

The Holy Spirit's Operation in Divine Inspiration: The Adventist Quest for a Better Understanding (1850-1930)

“At times I am carried far ahead into the future and shown what is to take place. Then again I am shown things as they have occurred in the past. After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen, and the matter is not so clear before me until I write, then the scene rises before me as was presented in vision, and I can write with freedom. Sometimes the things which I have seen are hid from me after I come out of vision, and I cannot call them to mind until I am brought before a company where that vision applies. Then the things which I have seen come to my mind with force. . . .

“I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that He is pleased to have me relate or write them.”

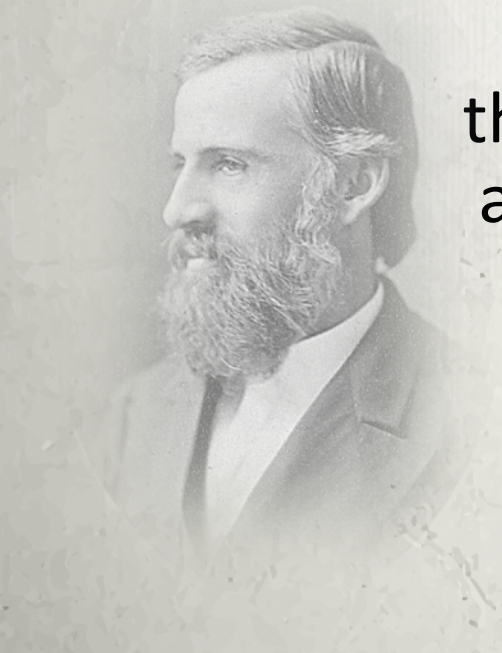
(Ellen G. White to J. N. Andrews and H. N. Smith,
June 11, 1860, Lt 8, 1860)



“Many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection of the writings, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected. . . . 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.”

(G. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, “General Conference Proceedings,”
Review and Herald, 27 November 1883, 741)

“God has given light to man in various ways:—**1.** By *speaking with his own voice* his holy law in the audience of the people; by announcing his Son and commanding the people to hear him; and by *writing with his own finger* the words of his law upon the tables of stone. **2.** By *taking Moses and Christ into his especial presence*, and fully instructing them relative to the great work to be done in the dispensations he was then inaugurating. **3.** By revealing to men in *visions and dreams* things which they could not have otherwise known, these men afterward writing or speaking the substance of what was thus given them, for the instruction of others. This method of inspiration, however, was not as full and perfect as the preceding.

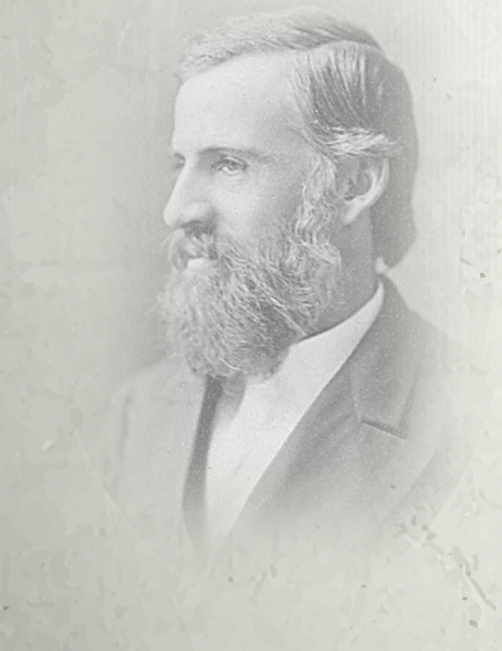


“4. By the influence of his Spirit, the Lord *illuminated the memory* of those who had been acquainted with important events, so that they could correctly place them on record. The Spirit brought all things “to their remembrance.” 5. It is probable that the Spirit of God rested upon Solomon and others, and *especially illuminated their natural faculties*, bringing to their minds good thoughts which are left on record for our benefit, in such books as the Proverbs, Job, etc. These books seem to have been given in a different manner from most of the other books of the Bible.”

