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REFLECTIONS



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Inspiration: Basic Issues in the Current Debate

Frank M. Hasel

In the discussion about the inspiration of Scripture, there exists a wide variety of different positions as well as a veritable dissonance in the use of inspiration terminology employed by its various proponents. What makes this quasi-Babylonian language confusion so perplexing is the fact that many of the proposed models of inspiration have some truth to it and overlap in some respects and to some degree. To make things worse, there exists no single, unanimously accepted definition of the various inspiration terminology that exists to describe the phenomenon of inspiration. Often the very same word is defined and used very differently by its supporters and detractors. I have come across at least nine different models of inspiration that are currently promoted in the scholarly discourse.¹

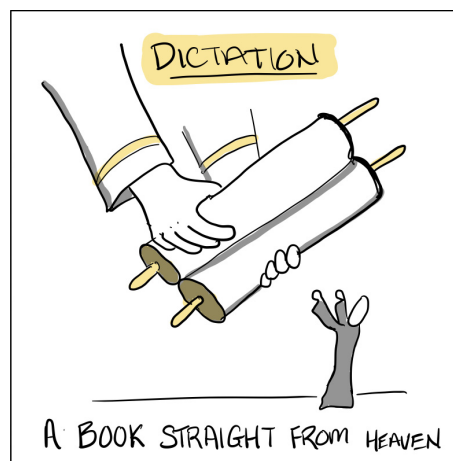
In this brief article I do not deal with the biblical evidence for divine inspiration, but rather will focus on some important models of inspiration with their different theological and philosophical paradigms and their ramifications for the authority of Scripture. It is not possible to deal with all nine models within the limits of this article. Hence, I will focus on four important models that have had significant influence on the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of inspiration. In doing so I will look at their respective strengths as well as their deficiencies and at some parallels in the process of inspiration of Ellen G. White and her writings.² I will conclude by proposing an alternative model with a new, distinct terminology that reflects the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of inspiration more adequately and provides greater clarity, unburdened by certain negative connotations associated with some of the other traditional models.

Four Prominent Inspiration Models and Their Implications for the Authority of Scripture

In the discussion about inspiration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one typically encounters the following four major inspiration models with their respective terminology: (1) dictation inspiration, (2) verbal inspiration, (3) thought inspiration, and (4) plenary inspiration. As we will see, some ideas in these

models often overlap.³ What makes a fair understanding of each model even more challenging is the fact that each term is used very differently by its proponents and opponents. Still, it is possible to highlight certain typical distinctives of each model, as well as particular strengths and deficiencies. Each model has certain theological and hermeneutical consequences that impact our understanding of the authority of Scripture.

Dictation Inspiration



The basic idea of the dictation inspiration model⁴ is that God directly dictated the very words of Scripture to the human writers. Because inspiration is understood as divine dictation, the biblical writers were totally passive and had no freedom to shape the very words they used in conveying God's message to humanity. Instead, the biblical writers functioned more like stenographers or secretaries who transmitted mechanically, word by word, what God dictated to them. They were God's passive pen, not His penmen. They recorded word by word what God said to them. Divine inspiration here functions in such a powerful manner that the minds and bodies of the biblical writers were so completely controlled by the Holy Spirit that they became passive instruments in the hand of God and only wrote the words that God told them. Some have called this a "docetic view of inspiration"⁵ because, for all practical purposes, the human side in

the process of inspiration has no impact on the process. Dictation inspiration limits inspiration to the written words. It denies any inspiration of human beings and their thoughts and thus makes the human writer an utterly passive instrument in the hands of God.

Strengths of the Dictation Model of Inspiration

The dictation model of inspiration maximizes divine authorship and the sense that Scripture is fully and completely God's Word. It offers a simple rationale for strong claims of absolute inerrancy, since God is presumed to choose every word that was written in Scripture. There are two passages in Scripture (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10) where God is described as the one who wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger. In Jeremiah 36 the prophet Jeremiah is described as telling Baruch, his scribe—or in modern parlance, his secretary—to write all the words of Jeremiah, which he had received from God, at Jeremiah's dictation (Jer 36:17, 32) in a scroll. The expression "at his dictation" (ESV) is sometimes used to support a dictation model of inspiration.

Deficiencies of the Dictation Model of Inspiration

The dictation model of inspiration neglects genuine human participation and its impact on literary style, which clearly varies across biblical books. If God had dictated every single word, one would expect a definite and recognizable style of writing across all the inspired books of Scripture.⁶ But this is not the case. This model is also inconsistent with several sections of Scripture where the author's research (cf. Luke's prologue, Luke 1:1–4), use of sources, or the involvement of secretaries in the writing process suggest a more complex process in the composition of the biblical text. Not every part of Scripture can claim such a direct involvement of God in the composition of the text as the Ten Commandments. In fact, the vast majority of Scripture was written differently, with no immediate and dominant control of God attested for in much of its composition. In the case of Jeremiah and Baruch, the description of the work of Baruch describes the faithful writing of the message he received from the prophet, but in the second scroll, which is the second edition of the manuscript, we read that "many similar words were added to them" (Jer 36:32 ESV), which indicates a growth in content and words beyond a mere dictation.

The dictation model of inspiration is reminiscent of the Islamic concept of the origin of the Qur'an, which most Muslims believe had its origin in the eternal mind of Allah. When the time was right, the angel Gabriel dictated the revelations to Muhammad.⁷ Since the dictated words were given in Arabic, the Qur'an is not

really translatable and if you actually want to study the Qur'an you have to learn Arabic, the very language in which it was given word by word.⁸ In a strict dictation model, any (!) change to the words of the text is not appropriate and ultimately even a translation becomes problematic and less authoritative.

Representative Advocates of the Dictation Model

In the Christian context, there are very few who promote a strict model of dictation inspiration. It is rarely defended in a sophisticated way today. There are a few scholars in the ancient world, influenced by Greek philosophy, such as Philo of Alexandria, who reportedly said,

A prophet gives forth nothing at all of his own, but acts as interpreter at the prompting of another in all his utterances, and as long as he is under inspiration he is in ignorance, his reason departing from its place and yielding up the citadel of the soul, when the divine Spirit enters into it and dwells in it and strikes at the mechanism of the voice, sounding through it to the clear declaration of that which he prophesieth.⁹

Most Christian theologians never supported a strict dictation model of inspiration. During the time of the Protestant orthodoxy, however, after the passing of the great Protestant Reformers like Luther and Calvin, one can find a handful of orthodox Protestant theologians who promoted some form of dictation theory. It is often said that the rigid dogmatism of Protestant orthodoxy in the seventeenth century led to a more radical position, where Scripture was now regarded as inspired, "purely because it was dictated to the Biblical authors by God."¹⁰ But the historical reality is much more complex and not as simplistic, as the careful study of church historian Richard Muller has shown.¹¹ Muller has meticulously gone through the extant primary sources of Reformed theologians of this time. His research has conclusively shown that there have been a few theologians like the English Puritan clergyman and lecturer at Cambridge William Perkins; the famous English Puritan theologian John Owen, who served as dean of Christ Church at Oxford; the Dutch Reformed theologians Gisbertus Voetius and Petrus van Mastricht; and Matthew Henry, an English non-conformist, who became famous for his commentary on the Bible, who promoted a stricter view of dictation inspiration, especially in response to increasing Roman Catholic criticisms of the authority of Scripture.¹² Some even ventured to claim that the vowel points of the Hebrew text were dictated by God

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in order to safeguard the divine authority of the Bible against Roman Catholic attacks. But only very few orthodox Protestant theologians during the seventeenth century promoted such an extreme position. As Muller points out, other contemporary Protestant orthodox theologians, notably

[André] Rivetus, [John] Cameron, [Johannes] Cocceius, [Herman] Witsius, [Bénédict] Pictet, and late orthodox thinkers like [Herman] Venema and [Thomas] Stackhouse differed appreciably with this strict view, and moved toward a doctrine of inspired infallibility without the assumption of a divine dictation of every word of the text.¹³

In more recent times it has been claimed that some hyper-fundamentalists may hold a mechanical dictation theory of inspiration,¹⁴ but J. I. Packer is probably right when he states that “the dictation theory is a man of straw”¹⁵ that critics of the conservative view often use as a foil. It is a misrepresentation of the true Evangelical position.

Two details are noteworthy in this discussion: (1) some of these more extreme positions of biblical inspiration that endorsed a mechanical dictation view of inspiration originated in the context of Reformed theology, which often is characterized, among other aspects, by a strong sense of God’s sovereignty and His divine predestination and election.¹⁶ Later in history the idea of absolute inerrancy also surfaces more prominently among Reformed theologians and often is endorsed by those who see inspiration from a more predestinarian perspective. (2) We can learn from this historical episode that even the best intentions (i.e., defending the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture against attacks) should not lead us to construct and promote weak solutions that can easily be shot down by critics. When our reasons for defending the authority of Scripture are weak or misguided, critics can easily question or even dismiss the idea of divine inspiration.

Parallels Relative to the Writings of Ellen G. White and Adventist History

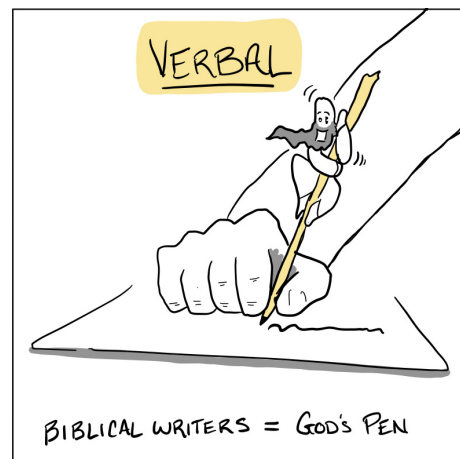
During Ellen G. White’s time some people apparently were inclined towards a dictation model of inspiration with regard to her writings. In 1906 White responded to a certain Dr. Paulson who said, “I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that *every* word that you [Ellen G. White] ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under *any* and *all* circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments.”¹⁷ Since the Ten Commandments were written with God’s finger by God Himself, Paulson had a dictation model of

inspiration in mind, at least with regard to the writings of Ellen G. White. White, however, clearly denied such a dictation model of inspiration for her own writings as well as for the Bible.¹⁸ Regarding her own writings she responded to Paulson, “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 ever made such claims.”¹⁹ Others, like George S. Bishop, similarly claimed that only the “direct, dictated, verbal inspiration—that everything in the Bible was set down by the finger of God” properly represented the teaching taught by Scripture itself.²⁰ It seems as if other people, like A. T. Jones, Judson S. Washburn, or D. M. Canright, who later became one of the strongest critics of the Advent movement and of White, also leaned toward a dictation model of inspiration and therefore could not harmonize their own restricted and deficient understanding of how inspiration works with edits in White’s writings.²¹

Occasionally White used the phrase that “the scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit.”²² This expression, however, should not be interpreted to endorse a mechanical understanding of a verbal dictation model of inspiration.²³ A careful investigation of the use of the word “dictated” in her own writings makes clear that she employed this expression not to describe or to endorse a mechanical dictation of written material, but to emphasize the divine origin and divine motivation of various actions.²⁴

This leads us to another model of inspiration that is often seen as closely related to a dictation model.

Verbal Inspiration



The basic idea in verbal inspiration is that the process of inspiration extends to the very words (Latin *verbum*) of Scripture. Inspiration is believed to have a verbal dimension that extends to the text of Scripture. In this model the words of Scripture, rather than the thoughts or the person himself or herself, are inspired.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 the Bible affirms that inspiration has a verbal dimension when Paul writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16 NKJV). Scripture (Gk. *graphē*) clearly refers to the written words of the Old Testament. Other passages by Paul seem to extend equal divine authority to existing New Testament writings (1 Thess 2:13; cf. 2 Pet 3:16).

Representatives of verbal inspiration see God as the ultimate author who in the process of inspiration uses human writers to write the words of Scripture. Most representatives of verbal inspiration recognize and affirm human aspects in the process of writing the inspired text²⁵ and acknowledge the individualities of the human writers with their typical vocabularies, literary forms, and styles, which are not being overridden in a mechanical manner, as in a dictation inspiration model. However, by favoring a word-focused inspiration process this model gravitates toward a divine dominance in inspiration where the free human participation is less distinct. Liberal critics often associate and conflate the idea of verbal inspiration with some form of a mechanical dictation process and frequently portray verbal inspiration in a very rigid and mechanical way. This easily distorts the position of those who hold to verbal inspiration and often does not accurately portray what its advocates propose. In order to avoid reading foreign understandings into the description of verbal inspiration, it is imperative to allow these representatives themselves to define their theory.

