bible is not given to us in grand, superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect."⁹⁸

Ellen White's conclusion that scriptural texts were written by humans and retain the imprint of the vehicles that carried God's Word did not decrease their spiritual value or usefulness. In her introduction to *The Great Controversy*, she explained how one can invest authority in statements that evidenced the human role in their production:

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of his servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.⁹⁹

The same point was emphasized when Ellen White reflected on the words of the apostles of Jesus. "Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold."¹⁰⁰ She revealed that inspiration also operated this way in her experience of being given a message and left to articulate it in her own words. She reflected on her personal trepidation as she endeavored to articulate the message transmitted to her from God, remarking: "I tremble for fear lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words."¹⁰¹ This fear is understandable only in light of the fact that she, though inspired, "embodied the thought

⁹⁷ Ellen G. White to Dr. [A. J.] Sanderson, 12 September 1901 (Letter 121, 1901), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:19–21.

⁹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888), c.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen G. White to Brother [S. N. Haskell], 5 April 1900 (Letter 53, 1900), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

¹⁰¹ Ellen G. White to Brother [O. A. Olsen], 15 July 1892 (Letter 40, 1892), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, as quoted in Arthur L. White, *Messenger to the Remnant*, 59.

in human language.”¹⁰² This human aspect of the inspiration equation rules out an inerrant text. Ellen White also conceded that the Bible “probably” contains errors derived from mistakes made by copyists and translators:

Some look to us gravely and say, “Don’t you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?” This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word. . . . All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.¹⁰³

This recognition of possible errors in Scripture reflected both the opinions of earlier Adventist pioneers on the subject, along with the subsequent statements published by church representatives. After examining her counsel on the subject, any serious student of her writings cannot avoid Ellen White’s clear pronouncement concerning the process of inspiration.¹⁰⁴

Early Adventist Hermeneutics and the Future of Christian Hermeneutics

Early Sabbatarian Adventists took the careful approach to Bible study inherited from the Millerite movement and honed it into a sophisticated hermeneutical method that established a church committed to a sound and scholarly study of Scripture as the inspired word of God. The early Adventists’ high respect for Scripture was balanced by an appreciation of the human role in its production, translation, and interpretation; and accompanied by an attitude of humility and a belief that human understanding of God’s messages to humanity is incomplete or partial. Their belief in progressive revelation encompassed the idea that more would be revealed in God’s time. These beliefs have traditionally safe-guarded the Seventh-day Adventist denomination from simplistic readings reflecting prevalent cultural attitudes.

The example of early Adventists should encourage current Adventists and other Christians, to commit themselves to do the intensive work of biblical scholarship and to reflect on how any particular text should be understood

¹⁰² Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (1888), c.

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White, “The Guide Book,” 1888 (Manuscript 16, 1888), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

¹⁰⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the streams of thought Adventism was navigating as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth began, Denis Kaiser’s work on the various theories of inspiration in nineteenth-century America is very useful. His work gives both an overview and a helpful bibliography of the various approaches: Verbal-Plenary Inspiration, Thought Inspiration, Inspiration of the Person, Degrees of Inspiration, Partial Inspiration, and popular understandings of the inspiration of Ellen White. He also examines the positions of major Adventist leaders, including Uriah Smith, George I. Butler, Dudley M. Canright, and Ellen White’s own understanding of her inspiration. “Trust and Doubt.”

and applied. This will help avoid the error of “finding answers” by clinging to single or isolated texts, at the expense of others. The hermeneutic so painstakingly pioneered by William Miller, James White, Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, Ellen White, and other early Adventist leaders guided the church through periods of religious fundamentalism and created a culture that values on-going study and biblical literacy. It has promoted biblical scholarship and produced a proud honor roll of qualified scholars.

Despite the established methodology of a solid and distinctive hermeneutic, the present era of fundamentalist growth and entrenchment in society and religion, with its embrace of biblicism, offers a challenge to the integrity of the nineteenth century Adventist legacy. It is inevitable that many church members are influenced by fundamentalist attitudes and impulses. Nevertheless, the early Adventist movement provides today's Protestants with sufficient resources to prevent them from being swallowed up by the biblicism of the modern fundamentalist resurgence, as long as they choose to retain the integrity of their hermeneutic. As noted in the discussion above, the early Adventist understandings of Scripture, inspiration, the vital role of critical thinking, and the insistence that Scripture passages be read and interpreted together, were all aspects that differentiated Adventists from the ideological stances of churches associated with fundamentalism. It is essential to continually educate those in modern Adventist pews, both the new members, who might bring other traditions with them, and those reared within the Adventist faith who may need to be reminded of the Adventist principles of careful and thoughtful biblical study. The hermeneutic that is the Adventist legacy has the potential to keep Protestantism alive and open to what pioneer Adventists such as James White called present truth and the expectation that Adventists will continue to grow in the understanding of God's will through progressive revelation. It creates the space for new readings and interpretations of various texts and allows positions to be taken based on our best understandings of God's Word.

Whether or not traditional Adventist hermeneutics will see the Adventist Church through the current resurgence of fundamentalist hermeneutics depends both on the degree of the church's commitment to its legacy, and upon whether the clarity concerning the goal of Bible study (preparation for union with Christ) is retained. Clearly, if Bible study does not steadily draw the Christian closer to God and educate each person more fully in the ways of God's love, the hermeneutic will be found lacking after all. If expertise in Scripture leads Christians to narrow the definition of who may participate in the conversation, moving to exclude greater numbers of people, insisting on an affirmation of a catechism of right beliefs, and joining in interpretive battles armed with proof texts, then the practices of the nineteenth-century pioneers of Adventism need to be reviewed and revived. It is critical to retain the understanding that no one fully understands every passage of Scripture,

but that God will lead his people into further truth as they are ready to move forward. Adventists today must embrace a vision of God's love for, and in engagement with, a people traveling out of the darkness of spiritual ignorance into increasing light.

Perhaps the most significant legacy that nineteenth-century Adventists left for their spiritual heirs was a love for the way God chose to reveal his will and intention for humanity's salvation. In his wisdom, he condescended to communicate to humanity through frail and flawed humans. And he allowed them to work within the limitations of their own languages as they struggled to articulate the grand vision he had for the healing and renewal of a broken and distorted humanity, in order to develop lives of authenticity and grace.

Early Adventists modeled faith in the process of careful study, utilizing the best scholarly resources available to them, and committing to the revision of their views and practices when new light was given, fully trusting God's continued guidance. The hermeneutical principles upon which they settled invite Christians today to see ourselves as they did, as pilgrims on a spiritual journey, never growing so fond of one (theological) place that Christ cannot be followed further as he bids us to pull up our stakes and travel forward to another place. If there was one principle upon which the Adventist pioneers retained clarity, it was that the ultimate purpose of immersion in Bible study is to catch glimpses of God, and that by beholding him we may be changed into authentic reflections of his grace. Whether or not this heritage is preserved may be the most critical element in the shaping of the future of Seventh-day Adventism and its contributions to the wider Christian community.