(George I. Butler, “Inspiration [No. 2]: Differences in Degrees and Manner of Bestowment,” *Review and Herald*, 15 January 1884, 41)

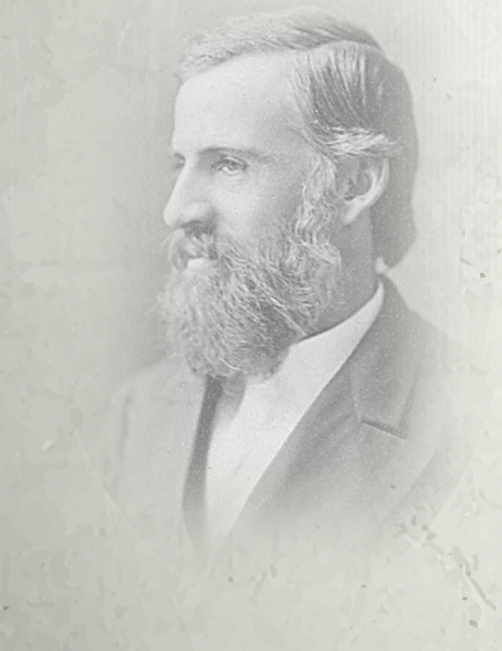
“So far as perfection of doctrine and moral instruction is concerned this revelation is perfect; and that as a whole it is perfectly adapted to save men from sin.”

(George I. Butler, “Inspiration, No. 10: Final Conclusions and Reflections,” *Review and Herald*, 3 June 1884, 361)



“There is some degree of imperfection, so far as *clearness* and *fullness* of light is concerned, in revelations from God through prophecy, ever remembering, however, that what is given is true and good.”

(George I. Butler, “Inspiration, No. 9: Is There Any Degree of Imperfection in the Revelation of God to Man?” *Review and Herald*, 27 May 1884, 346)



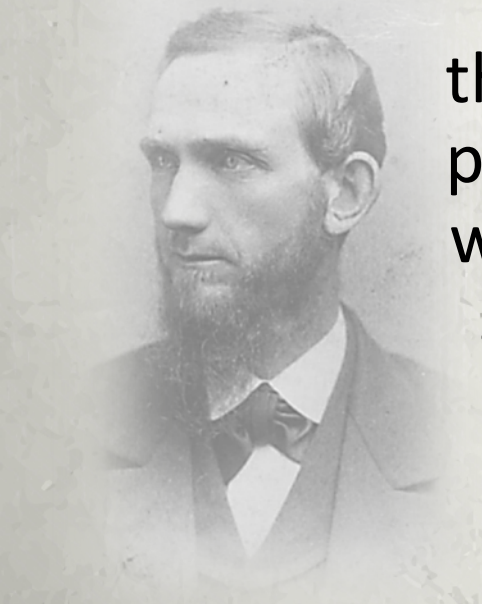
“The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. . . . The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes. The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike.”

(Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” Ms 24, 1886)

“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. 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.”

(Ellen G. White, “Objections to the Bible,” Ms 24, 1886)

"She claims that every line she writes, even in a private letter, is directly inspired by God. . . . I do positively know that the words in her written 'testimonies' are not inspired, for—1. When writing them out she will often change what she has written, and write it very differently. I have seen her scratch out a whole page, or a line, or a sentence, and write it over differently. If God gave her the words, why did she scratch them out and alter them? 2. I have repeatedly seen her sit with pen in hand and read her manuscript to her husband for hours, while he suggested many changes, which she made. She would scratch out her own words and put in the ones he suggested, sometimes whole sentences. Was he inspired, too?"