Strengths of the Verbal Inspiration Model

The verbal inspiration model has a strong emphasis on the divine aspect and origin in the process of inspiration. In verbal inspiration, God superintends human writers in such a way that their words convey God’s message accurately and truthfully and Scripture carries divine authority. This model emphasizes a propositional understanding of language and truth, where the words of Scripture are objective and truthful. For several recent proponents of verbal inspiration—as affirmed, for instance, in the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy”—inspiration is restricted to the original autographs, which are believed to be inerrant.²⁶ Since its focus is on the verbal dimension of Scripture, this model of inspiration encourages close attention to the inspired text of Scripture. It supports the grammatical and historical sense of Scripture, its literary forms, and affirms an exegesis that allows Scripture to explain itself (*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). Biblical passages like 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19–21, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and others provide a structured basis for an understanding that affirms a strong divine authority for the Bible where God’s truth is communicated

effectively across all cultural and temporal boundaries.²⁷ In this model God is seen as the author of Scripture and because He is the “author of all truth . . . the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else.”²⁸ This position also has a strong desire to harmonize Scripture and emphasizes the unity and clarity of Scripture. It claims a long history of theological supporters across a wide spectrum of different denominations and church traditions.²⁹

Deficiencies of the Verbal Inspiration Model

While some human dimensions in the process of inspiration are readily acknowledged by virtually all modern representatives of verbal inspiration, this model nevertheless gravitates heavily toward the divine aspect and for all practical purposes often emphasizes the divine aspects much stronger than any human involvement. In doing so, it functionally drifts towards a divine dominance in the inspiration process that in extreme cases borders on a near-dictation view. It seems that the greater the emphasis on the divine origin of the written text, the stronger the temptation to minimize cultural peculiarities, historical and theological developments, textual tensions, genre diversity, or progressing perspectives in Scripture. In all fairness to the position of verbal inspiration, the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy,” which represents perhaps the strongest and most recent example of this position, explicitly affirms a distinct awareness of cultural aspects, textual tensions, and even apparent contradictions in the text and thus is not negating these phenomena of Scripture.³⁰ Verbal inspiration seems to flourish especially in the context of Reformed faith with a strong predestinarian understanding of God’s sovereignty, where God is understood as being in supreme control of the inspiration process. Here the authority of Scripture is closely tied to modern notions of precision and complete freedom from error, coupled with a lack of thorough freedom on the human part, which has fostered an understanding of strict inerrancy.³¹ Another difficulty is the absence of the existence of any biblical autographs and thus the existence of any inerrant autographs as they are affirmed in the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy.”³²

Representative Advocates of the Verbal Inspiration Model

Since the verbal inspiration model has a very long history of supporters, all the way back to the early church fathers,³³ it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of all its representatives. A few modern and contemporary names shall suffice: B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge are Old Princeton scholars who are classic formulators of a robust verbal inspiration model that is tied to a strong inerrancy view. More recently, a very

large number of respected and leading Evangelical scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be listed as exponents of this model. Among the almost three hundred individuals who signed the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” in 1978, some of the more prominent scholars that could be mentioned are Gleason L. Archer Jr., Greg Bahnsen, James Montgomery Boice, D. A. Carson, W. A. Criswell, Bruce Demarest, Ralph Earle, John S. Feinberg, John M. Frame, Frank E. Gaebeline, Norman L. Geisler, Wayne Grudem, Stanley N. Gundry, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., George W. Knight III, Samuel Külling, Hal Lindsey, Gordon R. Lewis, Josh P. McDowell, J. Robertson McQuilkin, John MacArthur Jr., J. P. Moreland, Roger R. Nicole, Harold J. Ockenga, Raymond Ortlund, James I. Packer, Luis Palau, Vern S. Poythress, Robert D. Preus, Earl D. Radmacher, O. Palmer Robertson, Francis Schaeffer, Eckhard Schnabel, A. E. Wilder Smith, R. C. Sproul, John W. Wenham, John C. Whitcomb, A. Skevington Wood, John D. Woodbridge, Edwin M. Yamauchi, and Ronald Youngblood.³⁴ The wide range of different ecclesiastical backgrounds of these representatives alone is an indicator of how influential and widespread this position of verbal inspiration is among Evangelical scholars to this day. The “Chicago Statement on Inerrancy” has drawn together theologians and scholars from a wide spectrum of different churches and theological traditions. While certain parts of it are often criticized by liberal scholars, very rarely is there a fair interaction and comprehensive discussion of its entire hermeneutical proposal.

Parallels Relative to the Writings of Ellen G. White and Adventist History

The technical terms for different theories of inspiration, like “verbal inspiration” and “thought inspiration,” are virtually absent from Adventist publications before 1880.³⁵ Ellen G. White’s statements on inspiration, though lacking the usage of traditional verbal inspiration language, nevertheless reveals many areas of agreement with certain aspects of verbal inspiration. She also expresses significant differences.³⁶ White clearly affirms the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the words of Scripture because of its divine inspiration. She speaks of the “truth of Scripture”³⁷ and of the “reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments,”³⁸ which affirms some verbal dimension. She affirms that the Bible is characterized by a “simple beauty of language”³⁹ and an “unerring truthfulness.”⁴⁰ Since, for her, God is the ultimate author of Holy Scripture, the Bible is called the “sure Word of God.”⁴¹ The result of this divine revelation-inspiration process is that the Bible can be fully trusted. It is the “one trustworthy book”⁴² in which God has given “definite, unmistakable instructions” and therefore we should heed “these inspired injunctions.”⁴³ The words

of Scripture are “the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world,”⁴⁴ “an unerring guide,”⁴⁵ and an “unerring standard,”⁴⁶ by which even man’s ideas of science have to be tested.⁴⁷ It is “the Book of books, which God has given to man to be an infallible guide.”⁴⁸ For her, the Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears.⁴⁹ Hence, “the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will.”⁵⁰ As such, the Bible is “the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.”⁵¹ This latter statement is also quoted in Fundamental Belief 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which affirms:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

While all these affirmations of divine inspiration and the authority of Scripture can easily be affirmed in a verbal inspiration model, Fundamental Belief 1 also carefully expresses another important aspect that widens the concept of inspiration and moves beyond a strictly verbal understanding of inspiration. Here inspiration is not limited only to the text of the autographs, but also is at work in the inspired authors. We will come to this important aspect when we look more closely at the model of thought inspiration. Before we turn to this next model, however, let us briefly look at some examples from early Seventh-day Adventist history.

It seems that during the early years of the Advent movement Adventist writers strongly affirmed the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture. A word-focused verbal emphasis can be seen in many pioneers.⁵² Phrases like “inspiration has said” or “inspiration has defined” something, or the “pen” of inspiration or the “language of inspiration,” and even the expression “the divinely inspired amanuenses of the Holy Spirit” indicate a strong “word-focused view of inspiration.”⁵³ This is also evident in the citation of several non-Adventist theologians in Adventist publications who promote a firm word-focused understanding of inspiration, such as Adam Clarke, Thomas Hartwell Horne, and Louis Gaussen.⁵⁴

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Some have seen Gaussen's book *Theopneustos* as an influential source for the early Adventist understanding of inspiration,⁵⁵ but Kaiser has conclusively shown that he was only quoted three times on the issue of inspiration in thirty years.⁵⁶ Some Adventists seemed to have promoted similar views of verbal inspiration, as is reflected by Moses Hull's book title, *The Book from Heaven: Or a Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity*,⁵⁷ in which he defends the credibility of the Bible by insisting that nothing in the Bible contradicts any of the sciences of "physiology, anatomy, hygiene, materia medica, chemistry, astronomy, or geology."⁵⁸

White herself, while strongly affirming the trustworthiness and divine authority of Scripture, did not fit neatly into a strictly verbal model of inspiration and was not constricted by some of its difficulties and deficiencies, as we will see when we turn to the next model of inspiration that often is associated with her.

Thought Inspiration



The basic idea with thought inspiration is that God inspires the thoughts, concepts, or message of Scripture, rather than the specific words of it.⁵⁹ The term "thought inspiration" apparently was not employed in a technical sense before the early twentieth century, although the concept or idea that is expressed in this model is present even without the specific terminology.⁶⁰ In thought inspiration God is at work in the process of inspiration. God inspires the thoughts of the person, but inspiration does not pertain to the written words of the prophet nor to the original autographs, as it is affirmed in some versions of verbal inspiration. Often in thought inspiration a greater emphasis is placed on the human dimension in the process of inspiration, where the choice of specific words and stylistic features is left largely to the freedom of the human authors. The words that were used by the human writers to express inspired thoughts were freely chosen. Some representatives of thought inspiration still affirm God's guidance in this process so that the written

words ensure an accurate and reliable transmission of inspired thoughts.⁶¹ But others have suggested that the words in which the thoughts were clothed were selected without any divine guidance, hence reflecting human frailty and fallibility and implying the possibility of discrepancies and mistakes in Scripture.

Strengths of the Thought Model of Inspiration

One of the strengths of the thought model of inspiration is that it recognizes more fully the human involvement in the process of inspiration. Since thoughts rather than words are inspired, the human participants' freedom of choice in the selection of words to express divinely inspired thoughts is more distinctly recognized and given greater prominence. This allows greater flexibility for different vocabularies used to share the inspired thoughts, for literary aspects and artistry in the composition of the text, or for cultural aspects to be reflected in Scripture. Since divine authority is located primarily in the thoughts rather than in the specific wording of the message, there seems to be a greater openness to allow for differences in grammar, style, and cultural thought patterns in Scripture than would be the case in a mechanical, dictational, or even a strict word-focused model. While there are no explicit statements in Scripture that affirm thought inspiration, there are a number of biblical examples that seem to support the view that inspiration encompasses not just words, but thoughts. The prophet Ezekiel felt unable to adequately describe in human words the glory and majesty of God and God's throne (cf. Ezek 10), which seems to support the idea that God had showed him divine realities but did not prescribe how to express them in specific human words. In Luke 1 the author of the gospel indicates that his careful research of eyewitnesses has enabled him to write down a reliable, trustworthy, and orderly account of what took place without claiming that every word was dictated to him or verbally dominated by God. The acknowledgment and recognition of the human dimension in inspiration counterbalances a position where inspiration is heavily dominated by God. Here the biblical writers are God's penmen rather than God's pen.

Deficiencies of the Thought Model of Inspiration

A model that restricts inspiration to thoughts only actually resembles more of a view of revelation where inspiration has no impact on the expression of what God communicates to human beings.⁶² A strict thought model of inspiration does not adequately take into consideration and explain those biblical passages which argue that Scripture itself treats words as significant and God-given (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The separation of inspired thoughts from the words that express those thoughts seems artificial and ultimately is not convincing. Thoughts are only accessible

through words, as thoughts can only be recognized and understood when they are expressed orally or in written words. No one can read thoughts. They need to be communicated verbally. Accurate thoughts cannot be separated from language. Our thinking is inseparably connected to words and thoughts are inevitably shaped and expressed in words. The model of thought inspiration is rather vague in how to distinguish a divinely inspired message in the thoughts of the prophet from fallible human additions, which may undercut our certainty about what is authoritative and binding in Scripture and what is not. Often it is presumed that being human necessarily implies being fallible and that being human means making mistakes.⁶³ Since Scripture was written by fallible human beings, it is assumed that they cannot escape these fallible elements of humanity and thus the record of the inspired thoughts that we find in Scripture is not free from errors. Instead, it reflects the limitations, imperfections, mistakes, and errors of fallible human beings.⁶⁴

But, as is the case with so many other models of inspiration, there are different shades of understanding of thought inspiration and some proponents, like Ellen G. White, seek to maintain the inspiration of thoughts as well as the words of Scripture and thus the full trustworthiness of the Bible.⁶⁵ White certainly affirms the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture and emphasizes the inspiration of thoughts over against a mechanical dictation view of inspiration. With many other scholars who support some variety of thought inspiration one can notice, however, a tendency to emphasize much more the human imperfections and so-called phenomena of Scripture, including alleged discrepancies, contradictions, and errors than is the case in a word-focused model. With this thought inspiration model there is often a less pronounced interest in the harmonization of such discrepancies and contradictions because they are assumed as a given that should be expected and accepted.

Representative Advocates of the Thought Model of Inspiration

Because the term “thought inspiration” in its technical sense is a relatively recent phenomenon, there are not very many who explicitly use the terminology “thought inspiration.” Thus, we include scholars who exhibit similarities to this position or gravitate towards a thought inspiration model rather than affirming a strict word-focused verbal model. These scholars try to differentiate themselves from strict verbal and especially from a mechanical dictation view of inspiration, while still wanting to affirm that Scripture conveys divinely intended truth. Generally speaking, thought inspiration is often associated with “neoevangelical” or more progressive and revisionist Evangelical positions. Here people still affirm the existence of divine inspiration but

limit the full trustworthiness of the words of Scripture and reject its inerrancy. This leads some to promote a limited scope of authority, where Scripture is reliable in matters of salvation but not when it speaks about history, science, or cosmology. An example for such a view would be the late Clark Pinnock, who in his later views argued for a more dynamic view of inspiration with a greater appreciation of the human character of the Bible. His later understanding of the reliability of Scripture focuses more on what it teaches about salvation than on other details.⁶⁶

Another contemporary scholar is Peter Enns. While he affirms inspiration, he emphasizes theological intention over propositional precision. He strongly rejects any mechanical classic verbal inspiration or strict inerrantist formulations, especially as formulated in the “Chicago Statement on Inerrancy.” In his “Incarnational Model of Scripture,” the human dimension includes ancient worldview assumptions, literary conventions, and theological diversity and pluralism. In inspiration God did not override ancient cosmology, historiography, or cultural conditioning. Rather, the Bible reflects the intellectual world of the ancient Near East and Second Temple Judaism.⁶⁷ Similar ideas can be found with John H. Walton.⁶⁸

Even within the Evangelical Theological Society, which requires every member to sign annually a statement affirming, among other items, the inerrancy of Scripture,⁶⁹ there is an increasing number of members who push for a more flexible and generous view of inerrancy. This becomes evident in the internal discussions about creation or the historicity of Adam, where numerous scholars of the Evangelical Theological Society promote theistic evolution or question the historicity of Adam.⁷⁰

Some of these progressive views, associated with a thought inspiration model, have also made inroads among theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Parallels in the Writings of Ellen G. White and Adventist History

The idea of thought inspiration seems to be particularly popular among several Seventh-day Adventist scholars. In support of their understanding of this model, they usually do not quote Scripture but often refer to specific statements by Ellen G. White. It is important, therefore, to carefully look at what Ellen G. White wrote about thought inspiration.

As we have seen in the preceding discussion on dictation inspiration, White strongly rejected any form of a dictation theory of inspiration for her own writings. This stance also meant that she did not support the very narrow and flawed view of verbal inspiration that was supported by some contemporary Adventists who understood inspiration in a dictatorial word-focused

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mode. Some of the inspiration terminology that was used by others overlapped with a more verbal concept of inspiration. White, however, did not support such narrow notions of dictation or verbal inspiration.⁷¹ Instead she pointed out that inspiration works on the thoughts of the prophet and she affirmed the dynamic of the divine-human cooperation in the inspiration process. For her, the primary focus of inspiration is the person who is inspired. She wrote:

The Bible is written by inspired men. . . . 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.⁷²

This important passage indicates that for White, inspiration begins to function at the level of the thoughts of the inspired writer. In her understanding, “inspiration operated on the mind by giving thoughts, scenes, and sometimes words, without overruling her choice of language.”⁷³ The human utterances, however, are the word of God for her. She was keenly aware that the words she used were not perfect grammatically or orthographically.⁷⁴ She acknowledged that “different meanings are expressed by the same word,”⁷⁵ thereby giving everything human an imperfect touch. Yet she claims that the Bible is nevertheless characterized by a “simple beauty of language”⁷⁶ and an “unerring truthfulness.”⁷⁷ In her balanced view, she was also convinced that God was interested in conveying the message she had received from Him in a comprehensible manner and that God took care to avoid the corruption of His message. This also applies to the inspiration of Scripture.⁷⁸

White was convinced that God is able to use human language effectively to communicate His truth to humanity in a reliable manner. She believed that although “the Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language,”⁷⁹ nevertheless “God speaks to the human family in language they can comprehend.”⁸⁰ For her, the expressions of the Bible are not exaggerated.⁸¹ Rather, the Spirit of God guides in choosing “appropriate words with which to express the truth.”⁸² Thus, for White, the process of inspiration also extends to some degree to the written result of thought inspiration, whereby “the utterances of the man are the Word of God.”⁸³ This is why, for her, the product of the inspired writers is inspired by God: “I take

the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word”;⁸⁴ as God’s Word it is infallible;⁸⁵ “His Word is true”⁸⁶ and “reliable.”⁸⁷ For her, there was no doubt that the Bible is “an unerring counselor, and infallible guide.”⁸⁸ Even though written by human hands, God is acknowledged as the ultimate author⁸⁹ who “gives the message and then takes especial care that it is not corrupted.”⁹⁰

White affirmed a divine-human process, in which the Spirit inspired the thoughts, revived her memory, and then assisted her in transmitting a divine message in a reliable and trustworthy manner. This did not eliminate her weaknesses nor did it force her to employ specific language. She was free to clothe the scenes that were revealed to her and to convey the thoughts that God inspired her with in her own language, unless she rendered the exact words of an angel who had spoken something during a vision.

Some Adventist scholars of a more liberal mindset, however, have used her statements on thought inspiration to promote a more elastic understanding of biblical inspiration as well as White’s inspiration. For them, the thoughts are inspired but then the human writer is left to himself or herself to express them in fallible words. This allows these scholars to assert the existence of discrepancies and errors in the Bible⁹¹ as well as in the writings of Ellen G. White.⁹² Some still affirm the truthfulness of Scripture in matters of salvation but claim that in “science, history, or biblical exegesis” her books are of “limited value.”⁹³ In a recent book promoted as a new textbook on Adventist history for Adventist colleges, the authors claim that

God revealed himself and his ways directly to a fallible human being. He then sent his Spirit to guide that person in communicating what he had shown so that the revelation of him and his ways was accurate. God’s revelation always comes in the context of human personality, religion, culture, and science. The person recording the revelation cannot escape these elements of humanity. God ensures that the revelation of him and his ways is true, *but he does not miraculously preserve the record of the revelation from errors in history, cosmology, or science.*⁹⁴

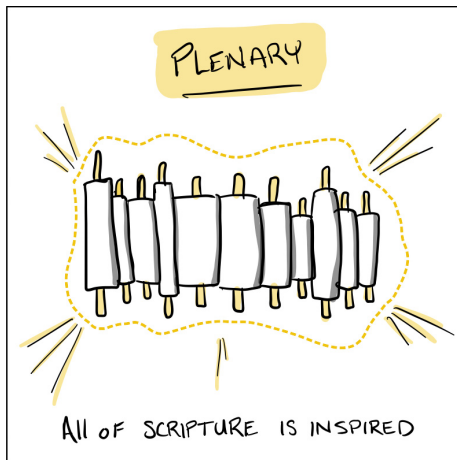
If the biblical statements on cosmology or history or science are fraught with error, many biblical teachings and the historical veracity and trustworthiness of Scripture are put into serious question.

Such a view effectively limits the effects of inspiration to salvific matters only, where the entire content of Scripture is no longer accepted as authoritative and trustworthy. This leads to yet another model of

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inspiration that deals precisely with this question: plenary inspiration.

Plenary Inspiration



The English word “plenary” is derived from the Latin word *plenarius*, which means “entire” or “complete” and expresses that something is “full, filled, or abounding,” not lacking any part of what properly belongs to it, or that a session is fully attended.⁹⁵ It could describe full political or military power (plenary power).⁹⁶ With regards to inspiration it states that the whole of Scripture in its entirety (plenary), not just certain parts of it, is inspired. Therefore, the divine authority of the Bible is full and complete in the sense that it extends equally to every part of the Scriptures.⁹⁷ With plenary inspiration there are no degrees of inspiration. Every part is inspired alike and the words of Scripture express inerrantly the truths that God wanted to communicate. The Bible is not a haphazard mixture of some human words here and some divine words there, but the entire Bible, all of Scripture, is God’s Word and thus the final and absolute authority for faith and practice.

Strengths of the Plenary Model of Inspiration

The plenary inspiration model seeks to affirm that Scripture is fully inspired, not just partially. It does not divide Scripture into inspired and uninspired passages, nor does it support degrees of inspiration. Instead, plenary inspiration accepts all parts of Scripture as being inspired by God and thus invested with divine authority. It thus affirms the full or complete authority of all of Scripture rather than leaving it up to fallible human beings to decide which parts of Scripture can be accepted and which parts cannot. As such, plenary inspiration supports a high view of Scripture. In 2 Peter 1:21, the apostle claims that none of the prophecies came by human impulse but that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (NKJV) and in 2 Timothy 3:16, the classic biblical text on the inspiration

of Scripture, Paul affirms that “*all* Scripture is given by inspiration” (NKJV, emphasis added), thus giving support to a plenary view of inspiration. It also has been pointed out that plenary inspiration stands in opposition to any “insight theory” that views inspiration as merely a natural human activity.⁹⁸

Deficiencies of the Plenary Model of Inspiration

Since 2 Timothy 3:16 states that *all* Scripture is inspired, and this is a key text that focuses on the inspired words of Scripture, it is not surprising that the plenary model of inspiration is often closely associated with the concept of verbal inspiration. Frequently it is mentioned together by proponents who exhibit a robust word-focused understanding of inspiration that is often tied to a position of strong inerrancy. Thus, while plenary inspiration denotes the extent of inspiration, it is closely associated with more rigorous verbal inspiration models and their proponents who support the idea of inerrancy. The idea that everything in Scripture is inspired could lead to a simplistic and deficient proof-text approach, in which Bible passages are indiscriminately lumped together while ignoring specific contexts and circumstances or God’s progressive revelation in the history of salvation.⁹⁹

Representative Advocates of the Plenary Model of Inspiration

The concept of plenary inspiration apparently originated in the latter Reformation period with Philipp Dotteridge as an initial advocate.¹⁰⁰ Among Protestants, the concept of plenary inspiration was particularly prominent among English-speaking Evangelicals.¹⁰¹ The close ties between verbal and plenary models of inspiration can be seen in a number of influential scholars such as the Old Princeton theologians B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge who have promoted a robust verbal-plenary view of inspiration that is tied strongly to inerrancy. More recently, other leading Evangelical scholars have also supported a verbal-plenary view of inspiration, such as Norman Geisler and William Nix and many signers of the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy,” such as R. C. Sproul and J. I. Packer to mention but some.

Parallels in the Writings of Ellen G. White and Adventist History

Ellen G. White does not use the word “plenary” in connection with the concept of inspiration. While she does not employ the technical terminology, she nevertheless affirms the full inspiration of Scripture. She quotes approvingly 2 Timothy 3:16, that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”¹⁰² Expounding on the same passage, she makes clear that “the Word of God includes the Scriptures of the Old Testament as well as

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the New. One is not complete without the other. The Old Testament, no less than the New, should receive attention.”¹⁰³ She also rejected the idea of degrees of inspiration¹⁰⁴ or partial inspiration, which would inevitably lead to a canon within the canon whereby some portions of Scripture are devoid of full divine authority.¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White warns of those “measuring by their finite rule that which is inspired and that which is not inspired.”¹⁰⁶ She bemoans that “some sit in judgment on the Scriptures, declaring that this or that passage is not inspired.”¹⁰⁷ For her, “it is not the province of any man to pronounce sentence upon the Scriptures, to judge or condemn any portion of God’s Word. . . . When a man feels so very wise that he dares to dissect God’s Word, his wisdom is . . . counted foolishness.”¹⁰⁸ While every reading of Scripture involves some interpretation, it seems as if with some interpreters an interpretive priority has been granted to certain presuppositions and findings of science, which leads them to limit inspiration to matters of salvation and assumes that Scripture reflects the cosmology and culture of its times to such a degree that it cannot be trusted in matters of science and history. In a similar manner, Ellen G. White is appreciated only as a devotional writer who lacks divine authority when she writes about cosmology, health, science, or history.