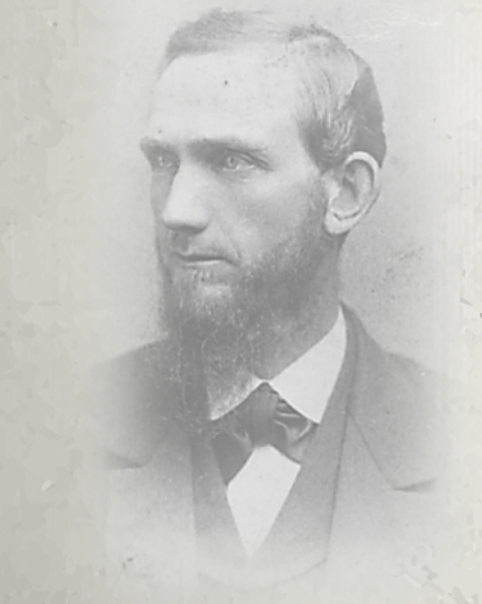
“3. As she is very wordy and wholly ignorant of grammar, of late years she has employed an accomplished writer to take her manuscript and correct it, improve the wording, polish it up, and put it in popular style, so her books would sell better. Thousands of words, not her own, are thus put in by these other persons, some of whom were not even Christians. Are their words inspired, too? 4. She often copies, without credit or sign of quotation, whole sentences and even paragraphs, almost word for word, from other authors. . . . This she does page after page. Was D’Aubigné also inspired?”

(D. M. Canright, "Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced [Article 12]," 2)



“She claims that every line she writes, even in a private letter, is directly inspired by God. . . . Thus it will be seen that Mrs. White claims the very highest inspiration, the voice of God speaking directly through her.”

(D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* [1888], 43, 44)



“If the Holy Spirit should give a person words to write, he would be obliged to use those very words, without change; but when simply a scene or view is presented before a person, and no language is given, he would be at liberty to describe it in his own words, as might seem to him best to express the truth in the case. And if, having written it out once, a better way of expressing it should occur to him, it would be perfectly legitimate for him to scratch out all he had written and write it over again, keeping strictly to the ideas and facts which had been shown him; and in the second writing there would be the divinely communicated idea just as much as in the first.”

(Uriah Smith, “Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?,”
Review and Herald, 13 March 1888, 168, 169)



“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 Timothy 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.”

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

“One writer *is more strongly impressed* with one phase of a subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation; another seizes upon a different phase; and each, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents *what is most forcibly impressed* upon his own mind; a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all.”

(Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [1888], d)

“Both in the tabernacle and in the college, the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say [that] *some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not*. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review* [in 1884], 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, 18 January 1889, Lt 22, 1889)



“Brother Butler is on the wrong track. God has not given the work into his hands to set up his human wisdom to put his hand on the sacred ark of God. When sitting in judgment upon the living oracles of God, did he consider that God had placed upon him the work *to pass judgment as to what is inspired in the Word of God and what is not inspired?* Has God committed the work to him to state *what sort of degrees of inspiration attend some utterances and what is wanting in others?* Whatever may be his thoughts in these things, if they are kept to himself they will not harm other souls.”

(Ellen G. White, "The Discernment of Truth," Ms 16, 1889)

“The doctrine of direct, dictated, verbal inspiration—
that everything in the Bible was set down by the finger of God—
has these five things in its favor:—

1. It is the *first*, original, and oldest doctrine.
2. It is the *simplest* doctrine.
3. It is the *undeviating* doctrine which has proved
the bulwark of the church of God.”

(George S. Bishop, "Five Reasons for Verbal Inspiration,"
Signs of the Times, 29 July 1889, 452)

“Every word of the Bible is the exact language of God. . . .
If God spoke, it was not man. *Man* was only the mouth-piece.
It was *God* who spoke. Then we should lose sight
of the human agency and see in the Bible the *word of God only*.”

([W. W. Prescott], "Bible Study,"
General Conference Daily Bulletin, 6 March 1891, 16)



“The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us. It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate.”

(Ellen G. White to S. N. Haskell,
5 April 1900, Lt 53, 1900)

“To my brethren in positions of responsibility,—
During the night following our interview in my house and
out on the lawn under the trees, October 19, 1902, in
regard to the work in the Southern field, the Lord
instructed me that I had taken a wrong position.”