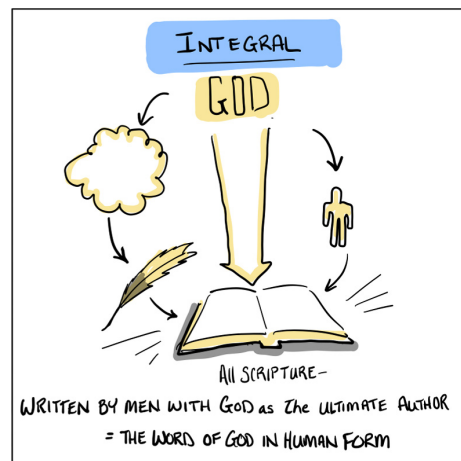
Having briefly looked at four major views of inspiration, we will conclude this exploration of inspiration models by proposing a new and more comprehensive model that reflects the various aspects of inspiration more harmoniously and without the negative associations of deficient models.

The Need for New Terminology

As we have seen from our discussion of four major inspiration models, the language used to describe the phenomenon and process of inspiration is plagued by a confusing ambiguity. The current conflicting usage of inspiration terminology is bewildering. Often the terminology that is employed is comprehended very differently by its proponents and opponents. The meaning of inspiration terminology has become increasingly fluid and the diverse concepts they represent lack a stable and uniform understanding. When words are used so differently and their meaning becomes debatable, the things they want to express ultimately become incommunicable, because we become incapable of understanding each other properly. The usual language we employ to describe inspiration has become so loaded with certain negative clichés that it is no help to understand and describe inspiration adequately. Such a state of affairs does not foster theological unity. The traditional words we use are no longer the means to understand each other clearly and correctly. Instead,

certain inspiration language increasingly has become a weapon to label opponents. This deplorable situation calls for a new terminology that distinguishes itself and is not burdened by negative connotations or deficient and misleading aspects that are associated with traditional terminology. I therefore suggest a new terminology that expresses the biblical realities involved in the process of inspiration unequivocally and with greater clarity.

A New Model for Inspiration: Integral Inspiration (*Inspiratio Integralis*)



The new terminology that I suggest is: integral inspiration (*inspiratio integralis*). The word “integral” has roots in Latin (*integer*, meaning “whole” or “untouched”)¹⁰⁹ and carries nuanced meanings across different contexts that are helpful for our discussion. The word “integral” is used to describe something essential in forming a unified whole, such as an “integral component.” Something is integral if it cannot be separated without loss. In interdisciplinary studies, it emphasizes synthesis: blending insights from multiple fields into a comprehensive view, beyond mere juxtaposition. It describes different components or parts that *together* constitute the existence of something and that only together is complete and whole. Being integral means that it belongs to the totality of something and only with the integration of these different parts does it become what it is.

By *integral inspiration* we affirm the harmonious integration of the divine and human aspects in the process of inspiration. The emphasis is not on the divine or the human aspects in inspiration, because both are essential to its completeness and only together in the concursus between the divine and the human is the inspiration of Scripture fully grasped and appreciated.

This integrated understanding of inspiration affirms the divine origin and authority of the biblical text and allows for the free human participation in the

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composition of Scripture. Divine inspiration is not the product of human genius nor is it a human achievement. It is a divine grace and gift, given to those through whom God sees fit to communicate His will to human beings.

While Scripture is ultimately authored by God, who inspires thoughts in the mind of the biblical writers, the human instrumentality is not just a mechanical pen in the hand of God, but contributes style, composition, literary forms, and language that is typical of the writer. The biblical writers did not communicate in a “heavenly Esperanto,”¹¹⁰ but spoke and wrote in the customary language of their times and used ideas that were familiar to the audience to whom they spoke or wrote. Inspired by God, Scripture is written by imperfect human beings. Ellen G. White has expressed this as follows:

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. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.¹¹¹

A purely divine mode of communication would be absolutely accurate and precise. Any human mode of communication necessarily carries certain limitations and weaknesses. Even the best human products are finite and fall incalculably short of absolute perfection.¹¹² The following example shall illustrate this point:

Bethoven composed 822 brilliant works written over fifty-five years. But his greatest composition falls far short of the music of heaven. Serena Wiliams is among the greatest athletes in history. She has won 22 Grand Slam Tennis tournaments and three Olympic gold medals. Her success on the Tennis court is unmatched. But her talents do not match the talent of heaven. Even the greatest human achievements are finite and thus imperfect.¹¹³

In this paragraph there are numerous misspelled names, and slightly incorrect numbers. This raises the question: “Do such mistakes, however, change the meaning in any significant way? No. None of the mistakes concern anything integral to the subject matter communicated or make any material difference to the message communicated.”¹¹⁴ The decisive issue is not whether there are any apparent mistakes in the Bible, such as minor copying or spelling errors, but whether

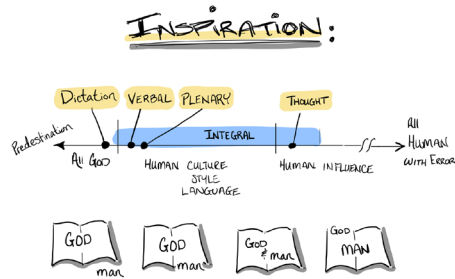
any such defects in any way compromise the subject matter of the message that Scripture communicates.¹¹⁵

An analogy to the incarnation might help illustrate the point. With the inspiration of Scripture there is a certain parallel with the nature of Christ (Christological analogy). In Jesus Christ, both aspects—His divine nature and His human nature—are harmoniously united and integrated. His origin was from God. He is one with God the Father (John 10:30), but He was born of a human being, the virgin Mary. When Jesus was born, He accepted the frailty of a human body that was *affected* and weakened by thousands of years of sin. He got tired. He was hungry. He experienced a weak and feeble human body. Yet, He was never *infected* by sin. He never sinned and there was no sin in Him. In a similar manner, Scripture has a divine cause but is written by human writers and thus is affected by human frailty and imperfection. Every human language is inadequate to some extent and cannot perfectly cover or reflect all aspects of reality. There can be grammatical and orthographic imperfections or inaccuracies, but Scripture does not mislead or deceive us. Scripture is truthful, reliable, and trustworthy in what it affirms. While human beings have the potential to make mistakes, error is not necessary or inevitable. Even sinful and imperfect human beings are capable of communicating things truthfully and accurately.

While Jesus was 100 percent human, He wanted to be acknowledged for who He really is: the Son of God! In a similar manner, the Bible was written by imperfect human beings and yet it wants to be acknowledged for what it really is: the written Word of God. Jesus lived in a specific place, at a specific time, in a specific culture, but that did not make Him culturally relative. Although He came into this world at a specific, unrepeatable historical moment, He can still be the universal Savior of all human beings around the globe who have ever lived. In a similar manner, Scripture is not historically conditioned and thereby limited and relative; but Scripture *is* historically constituted¹¹⁶ and thus binding for all time and all places. Of course, there are significant differences between Jesus Christ and the Bible. Only Jesus Christ became incarnated. God did not incarnate Himself into a book. We worship Jesus, but we do not worship a book. That would be bibliolatry, a form of worshipping an idol. But we respect the words of Scripture because they testify of Jesus who regarded the Scriptures as His authoritative norm for faith and practice. When Scripture is not the context for our understanding of Jesus Christ, Jesus becomes the pretext for judging Scripture!¹¹⁷ It is noteworthy that neither Jesus nor the apostles ever criticized parts of Scripture nor did they feel the need to point out mistakes or errors in it. Never did they insinuate

that Scripture is not trustworthy or lacks divine authority. When it comes to our attitude about Scripture, can we be more apostolic than the apostles were? Can we be more Christian than Christ Himself?

Conclusion



The integral nature of the divine and human in the process of inspiration is crucial for a proper and balanced understanding of the nature of Scripture and the proper authority of Scripture. The need for a new model of inspiration grows out of the awareness that for the Protestant Reformation, including Luther and Calvin, the doctrine of inspiration was the decisive framework for their biblical hermeneutic.¹¹⁸ This insight certainly also holds true for Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutics.¹¹⁹ Wherever the divine and human factors are less than fully integral parts in the process of inspiration, whenever they are not carefully integrated so that one dominates the other, hermeneutical issues arise that negatively affect our understanding of Scripture and have repercussions for the authority of the Bible. The model of integral inspiration can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the integral factors at work in the process of inspiration. It can enable authentic dialogue without prejudice and thus help to foster an understanding that affirms the inspired witness about inspiration and acknowledges common ground that exists among various positions.

Frank M. Hasel

Associate Director of the
Biblical Research Institute



Endnotes

A big “Thank You!” goes to Brad LaLonde, for his creative art work throughout the entire article. Brad wants to use art to draw others to Christ and His truth for our time. His favorite pass time is making Sermon Skechnotes. He currently lives in Montana with his wife Nicole and their two kids: Azalea (5) and Aadrik (2). He can be contacted at LaLonde.brad@gmail.com

1 The following models are promoted by various representatives: (1) dictation inspiration, (2) verbal inspiration, (3) thought inspiration, (4) plenary inspiration, (5) partial or limited inspiration, (6) neo-orthodox encounter inspiration, (7) community inspiration, (8) canonical inspiration, and (9) entire inspiration. There is also a position that denies any (divine) inspiration and instead focuses only on what is called illumination. Because illumination is distinct from inspiration, I have not listed it as a separate model.

2 In a sense, Seventh-day Adventists have more detailed insights into the process and dynamics of inspiration through what we know about the ministry and writings of Ellen G. White. While she affirms divine inspiration (in Scripture and her own writings) and uses some of the prominent inspiration terminology, she does not endorse other aspects that are commonly associated with some of the models discussed in this article. For a concise overview of her understanding of the process of revelation and inspiration, see Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin, Jerry Moon, Michael W. Campbell, and George R. Knight (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1087–1093.

3 With regard to different theories of inspiration that circulated during the nineteenth century in North America, it has been pointed out by Kaiser in his published dissertation that “proponents of different theories [of inspiration] sometimes displayed common features. They may have been appealing to Seventh-day Adventists as almost all theories retained a belief in the Holy Spirit’s supernatural assistance in the inspiration process.” Denis Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History*, Schriften der Forschung—Historische Theologie Band 3 (St. Peter am Hart: Top Life Wegweiser Verlag, 2019), 28.

4 All art work is done by Brad LaLonde, LaLonde.brad@gmail.com

5 Isaak August Dörner, *System der Christlichen Glaubenslehre* (Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Hertz, 1880), 1:624 (transl. 2:186–189), as quoted in Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 1:208. Docetism, from the Greek *dokein*, “to seem,” is the view that was promoted in the early church that tends to limit or deny altogether the full humanity of Christ. This view was heavily influenced by Hellenistic philosophy.

6 It is theoretically possible to think that some authors who affirm a dictation model of inspiration could say that God purposely uses different styles to account for each individual writer’s own style. However, I have not come across such reasoning in the literature.

7 James A. Beverley, *Nelson’s Illustrated Guide to Religions: A Comprehensive Introduction to the Religions of the World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 240. According to John F. A. Sawyer, the sacred text of Muslims “is believed to have existed in Arabic in heaven before it was revealed, chapter by chapter, to the illiterate prophet Muhammad from 610 to 632 C.E., at first in Mecca and then, after the Hijrah in 622 C.E., in Medina. In the earliest passage he is instructed to recite it in the name of God (sura 96), and listeners wrote down what they heard on scraps of parchment, leather, stone, and other materials that were eventually collected and edited into one authorized text under the third caliph, Uthman (644–55 C.E.)” John F. A. Sawyer, *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and Its Reception* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 217–218.

8 Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in a dictation model of inspiration. However, we value studying the Bible in the original languages in which it was written: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. Familiarity with original languages can help the student of Scripture to understand expressions, wordplay, and usage of words that are easily lost in any translation.

9 William Sanday, *Inspiration: Eight Lectures on the Early History and Origin of the Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration—the Bampton Lectures for 1893* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896), 74, as quoted in Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 209.

10 So Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 17.

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11 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, vol. 2, *The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 224–255.

12 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 248–249. Similar responses can be seen from seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians in response to polemical exchanges with Roman Catholics. In doing so, “they employed Aristotelian categories” to discuss the nature of Scripture. Robert Kolb, “The Bible in the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 101.