(Ellen G. White to Brethren in Positions of Responsibility,
26 December 1902, Lt 208, 1902)



“In *Testimony* #31, page 63 I read more than twenty years ago these words: ‘I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in visions—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.’ From this and somewhat similar statements I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the ten commandments. I held that view with absolute tenacity against innumerable objections raised to it by many who were occupying prominent positions in the cause.”

(David Paulson to Ellen G. White, 19 April 1906)



“My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have made any such claims. Neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause have made such claims.”

(Ellen G. White to David Paulson, 14 June 1906, Lt 206, 1906)



“He should send me the written words and see if I can call to mind this special statement which was not a testimony. The information given, concerning the number of rooms in the Paradise Valley Sanitarium, was given not as a revelation from the Lord, but simply as a human opinion. There has never been revealed to me the exact number of rooms in any of our sanitariums; and the knowledge I have obtained of such things I have gained by inquiring of those who were supposed to know. In my words when speaking upon these common subjects, there is nothing to lead minds to believe that I receive my knowledge in a vision from the Lord and am stating it as such.”

(Ellen G. White, "A Confusion of the Sacred and the Common,"
5 March 1909, Ms 107, 1909)

“I believe, Brother Haskell, that there is danger of our injuring Mother’s work by claiming for it more than she claims for it, more than Elders [J. N.] Andrews, [J. H.] Waggoner, or [Uriah] Smith ever claimed for it. I cannot see consistency in our putting forth a claim of verbal inspiration when Mother does not make any such claim.”

(W. C. White to S. N. Haskell, 31 October 1912)



“Now in regard to the Spirit of prophecy. You say that you are in harmony with your mother, and father, and leading brethren, etc. You also strongly intimate that my position and a few others will bring confusion. Well perhaps I had better from this time onward not say much about the spirit of prophecy. The work is not mine but the Lord’s.”

(S. N. Haskell to W. C. White, 15 February 1913)



“Mother never made the claim, as some have said, that everything she ever wrote at any time was inspired. I told them that Mother, like every other prophet of God, had her own private life, and spoke and wrote about matters of finance, about her household, her farm, her chickens, her horses, and her dairy, and that there was no claim that she was speaking regarding these matters with the voice of inspiration..”

(W. C. White to J. W. Watt, 7 March 1915)



“If it [Scripture] is not verbally inspired and I am not to receive it as such, who is authorized to tell me what is inspired, and what is not? . . . If the words of the Bible are not to be taken as expressed, we would have no definite rule by which to go.”

(S. N. Haskell, “Bible Readers’ Class,” *Bible Training School*, April 1917, 206, 207)



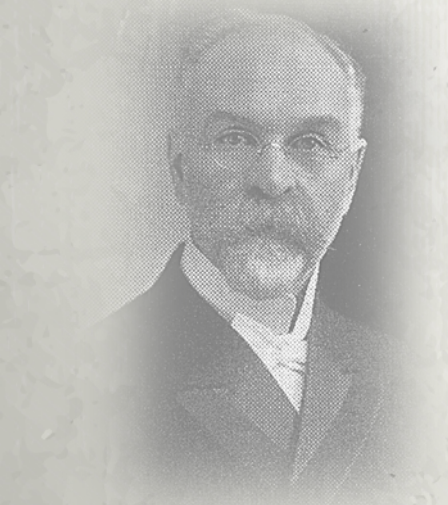
“I enjoyed very much the talk Elder Daniells gave on the question [of the Spirit of Prophecy], and I think the view he took of the question very fully agrees with my own view. I have known for long years the way in which Sister White’s works were brought together and her books compiled. I have never believed in the verbal inspiration of the Testimonies.”