13 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 248–249.

14 Cf. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 190.

15 J. I. Packer, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: *Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 78.

16 Kelly M. Kapic and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 97–100; and Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 373–375. Among Lutheran Orthodox scholars, a similar trend can be observed—for instance, in Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617–1688), a professor at the University of Wittenberg, or Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), often considered the most important dogmatic professor of Lutheran Orthodoxy after Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz.

17 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:24.

18 On Ellen G. White’s understanding of the process of revelation and inspiration, see Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” 1087–1093.

19 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:24.

20 George S. Bishop, “Five Reasons for Verbal Inspiration,” *The Signs of the Times*, July 29, 1889, 452, as quoted in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 213.

21 See the discussion on Dudley M. Canright, A. T. Jones, and Judson S. Washburn in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 148–175, 203–233, 326–338. In his detailed study of important early Adventist thought leaders and their views on inspiration, Kaiser has demonstrated convincingly that a number of them used verbal inspiration language without necessarily endorsing a mechanical dictation model of inspiration.

22 Cf. Ellen G. White, “Bible Biographies,” *Review and Herald*, January 22, 1880; and Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1885–1909), 4:9.

23 J. H. Burrey, “An Investigation to Determine Ellen White’s Concepts of Revelation, Inspiration, ‘The Spirit of Prophecy,’ and Her Claims About the Origin, Production and Authority of Her Writings” (MA thesis, Andrews University, 1991), 48–50; and Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” 1090. See also the balanced historical review of Ellen G. White and early Adventist pioneers on the use of dictation terminology in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, throughout the book. He concludes, “Scholars should therefore avoid interpreting the mere presence of such language as direct evidence for a dictation concept.” Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 410.

24 Cf. her use of the word in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 17:221; Ellen G. White, *Spalding and Magan’s Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White*, comp. Arthur Whitefield Spalding and Percy T. Magan (n.p.: 1915–1916); White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:101, 3:507; and Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, May 4, 1893. See the discussion in Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” 1090.

25 This is also the case for religious antecedents of Seventh-day Adventists, as has been shown in great detail by Denis Kaiser. See Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 28–31, 38–49.

26 Article VI of the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” states, “**WE AFFIRM** that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, **down to the very words of the original**, were given by divine inspiration” and Article X affirms, “**WE AFFIRM** that **inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture.**” International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” (Chicago, October 26–28, 1978), https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf, 4–5, bold emphasis added. The “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” resulted from the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy that took place in Chicago in 1978, and has become an important statement of Evangelical theological orthodoxy.

27 The “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” affirms that Scripture is not culture-bound but also carefully acknowledges that “it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.” International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “Chicago Statement,” 9.

28 Article XX in International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “Chicago Statement.” This idea is reiterated several times in the statement. In number 2 of the introductory section “A Short Statement” it affirms, “Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of **infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches**: it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises” (bold emphasis added). In Article XI the statement affirms, “**WE AFFIRM** that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, **it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.** **WE DENY** that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated” (3; bold emphasis added). In Article XII it reads, “**WE AFFIRM** that **Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.** **WE DENY** that **Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science.** We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood” (5; bold emphasis added). In the “Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation” section of the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” the authors indicate that such a strict affirmation of inerrancy is somewhat qualified by the following affirmation: “So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, **non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers.** When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. **Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed**” (9; bold emphasis added).

29 The concept of verbal inspiration can be traced back to the time of the early church fathers; see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 59–69. “The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” claims in Article XVI, “**WE AFFIRM** that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church’s faith throughout its history. **WE DENY** that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism” (6).

30 See, in the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy,” Article XIII and XIV (6) and the section on “Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation,” where it is stated that “The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called ‘phenomena’ of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions” (9).

31 In all fairness to modern representatives of an inerrancy position of inspiration, even the “Chicago Statement of Inerrancy” clearly affirms in Article XIII “that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of many disciplines of Biblical study” (5).

32 Of course, no errant autographs are in existence either, as Carl F. H. Henry has pointed out in *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 4:208–209. The postulate of inerrant or errant autographs is decided not on the evidence of any existing original biblical

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manuscripts—there are no original manuscripts that exist—but must be deducted from one's view of God, His truthfulness, and capability to communicate effectively and truthfully with human beings.

33 From a more liberal perspective, see the historical reconstruction in Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). From a conservative perspective, see the discussion and concise overview in Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther," in *Inerrancy* by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 357–385; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 199–224. On Calvin and the Westminster Confession, see John H. Gerstner, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines" in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 385–412; see also W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, 225–250. They also interact and convincingly respond to Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. More recently, see the detailed discussion with primary sources in Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., eds., *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2013); and the historical chapters in Carson, *Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, esp. 43–265.

34 The complete list of names can be found in International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "List of Signers of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (January 1, 1979), https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1_typed.pdf.

35 Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 51.

36 We will deal with some of these differences later in this study when we present the thought inspiration model.

37 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 238.

38 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 522; and Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), 193; cf. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:258. See also the discussion in Hasel, "Revelation and Inspiration," 1090.

39 Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, May 7, 1884.

40 Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 127.

41 Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 47; see also Ellen G. White, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Ellen G. White Comments; Philippians to Revelation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association), 7:918; and Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 21, 1886.

42 Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 20, 1897.

43 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:248; cf. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:299.

44 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:16.

45 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 506; and White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:389.

46 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 256; and Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913), 425.

47 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 8:325.

48 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association 1923), 394; cf. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:312.

49 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:393.

50 White, *The Great Controversy*, vii.

51 White, *The Great Controversy*, vii.

52 Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 38–59.

53 So Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 57. Kaiser lists numerous examples and references in support of this.

54 Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 53.

55 So Jud Lake, "D. M. Canright, Ellen White, and Inspiration: A Crisis in the Making," *Ellen White Issues Symposium* 8 (2012): 42–44, <https://digital-commons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ewis>, as quoted in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 55.

56 Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 55.

57 Moses Hull, *The Book from Heaven: Or a Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1863).

58 Hull, *The Book from Heaven*, 168–169, as quoted in Alberto Timm, "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844–2000)," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, nos. 1–2 (1999): 489.

59 Sometimes thought inspiration is extended to the entire person who is deemed to be inspired. See the discussion in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 32–33 passim.

60 So Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 32.

61 Kaiser mentions the Anglican bishop Charles John Ellicott as an example in *Trust and Doubt*, 31–32.

62 Cf. Leroy F. Forlines, *Biblical Systematics: A Study of the Christian System of Life and Thought* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1975), 24.

63 Some selectively use Ellen G. White's statement that "Everything that is human is imperfect" in support of this idea. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

64 It is true that human beings are capable of making mistakes and not every human being is trustworthy. However, one should not overlook the important fact that even sinful and faulty human beings are fully capable of telling the truth. Without the human ability to communicate truthfully and correctly, no society could function and no legal system would work. If truthful communication is possible even with imperfect human beings, should it not be possible that in the communication of God's message to human beings, the message can be communicated in a reliable and trustworthy manner?

65 Balanced Adventist theologians have acknowledged that inspiration works on the level of thoughts and also has an impact on the written expression of those thoughts. See the discussion by Peter van Bemmelen, who states, "Whether inspiration should be attributed to the inspired writers or to the Scriptures written by them is to a large extent a needless dilemma. It is clear that the primary locus of inspiration is in people. The Holy Spirit moved upon people to speak or write; yet what they spoke or wrote was the inspired word of God. . . . The primary locus of inspiration is the apostle; the result of that inspiration is Holy Scriptures." Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed., Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 39. See also Fernando Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 392–412.

66 See the discussion in Ray C. W. Roenfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 16 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

67 Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005). See also Peter Enns, "Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrik, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 83–116; and Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012).

68 The books by John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018); John H. Walton and D. Brant Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, Lost World Series 3 (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2013); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*, Lost World Series 1 (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); John D. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, Lost World Series 2 (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); and other books in the Lost World Series.

69 The Evangelical Theological Society affirmation statement that every member has to sign annually states, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory." "Membership Applications and Levels," Evangelical Theological Society, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://etsjets.org/membership/membership-applications-and-levels/>.

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70 For an Evangelical response to some of these challenges, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Bruce K. Waltke, "Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (2009): 83–95; Hans Madueme, "Some Reflections on Enns and The Evolution of Adam: A Review Essay," *Themelios* 37, no. 2 (2012): 275–286; Guy Prentiss Waters, *For the Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken: The Doctrine of Scripture* (Fern Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2020), 271–304; D. A. Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Trinity* 27, no. 1 (2006): 1–62, esp. 18–45; Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Embattled Bible: Four More Books," *Themelios* 34, no. 1 (2009): 6–25; and J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

71 See the comprehensive and balanced discussion in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 59–81.

72 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:21.

73 Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 69.

74 Hence her need of literary assistants to prepare her manuscripts for publication; see the discussion in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 70. For her, "perfection of language seemed to be secondary." Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 81.

75 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

76 White, *The Youth's Instructor*, May 7, 1884.

77 Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, 127.

78 See the discussion in Fernando Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 411–412.

79 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

80 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 136.

81 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:22.

82 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 3:51.

83 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:17.

84 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:17.

85 She contrasts human fallibility with God's infallible Word when she states, "Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible." White, *Selected Messages*, 1:416; cf. White, *Review and Herald*, February 6, 1900.

86 Ellen G. White to Frank Belden, June 9, 1895, Lt 10, 1895; and White, *Selected Messages*, 1:37.

87 Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, October 1, 1894.

88 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 100.

89 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, v; see also White, *Selected Messages*, 1:25.

90 Ellen G. White to J. N. Andrews, June 11, 1860, Lt 8, 1860. See also Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), 307; and the discussion in Frank M. Hasel, "Revelation and Inspiration," 1091.

91 Alden Thompson could be listed as a representative of this thinking, although he himself writes that he carefully went through the entire manuscript of his book to eliminate the word "error" because it would raise many questions. Instead, he used other, "gentle, friendly words" like "discrepancy." See Alden Thompson, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), 18–19, 144–145.

92 The issue of inspiration applies equally to the Bible and to Ellen G. White. Whatever is affirmed or denied in one has repercussions for the other. Recently, a book on Ellen G. White—which claims to defend Ellen G. White as an inspiring devotional author—tries to reclaim her as a fallible prophet. One author states the desire to present Ellen G. White as an "altogether human woman" and that we have to come "face to face with a very human prophet" Jonathan Butler, "Embracing Ellen White: What Her Defenders and Detractors Misunderstand," in *Reclaiming the Prophet: An Honest Defense of Ellen White's Gift*, ed. Eric Anderson (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2025), 47. Similarly, Donald R. McAdams, "Turning Points," in Anderson, *Reclaiming the Prophet*, 139, 145; and Gilbert M. Valentine, "Messenger with a New England Style," in Anderson, *Reclaiming the Prophet*, 70. Others maintain that "it is not unfaithful to her legacy to see her writings as primarily devotional." Denis Fortin, "Ellen White as a Devotional Writer," in Anderson, *Reclaiming the Prophet*, 91; similarly McAdams, "Turning Points," 126, 145.

93 McAdams, "Turning Points," 135. Niels-Eric Andreasen, "Where Do We Go from Here?," in Anderson, *Reclaiming the Prophet*, 158, voices similar sentiments and questions what White wrote, especially "with history, science, and Scripture."

94 Michael W. Campbell and Edward Martin Allen, *A Global History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2026), 229, emphasis added.

95 Merriam-Webster Online, "plenary," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/plenary>.

96 Etymonline, "plenary," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/plenary>.

97 Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 604.

98 H. D. McDonald, "Bible, Inspiration of the," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter E. Ellwell and Barry J. Beitzel (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 307.

99 It has been pointed out that plenary inspiration "does not require that every statement in the Bible is necessarily true. The mistaken view of Job's friends (cf. Jb 42:7–9), the falsehoods told by Peter (Mk 14:66–72), and the letters of heathen kings (Ezr 4:7–24), although quoted in the Scriptures, were not Spirit-inspired. Whether they are actually true or false must be discovered by reference to the context. The recording of such words by the writers of Scripture, however, was subject to the Spirit's inspiration: God wanted them to be part of his revelation." McDonald, "Bible, Inspiration of the," 307.

100 Carl F. H. Henry, "Bible, Inspiration of," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 129.

101 I. S. Rennie, "Plenary Inspiration," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 929.

102 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 171; see also White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 502.

103 Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958) 12.

104 See Frank M. Hasel, "Inspiration, Degrees of," in Fortin et al., *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 895–897; and the discussion in Kaiser, *Trust and Doubt*, 127–148.

105 See the discussion in Hasel, "Inspiration, Degrees of," 897.

106 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:17.

107 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:42.

108 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:42.

109 For the etymology of the word "integral" see Etymonline, "integral," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=integral>; see also Merriam-Webster Online, "integral," accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integral>.

110 Esperanto is the world's most widely spoken constructed auxiliary language, designed in 1887 by the Polish ophthalmologist Dr. L. L. Zamenhof to be a neutral, easy-to-learn second language for international communication and peace. It features a phonetic, regular grammar with vocabulary derived from Indo-European, mainly Romance, languages.

111 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20.

112 The following example might illustrate this point. In the English language there are different words for the animal "horse." A mustang, bronco, stallion, mare, colt, or pony—they all describe a horse. While each word is limited and describes the full reality of that animal only imperfectly, it is nevertheless truthful and refers to a horse but never describes a cow or a kangaroo. See also the discussion in John C. Peckham, *God with Us: An Introduction to Adventist Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press and Biblical Research Institute, 2023), 310–314.

113 These illustrations and commentary are taken from Peckham, *God with Us*, 311.

114 Peckham, *God with Us*, 311.

115 Peckham, *God with Us*, 312. Ellen G. White acknowledges the possibility of the existence of a few mistakes of Scripture that have crept in through the process of its transmission and translation. "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, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and

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discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. 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." White, *Selected Messages*, 1:16.

116 See the discussion in Frank M. Hasel, "Reflections on the Authority and Trustworthiness of Scripture," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 201–220, esp. 209. See also Fernando L. Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 2001), 39–40.

117 Frank M. Hasel, "Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation" in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*, ed. Frank M. Hasel (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 453.

118 Peter Stuhlmacher states "Luther, therefore, did not in any way deny the doctrine of scriptural inspiration. Nor did Calvin. Rather, even in the

Reformation, the doctrine of inspiration remains the definitive framework for biblical hermeneutics" (my translation of "Luther hat also die Lehre von der Inspiration der Schrift keineswegs negiert. Auch Calvin hat dies nicht getan. Es bleibt vielmehr auch in der Reformation dabei, daß die Inspirationslehre der maßgebliche Rahmen für die biblische Hermeneutik ist"). Peter Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 60. Stuhlmacher then concludes, "When biblical exegesis breaks free from the interpretive framework established by the doctrine of inspiration, it loses its direction and, at best, becomes bogged down in historical minutiae" (my translation of "Wo sich die Exegese der Bibel aus dem von der Inspirationslehre gesteckten Interpretationsrahmen löst, wird sie richtungslos und verzehrt sich im besten Fall in historischer Detailarbeit" (61).

119 It should be noted that the first Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church deals with Scripture and its inspiration and authority.

“ 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) ”

Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911, vi.

Artificial Intelligence and Its Use in the Church

A Statement of the Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee

The digital revolution that began a few decades ago has significantly impacted how we live our lives. The recent boom in artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize our society even more, leveraging dramatic technological innovations across industries, creating new opportunities in the workforce, and altering the way we perform daily tasks. Such changes naturally lead to questions about how we should engage with AI as faithful Christians with a mission to reach the world for Christ. To this end, we will reflect on the place of AI within a biblical worldview, followed by some implications on how to use AI in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a biblically and ethically informed manner.

AI and the Biblical Worldview

AI can be defined as “technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity, and autonomy.”¹ Although AI has gone through different development phases since the 1950s, the most recent breakthrough in AI technology applies specifically to generative AI, which are “deep learning models that can create complex original content such as long-form texts, high-quality images, realistic video or audio and more in response to a user’s prompt or request.”² Large language models (LLM), such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT or Google’s Gemini, are exposed to a large variety of text from various sources, learn language patterns based on those sources, and then utilize the data and statistics they learned to generate answers in response to prompts. Those responses are not necessarily factual; rather, they are predictions based on learned patterns.

In other words, generative AI is data-driven and algorithmic, and it can aid in human reasoning and decision-making because of its data-processing capabilities and be used to optimize research and implement new strategies in diverse fields of knowledge. Because AI works purely based on statistical patterns, it does not “think” or “know” things the way humans do. To be sure, AI differs from other technologies in that it can be programmed to operate autonomously, whether

in responding to prompts or interacting with people through bots. But it is not imbued with personhood, moral agency, or responsibility, nor does it have opinions, feelings, awareness, or a conscience. Instead, its outputs are determined and limited by algorithms and inputs of its human programmers, which in turn are often driven by profit-enhancing processes³ and the sources it was exposed to and trained on.

Creativity and resourcefulness are important characteristics of how God made us as human beings created in His image (Gen 1:26–28; 2:15; Exod 31:1–6; 35:30–35; Prov 24:3–4). AI is the latest example of how humans have made use of these essential characteristics in our development of tools and technologies that can facilitate our understanding of reality and our interaction with the world (cf. Gen 4:20–22). But similar to other technologies, AI can be used either in positive or in harmful ways. In this sense, it is not necessarily AI in and of itself that is problematic, but how fallible and sinful human beings program and operate it.

Similarly, in utilizing AI, we must maintain realistic expectations regarding what it can and cannot achieve. Although technology can contribute much to the improvement of society, Christians recognize that only through divine intervention can sin, evil, and death ultimately be overcome (Ps 20:7; Isa 31:1). Despite the optimistic plans and projections of technocrats, our hope is found not in technological progress but in Christ and in His death and resurrection (Jer 9:23–24; 1 Cor 15:21–26). And no matter how powerful or how much it can benefit our world, AI is incapable of solving humanity’s deeper problems of evil, sin, and death. Only Christ can address the evil within the human heart that leads individuals to misuse technology for harmful ends. With this general framework in mind, we can now turn to implications on how to use AI.

Implications on How to Approach AI

As a powerful tool that can support human reasoning, decision-making, and work processes in various fields, AI can be utilized in many ways without compromising biblical principles. It can be especially

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useful when it is used for the glory of God and the furtherance of the mission of the church, when it supports human flourishing and promotes love for one's neighbor. Examples of such uses include AI tools that help pastors, scholars, and Bible students engage with Scripture more deeply, translation tools for books, sermons, and other media, tools to help in administrative bookkeeping and financial records, analysis of church attendance or member engagement data, and accessible technologies that promote inclusion for people with disabilities.

At the same time, it is not a “neutral” tool in that it is developed and programmed by fallible humans and even fallible Christians who have their own biases. For example, OpenAI's creators wrote, “We designed ChatGPT's default personality to reflect our mission and be useful, supportive, and respectful of different values and experiences.”⁴ While this may sound positive on a surface level, values promoted by such companies might not always align with—and at times might even be contrary to—the beliefs and values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These biases might not affect every output, but it is still important to be aware that their existence might color the results we receive and continued use may eventually shape the way we think and do things.

Similarly, when we understand how generative AI works in that it predicts and creates outputs based on learned statistical patterns, we understand that its results are not always failproof. Most AI platforms include some form of disclaimer saying that they can make mistakes, and that it is the user's responsibility to verify information.⁵ It is not only our responsibility as users, but also our moral duty as believers to carefully check sources and verify information to ensure that we are not blindly believing things nor contributing to the propagation of falsehood, misinformation, or misleading statements. Nor should we be engaged in using AI for deepfakes that misrepresent people as saying or doing things they have not actually said or done. As Christians, we have a moral and spiritual responsibility to be firmly committed to the truth (Prov 23:23; Eph 4:25).⁶

Additionally, we should be wary of outsourcing our own research skills and critical thinking to AI, especially when it comes to studying the Word of God. Studies demonstrate that continued reliance on AI can jeopardize a person's brain performance over time,⁷ which in and of itself is concerning. But beyond that, as Christians we are called to engage our mind—our ability to think, reflect, make decisions, reach conclusions, etc.—in a way that is pleasing to God (Rom 12:1–2). God expects from us reasonable, “rational” worship, a worship that involves both the mind and the heart, worship that is appropriate for human beings created in the image of God as rational and spiritual beings. This means that it

is *our* responsibility, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to think, analyze, and discern “what is the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God” (v. 2). In the words of Ellen G. White, “We must study the truth for ourselves. No man should be relied upon to think for us. . . . We are to exercise the ability God has given us, in order to learn what is truth. . . . We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God.”⁸ This counsel on not relying on others to think for us also applies to AI. While this does not preclude the use of AI to facilitate research and analyses, AI should not be relied on to do all the critical work, to reach conclusions for us, nor to prepare sermons, speeches, spiritual content, or prayers. Humans are solely responsible—ethically, morally, and spiritually—for their decisions, words, and actions, and humans alone will be judged by God for what they say and do (Deut 24:16; Eccl 12:14; Jer 17:10; Ezek 18:20; Matt 12:36–37; 2 Cor 5:10).

The same also applies to the responsibility of church leaders, pastors, and teachers more broadly, who are tasked with teaching the Word of God and shaping the minds of others. While AI may be used as a supporting tool, teachers of Scripture are personally accountable for the faithful transmission of the gospel. In fact, they bear greater responsibility because they are to give an account of their stewardship of the Word and of the souls of others before God (1 Cor 4:1–5; 1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 13:17; Jas 3:1). And here it is important to remember that the interpretation and teaching of Scripture are not exact sciences, as if AI were capable of providing us with infallible readings of Scripture or faultless, effective sermons; it is only through the work of the Spirit that the depths of Scripture can be grasped (1 Cor 2:14) and that the preaching of the Word can change hearts (1 Cor 2:4–5). The Holy Spirit speaks to human minds and hearts (John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10–13; Eph 1:17–18), not through AI. No matter how doctrinally or exegetically accurate AI-generated Bible studies or sermons may be, they cannot replace the transforming power of a personal, Spirit-led engagement with the text. If we have not been personally transformed by our engagement with the Bible, our message will have a limited effect on our hearers, no matter how creative or theologically accurate our sermons are. Of course, the Spirit can still act and use such messages to reach those who need to hear them, but we will personally miss out on the very essence of why the Bible encourages us to study, meditate, and engage deeply with Scripture (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; Prov 2:1–5; Col 3:16; 1 Tim 4:13–16; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:14–17; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:22). For these reasons, we do not recommend that pastors and church elders rely on AI for the preparation of sermons, that teachers depend on AI in preparing class material, or that AI or AI-driven bots be used as the primary resource

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in Bible studies and in answering spiritual questions. AI can help us, but should not shepherd us.⁹

An additional point to keep in mind is that use of AI must be openly acknowledged and disclosed. Use of AI-generated content without proper attribution is a form of plagiarism, because it deceptively represents the work of another as if it were one's own original work.¹⁰ Regardless of whether it was done intentionally or accidentally, this is dishonest and makes one liable to disciplinary and in some cases even legal action. These kinds of plagiarism apply especially to academic settings, but they extend to other scenarios as well, including the writing of sermons. In order to avoid such instances of plagiarism, users should treat AI as a tool to aid in the creative process, not as a content generator, and should openly acknowledge use of AI when it is used to generate texts, images, videos, etc.

Finally, we must remember AI's proper place within the created order.¹¹ As a created tool, no matter how powerful, capable, or lifelike AI may seem, it is nothing more than a human creation, and as such it should not be elevated to the human level nor should it replace embodied presence. Although AI is becoming increasingly more complex and humanlike in various ways, machines should not be given more power, control, or esteem than human beings who were created in the image of God and who are endowed with the role of stewards of God's created world (Gen 1:26–28; Ps 8:4–6). We should not ascribe personhood or agency to them, use them for emotional support, nor grow attached or form emotional bonds with them.¹² It should not replace personal presence, relationships, or interactions, especially when it comes to pastoral and spiritual care, counseling, mentorship, or worship.