(F. M. Wilcox, Minutes of the 1919 Bible Conference,
Aug. 1, 1919, 1229)



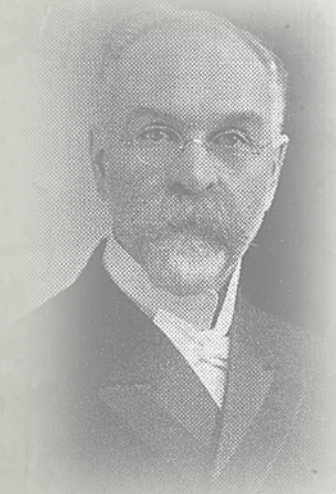
“I know positively that she carried on a line of correspondence with relatives and friends for which she made no claim of inspiration whatsoever. In many replies to questions sent to her, she frankly acknowledged her inability to throw light on the subjects presented. At the same time she did write letters or messages for which she claimed inspiration. It was the latter to which she referred in *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 63-67.”

(A. G. Daniells to F. E. Dufty, [1920])



“Mrs. White never laid claim to verbal inspiration nor perfection of diction. All through her life she expressed regret because language seemed inadequate to express the wonders of the great plan of redemption. . . . We have no statements from Mrs. E. G. White claiming that it had been revealed to her in vision that probation for the world had closed, and that there was no longer salvation for the unsaved. There is a vast difference between holding a personal belief regarding a question, and declaring that this belief has been obtained by a direct revelation from the Lord.”

(A. G. Daniells to F. E. Dufty, [1920])



“At a recent Institute, you held up the Bible in the one hand and the Testimonies in the other and said, ‘We do not test the Bible by the *Testimonies*, but we do test the writings of Sister White by the Bible. Therefore the *Testimonies* do not stand on the same level with the Bible.’ That is simple Higher Criticism.”

(J. S. Washburn to A. G. Daniells, 1 May 1922)

“We know at the present time of earnest Christians who believe in what is termed the ‘verbal,’ or word-for-word, inspiration of the Scriptures of Truth. On the other hand, we know of other Christians equally earnest who do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, but in ‘thought,’ or idea, inspiration. Both believe equally that the Scriptures are the inspired, infallible word of God. In the experience of both classes the Bible is the court of final appeal, and they are conscientiously endeavoring, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring their lives into conformity with its divine precepts.



“Now, in our judgment, for one class to charge the other with disbelief of the Bible because of difference of opinion as to the technical features of inspiration, would be ungenerous and un-Christian.”

(F. M. Wilcox, "The Editor's Mail Bag," *Review and Herald*,
19 January 1922, 6)



“The great events occurring in the life of our Lord were presented to her in panoramic scenes as also were the other portions of the *Great Controversy*. In a few of these scenes chronology and geography were clearly presented, but in the greater part of the revelation the flashlight scenes, which were exceedingly vivid, and the conversations and the controversies, which she heard and was able to narrate, were not marked geographically or chronologically, and she was left to study the Bible and history, and the writings of men who had presented the life of our Lord to get the chronological and geographical connection.”

(W. C. White to L. E. Froom, 8 January 1928)



“I believe in thought inspiration as applied to both the Bible and the Testimonies. I believe, however, that in the overruling providence of God, the Bible was so safeguarded that the writers of the Bible conveyed the thought of God. I never have placed the Spirit of Prophecy on a parity with the Bible, and yet I cannot help but believe that Sister White was a prophet to the church in her day, the same as Jeremiah was a prophet to the church in his day.”

(F. M. Wilcox to L. E. Froom, 5 August 1928)



“Many of the writings of Mrs. White were written under trying circumstances; some in the bustle and stir of railway travel, some in the midst of busy meetings, some under the handicap of physical pain. Recognizing this, the early believers, assembled in General Conference in 1883, recommended that she take time to clarify these writings and improve her language and forms of expression. . . . The view of inspiration expressed in the resolutions of the General Conference, has been the teaching of the church, so far as we know, throughout its history.”

(F. M. Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church: The Question of Verbal Inspiration,” *Review and Herald*, 18 October 1928, 11, 12)