Neither should AI be elevated to a god-like status, similar to how idols and images are to be treated as nothing more than human creations (cf. Ps 115:4–8; Isa 44:9–20; Rom 1:22–25). Some experts have expressed concerns that the expanding influence of AI could gradually erode human agency and control, and, in more extreme scenarios, develop forms of autonomy that centralize power and diminish human responsibility. Such concerns remind us that AI should not be granted control over human beings, nor should we allow it to have any kind of emotional, psychological, or spiritual power over us, whether real or perceived. Nothing must be allowed to take the place of God as our Creator and Redeemer in our lives. And despite purported doomsday

scenarios in which AI takes over control of the world, we do not need to be afraid because ultimately God is the King of the universe and He is guiding the course of history according to His purposes (Dan 2:21; Ps 103:19; Isa 46:9–10; Rev 11:15). As with many other tools and technologies, we can utilize AI from within an ethical biblical framework, so that we may continue to be faithful to God and true to the mission He has entrusted to us. While the world around us and how we engage with it may change, God's Word, its enduring principles, and our mission to preach the gospel remain the same.

Endnotes

1 Cole Stryker and Eda Kavlakoglu, "What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?," *IBM Think*, accessed February 12, 2026, <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence>.

2 Stryker and Kavlakoglu, "What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?"

3 As with other technological advancements, the issue of profit-driven companies and affordability raises the concern whether AI might further exacerbate economic divisions within society. Grant Macaskill, for example, notes, "The point is made—and made often—that for all the increasing affordability of technology, the assigning of capital resources to technological projects . . . is one that typically benefits only a small, elite fraction of society." "Playing God or Participating in God? What Considerations Might the New Testament Bring to the Ethics of the Biotechnological Future?," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2019): 160.

4 "Sycophancy in GPT-4o: What Happened and What We're Doing about It," OpenAI, April 29, 2025, <https://openai.com/index/sycophancy-in-gpt-4o/>.

5 For example, ChatGPT says, "ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info." Google's Gemini includes the following disclaimer: "Gemini can make mistakes, so double-check it."

6 "For God has a people who will preserve their fidelity to his truth, who will make the Bible, and the Bible alone, their rule of faith and doctrine." Ellen G. White, "Romanism the Religion of Human Nature," *Signs of the Times*, February 19, 1894, 1545.

7 A study conducted by MIT concluded, "Subjects who used ChatGPT over a few months had the lowest brain engagement and consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels." Rachel Scully, "ChatGPT Use Linked to Cognitive Decline: MIT Research," *The Hill*, June 19, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/5360220-chatgpt-use-linked-to-cognitive-decline-mit-research/>.

8 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892), 129.

9 AI can aid pastors and teachers in many useful ways, such as to create varied learning activities or create images for PowerPoints, etc. But it should not be relied on primarily to create spiritual or teaching content itself.

10 An additional issue is that AI is often trained using unauthorized, copyrighted works, which adds an additional layer of potential plagiarism in the AI-generated content itself.

11 There are additional concerns related to AI, such as privacy issues related to data surveillance or the extremely high energy and water consumption needed to operate AI. Since these are concerns that also apply to other technologies more broadly, these have not been addressed here.

12 Although instances of human-machine emotional attachments have been reported, studies show that whatever emotional bonds are formed between humans and machines are fake: they lack genuine affection, eye contact, facial cues, etc.

What Was the Role of the Scapegoat?¹

Roy E. Gane

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel [scapegoat, NASB, KJV, NIV]. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. (Lev 16:8–10 RSV)



Seventh-day Adventists have been accused of making Satan their vicarious sin-bearer and savior because they believe that the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 represents Satan. By contrast, many Christians hold that the scapegoat represents Christ as truly as does the slain goat.

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The Leviticus 16 Ritual

In Leviticus 16, the Israelite community is to provide two male goats, each of which is to function in a ritual of purification on the Day of Atonement (v. 5). To determine which goat is used for each ritual, the high priest uses lots, implying that the Lord makes the selection. Then the lots are placed on the two goats as labels for distinguishing between them (v. 8). The goat receiving the lot “belonging to the Lord” is the Lord’s goat, which is to be sacrificed as a purification offering (the so-called “sin offering,” v. 9) for purging physical

ritual impurities and sins from the sanctuary (cf. vv. 15–19, 25). The other goat, which receives the lot “belonging to Azazel” (*‘Aza’zel*), is to be presented before the Lord. But instead of being sacrificed *to* the Lord, this live goat is to be sent *away* from the Lord to Azazel in the wilderness (v. 10). “Atonement” is made *on* the live goat (v. 10) in the sense that it bears the moral faults of the Israelites away from their camp after the high priest has transferred these evils to the goat through confession while pressing both his hands on its head (vv. 20–22).

Different Views Concerning Azazel

The main question is: who is Azazel, and what does his goat represent? Numerous attempts to explain the meaning of the name “Azazel” on the basis of etymology have failed. The common translation of Azazel as “scapegoat”—the goat that goes away or escapes (*‘ez-’azel*)—is certainly incorrect and should be abandoned because it makes no sense in Leviticus 16:10. There the goat belonging to Azazel is sent to Azazel, but if you read “scapegoat” for Azazel, the goat belonging to the goat is sent to the goat.

Various scholars have interpreted “Azazel” as a desolate place, as an idea of “removal,” or as a deity. A prominent Jewish view is to regard Azazel as a demon (e.g., *1 Enoch* 9:6; 10:4–5, 8; *Apocalypse of Abraham*; for association of wild goats, goat-demons, and demons with uninhabited regions, compare Lev 17:7; Isa 13:21; 34:14; Luke 11:24; Rev 18:2). In harmony with the concept that Azazel is a demon, some Christians (including Seventh-day Adventists) see in the live goat a representation of Satan, the chief demon and archenemy of God. But other Christians object that such an approach makes Satan our sin-bearer and prefer to interpret the so-called “scapegoat” as a symbol of Christ, who bore human sins and suffered outside the city (Heb 13:12–13—but v. 11 shows that this passage does not concern the “scapegoat”).

“The Lord’s goat belonged to the Lord and was offered to the Lord, but it also represented the one who died for human sin: Christ (Heb. 13:11–13), who is the Lord (John 8:58; 10:30). If there is this tight a connection between the Lord and his goat, we must consider the possibility that the goat belonging to Azazel and sent to him also represents him.”²

The Goat for Azazel Is Not Sacrificed

The key to the identification of “Azazel” is found in Leviticus 16:8–10 in which one goat belongs to the Lord and the other belongs to Azazel. Azazel is clearly the proper name of a personal being, other than the Lord, who is capable of owning a goat. However, the live goat is not a sacrifice to Azazel. Rather, this “tote-goat” serves as a “garbage truck” in a nonsacrificial purification ritual of elimination (see v. 5, but not to be translated “sin offering” in this case) to send Israelite sins away to Azazel’s territory in the wilderness. Dumping such a load of toxic waste in someone’s “yard” is a singularly unfriendly gesture. So, the Lord, who commanded this ritual, must view Azazel as the originator of the sins of Israel; these sins are, therefore, returned to their source. This would make sense if Azazel is Satan, who originated sin and tempts people (Gen 3; Rev 12:9), and then maliciously accuses them even when they are forgiven (Rev 12:10; cf. Deut 19:16–21 where the accuser receives the punishment).

Christ Alone Is Our Sin-Bearer

The goat that belongs to the Lord is sacrificed to Him. But on a higher level of symbolism (or “typology”) that points beyond the Israelite ritual system, this goat represents the Lord—that is, Christ—who died for human sin (John 1:29; Heb 13:11–13). So, on this higher level, it would make sense that the live goat, banished to Azazel’s wilderness territory, also represents Azazel—that is, Satan—as the one who bears *his part* in the sins of God’s people and who ends up with responsibility as the mastermind behind their offenses. Sin comes back on the one who causes it, and he is sent to where he belongs. This accomplishes a kind of atonement (Lev 16:10) for God’s people in the basic sense of reconciling them to God by purging from their midst the sinner (Satan) who has obstructed their divine-human relationship (cf. Num 25:7–8, 13). There is no substitution in this atonement in contrast to the atonement that Christ provides by taking our place: bearing all of our blame when we accept His sacrifice on our behalf. Satan will die for his own part in our sins; Christ alone is our vicarious sin-bearer.

Conclusion

On the Day of Atonement, Azazel’s live goat bore sins of the Israelites away from their camp in order to purify their community by returning these evils to their demonic source. Similarly, God’s people will ultimately be freed from temptation and malicious false testimony (cf. Rev 20:1–3) when Satan will receive his blame and punishment for using these strategies against them.³

Roy E. Gane

Professor of Hebrew Bible and
Ancient Near Eastern Languages,
Andrews University



Endnotes

- 1 This article was originally published as Roy E. Gane, “What Was the Role of the Scapegoat?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 162–164.
- 2 Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 290.
- 3 For further reading, see Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 273–277, 288–291; and Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999), 247–255.

The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism

Alberto R. Timm

Michael W. Campbell, Christie Chui-Shan Chow, David F. Holland, Denis Kaiser, and Nicholas P. Miller, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. Xiv+605 pp. Hardcover USD 178.00 / Kindle USD 154.57.

The publication of the 605-page *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* (2024) is, in itself, a noteworthy accomplishment that deserves special recognition and attention among Adventists. This is especially the case as this volume is among the *Oxford Handbook* series. Although written primarily for a scholarly audience, the language is accessible to general readers interested in the field.

The first major handbook related to Seventh-day Adventists was the classic 1,027-page *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen and published by the Review and Herald in 2000.¹ As an official theological publication of the church, its twenty-eight chapters were carefully reviewed by the Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM), which at the time comprised sixty-six members—primarily scholars, along with select administrators—representing the worldwide body of believers. The volume presents the denomination’s mainstream doctrinal and theological positions in a reliable and systematic manner.

This second major handbook, *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*, edited by Michael W. Campbell, Christie Chui-Shan Chow, David F. Holland, Denis Kaiser, and Nicholas P. Miller, is published by Oxford University Press. All the editors are Seventh-day Adventists except David F. Holland, who is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thirty-eight authors contributed chapters to the volume, four of whom are not Adventists: David F. Holland, Thomas S. Kidd, Alec Ryrie, and Samuel L. Young. Rather than an official denominational publication, this *Oxford Handbook* was written for a wider audience by a variety of authors representing a broad spectrum of perspectives.

The volume offers a rich and insightful overview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, but a comparatively limited treatment of the denomination in the rest of the world. The introduction states that the book was written by “a wide variety of authors, from around the world and from both inside and outside

the Adventist tradition” (p. 3). While the contributors do represent a range of perspectives, most come from the English-speaking world, with relatively few voices from other linguistic and cultural contexts. Moreover, although certain chapters provide a more global analysis of their respective topics, others focus exclusively on developments within the United States.

As a whole, the book appears to have been carefully edited, although a few typographical and factual errors have slipped through. For instance, on page 22 the word “certainly” should read “certainty,” a typo that appears twice in the same sentence. On page 454 the town of Taquari is described as being “on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo,” when in fact it is in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The overall content mingles positive and some negative assessments of Adventism, but as one moves closer to the end—especially in the final part of the book—the tone tends to become more negative and critical. At times, one also gets the impression that some authors do not fully engage with the literature listed at the end of their chapters.

The introduction states that “the origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church stem from the Millerite revival during the 1830s and 1840s” (p. 2). For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with Adventism, it might have been helpful to add a sentence or two explaining that, although rooted in the Millerite revival of the 1830s and 1840s, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organized only in the early 1860s.

In addition to its introduction, the volume includes thirty-eight chapters organized into seven major parts. Part I, “History of Adventism,” comprises the first four chapters. In chapter 1, “The Second Great Awakening Context,” Thomas S. Kidd and Samuel L. Young describe the broader religious milieu in which Millerism emerged. Interpreting the movement as the zenith of the era’s widespread “eschatological fever,” they observe that “initially Miller had judged that Christ would return between March 1843 and March 1844, but the year passed

without incident. Using different Jewish calendars, Miller proposed a new date, April 14, 1844” (pp. 16–17). To the best of our knowledge, however, Miller himself did not set April 14; rather, some Millerites later suggested April 18 as a possible alternative date.

In chapter 2, “Theological Roots of Seventh-day Adventism,” Nicholas P. Miller identifies four principal roots: (1) “A God of Truths: Common-Sense Philosophy and the Words of God”; (2) “A God of Righteous Loves: The Atonement, the Sanctuary, and God’s Moral Government of Love”; (3) “A God of Freedoms: Free Will and Religious Liberty”; and (4) “A God of Creations: Sabbath, Human Wholism, and Stewardship.” He further acknowledges that “a central and very important root is that of the prophetic, apocalyptic, eschatological tradition of Protestantism and Christianity in which both Millerism and Adventism very much participated” (p. 29), though he left this dimension for other chapters to explore.

Michael W. Campbell’s chapter 3, “Millerite Revivalism and Post-Millerite Adventist Churches,” provides a concise overview of the Millerite movement, its fragmentation after 1844, and the principal groups and denominations that emerged from it. In surveying the dramatic end-time eschatological “signs,” the chapter mentions the 1755 Lisbon earthquake and the 1780 Dark Day (p. 33), yet makes no reference to the 1798 imprisonment of Pope Pius VI—an event that significantly rekindled interest in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

Chapter 4, “Backgrounds of Sabbatarian Adventism,” by Jeffrey Rosario, offers a concise historical survey of seventh-day Sabbath observance: (1) from the Patristic era through the sixteenth century, (2) in seventeenth-century England, (3) in colonial America, (4) among the Millerites, and (5) among Seventh-day Adventist pioneers.

Part II, “Scripture, Inspiration, and Ellen G. White,” comprises chapters 5 through 7. In chapter 5, “The Phenomenon of Continuing Revelation in the Nineteenth Century,” David F. Holland offers a helpful survey of how nineteenth-century openness to supernatural manifestations prepared the ground for the acceptance of Ellen G. White’s prophetic ministry. Reflecting on the Seventh-day Adventist experience, Holland insightfully observes that

their restorationism insisted on a God as miraculous today as he had ever been; their anti-creedalism rejected the legitimacy of mere human authority; and their disappointment reminded them that readings of Scripture could be disastrously inadequate without divine

assistance: all these factors fueled a commitment to the idea that God may yet lead his people by living vision. (p. 74)

Denis Kaiser’s chapter 6, “Adventist Views of Inspiration and the Biblical Canon,” offers a historical-theological overview of the topic across three major periods: (1) “The Nineteenth Century: From Closed Canon to Functionally Open Canon”; (2) “The Twentieth Century: From Functionally Open Canon to Wide Diversity”; and (3) “The Twenty-First Century: Consolidation of Theory and Practice in Matters of Canon. Recognizing the genuineness of White’s prophetic gift, Kaiser explains that “the timing and reception of visions and dreams were beyond her control” (p. 82). He also acknowledges the trustworthiness of her self-testimony when he states, “She stressed her dependence on the Holy Spirit in writing out the matters given to her in vision, yet she did not define that dependence as a dominating power that eliminated her personal choice and engagement. Rather, the Spirit had to refresh her memory, as she often did not remember all the details of the vision” (p. 82).

Meanwhile, Kaiser also points out that her “early works acknowledged a private, common realm in her life for which she did not claim divine inspiration,” thereby explicitly rejecting “any claim to infallibility” (p. 81). He further argues that the compilations of her counsels published from the 1920s onward may “easily give readers the impression that everything she had written was divinely inspired, authoritative, normative, and infallible” (p. 86). Finally, he maintains that “neither did she claim inspiration for her autobiographical works or writings on common matters” (p. 87).

Unquestionably, White herself acknowledged that when addressing “common things”—such as “houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions”—her words were “not given under the special inspiration of the Spirit of God.”² The question, however, is how to distinguish uninspired information from inspired material. This is a complex issue—one that I have addressed briefly elsewhere³—but it still requires more thorough consideration.

In Chapter 7, “Ellen G. White’s Influence in the Development of Adventist Beliefs and Practices,” Denis Fortin examines White’s role in the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and in the development of Seventh-day Adventist organization, institutions, and lifestyle. Fortin explains that “Seventh-day Adventists certainly value the writings of Ellen White and give them a measure of doctrinal and theological authority, albeit secondary to Scripture” (p. 105). He compares her role among Adventists to that of *The Book of Concord*

for Lutherans, John Calvin and the Synod of Dort for Reformed Christians, John Wesley and Arminianism for Methodists, and the Westminster Confession of Faith for Presbyterians. According to Fortin, “It can be argued that the writings of Ellen White influence Adventist theological thinking and Christian life to an extent similar to how the writings of other Christian church founders’ influence their denominations’ theological thinking and Christian life” (p. 105). While this analogy may appear insightful, it overlooks an important distinction: Adventists view White not merely as an influential leader, as in those other traditions, but uniquely as exercising a prophetic non-canonic role.

Part III, “Theology,” is the largest section of the volume, encompassing chapters 8 through 16. In chapter 8, “Doctrine of God,” John C. Peckham briefly addresses the relationship between God and the world, the divine attributes, and the doctrine of the Trinity. He observes that “Adventist conceptions tend to fall within the range of social (or relational) theories of the Trinity, . . . especially the kind of I–Thou relationships between the Trinitarian persons” (p. 123). He further notes that “the majority of academic Adventist theologians maintain that the submission of the Son and the Spirit are [*sic*] merely functional and temporary within the economy of redemption” (p. 123).

In chapter 9, “Eschatology, Great Controversy, and Prophetic Interpretation,” John K. McVay raises the crucial question of why Seventh-day Adventists have continued to uphold historicism as their “central framework for interpretation” of apocalyptic prophecy, while other Protestants have gravitated toward alternative approaches. He insightfully explains that the interpretive pattern Adventists

had inherited from the Reformers and Miller led them to see themselves in the text, to perceive in Bible prophecy predictions of their own existence and role (especially in Rev 12–14 and the idea of “remnant”). To turn away from historicism would be to abandon their own story and identity in a way that was not true for wider, Protestant Christianity. (p. 135)

The next two chapters are devoted to the seventh-day Sabbath. In chapter 10, “Early Adventists and the Seventh-day Sabbath,” Edward Allen surveys the development of early Adventist Sabbatarianism. He notes that

by identifying the United States as the beast from the earth in Revelation 13 and predicting that it would abandon its commitment to religious liberty, Sabbath-keeping Adventists

offered a critique of the United States as a slaveholding imperial power that would seek to coerce the conscience of those who would not uphold Sunday as sacred. (p. 149)

Indeed, even after the Civil War, Uriah Smith argued that the abolition of slavery was only temporary.⁴ He maintained this slaveholding interpretation of the United States into the 1870s but seems to have abandoned—or at least softened—it by the mid-1880s.⁵ The chapter would benefit from the inclusion of subheadings to provide greater structural clarity.

Sigve Tonstad’s chapter 11, “The Sabbath: Twentieth-Century Developments,” explores emerging perspectives and evolving interpretations of the Sabbath in the twentieth century. While engaging several important scholarly contributions to the study of the Sabbath (pp. 151–157), Tonstad might also have referenced some other crucial ones.⁶ Seeking to present the Sabbath in a way that speaks more directly to the sociopolitical concerns of the contemporary world, Tonstad argues that “the contours of a different construct [of the Sabbath] are beginning to emerge, . . . with social justice, ecology, and economics restored to the Sabbath’s portfolio of meanings” (p. 164). However, this more humanistic perspective of the Sabbath does not reflect the denomination’s position in its more recent treatment of the subject.⁷

In chapter 12, “Sanctuary, Atonement, and Judgment,” Martin Pröbstle highlights the relevance of the doctrine of the sanctuary for Adventists from both theological and experiential dimensions. “Theologically, the sanctuary doctrine reveals a harmoniously constructed system of biblical truths centered on Christ’s sacrificial death and priestly ministry, which serves as foundation and frame of reference for the Adventist faith” (p. 181). Experientially, “Christ’s priestly ministry is indispensable for salvation, and so are the phases of judgment—the pre-Advent judgment and execution at the Second Coming; and the millennial judgment and execution after the millennium. All these steps are interlinked” (p. 181).

John Brunt’s chapter 13, “Sin, Justification, and Sanctification,” appropriately cautions readers against the dangers of legalism and perfectionism, yet it appears to do so by framing salvation primarily in terms of subjective experience. The discussion would be strengthened by a clearer distinction between the biblical concept of perfection and the excesses of perfectionism.⁸ In the same chapter, Brunt describes “justification” as one of the “various metaphors to help us understand the reality of grace” (p. 195). This statement calls for further clarification, given its potential for raising questions regarding the author’s view of atonement.⁹

Chapter 14, "Creation," by Timothy G. Standish, offers a balanced and reliable overview of creationism from an Adventist perspective, while also engaging selected contributions from other Christian creationists. He provides helpful reflections on the tension between contemporary science and the doctrine of creation (pp. 205–207) and outlines key creationist and catastrophist responses to evolutionary science (pp. 207–210).

In chapter 15, "Adventist Anthropology: Conditionalism, Physicalism, and Perfection," Zane Yi briefly addresses the crucial subject of Adventist anthropology. Although he offers helpful insights on conditionalism, physicalism, and perfection, some readers may find the treatment lacking a more sustained biblical exposition of the foundational theme of Adventist theology. The chapter's bibliography could be strengthened by including a few other sources.¹⁰

George R. Knight's chapter 16, "Adventist Lifestyle," emphasizes that (1) the development of the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle did not follow a systematic or progressive line of logic, (2) White played a more prominent role in shaping lifestyle practices than in formulating doctrinal beliefs, and (3) this area has generally lacked the level of sophistication evident in the denomination's theological reflections (pp. 229–230). Knight then explores several case studies, including stewardship, the question of unclean foods, the timing for the beginning of the Sabbath, and issues of adornment and dress (pp. 234–238). He concludes that

the official position of the denomination in its statement of Fundamental Beliefs is principle based, culturally sensitive, and biblically informed: "While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit." (pp. 238–239)

Part IV, "Worship, Preaching, and Ordinances," comprises chapters 17 through 19. In chapter 17, "Adventist Pastoral Ministry and Preaching," Jud Lake highlights the significant contributions of several American preachers and evangelists, and how Adventist preaching today has evolved from mainly topical approaches to a more exegetical one (p. 254). The chapter would have been strengthened, however, by acknowledging at least some influential figures from other regions of the global Adventist field.

Chapter 18, "Adventist Hymnody and Music," by David A. Williams, surveys the rich musical legacy of the Millerite movement and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The discussion would be improved, however,

by expanding its brief, single-paragraph treatment of Adventist music beyond the United States (pp. 269–270). The assertion that "music is not a universal language; but every culture has a musical language" (p. 270) might also be further nuanced to acknowledge that, while musical expression is culturally shaped, it also incorporates certain universal elements.

In chapter 19, "Ordinances and Rituals," Darius Jankiewicz offers a helpful response to sacramental theology from an Adventist perspective. He then outlines the Adventist understanding of such ordinances and rites as baptism, the Lord's Supper, foot washing, ordination, child dedication, and the anointing of the sick. The statement "Unlike many Christian denominations, Adventists do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation" (p. 278) is true, because Adventists do not share a sacramental understanding of baptism, as it is affirmed in many churches. However, Adventists do recognize that baptism "is fundamentally the pledge of entrance into Christ's saving covenant and should be treated as a solemn and yet joyful welcome into the family of God."¹¹ The sections on "The Lord's Supper" and "The Foot-Washing Ordinance" (pp. 279–283) would have been strengthened by reference to the major study on these subjects conducted by the Biblical Research Committee (BRC) of the Euro-Africa Division (now the Inter-European Division).¹²

Under the topic of "Ordination," Jankiewicz argues,

Because the Adventist church rejects a sacramental understanding of pastoral ministry and, at least at the official level, does not subscribe to an ideology that supports the headship of men in the church, both men and women may function as associate or senior pastors within local congregations. The ordination of women is customarily referred to as commissioning.

While there are policy differences between ordination and commissioning at the organizational level, once a female pastor accepts a call and is accepted by a local congregation as its pastor, these differences tend to disappear and do not play a significant role in the fulfillment of ministerial duties. Thus, within Adventist local church congregations, women fulfill much the same ministerial services as men. (p. 284)

For the sake of clarification, the ordination and/or commissioning of women to the pastoral ministry is practiced only in some places of the world but it is not an official practice of the worldwide church.

Part V, “Organization and Ministry,” consists of chapters 20 through 24. In chapter 20, “Church Organization,” Wendy Jackson offers a concise overview of the church’s initial organizational structure, its subsequent reorganization, and its current governance model. She contends that the Adventist Church’s distinctive “hybrid form” of governance has generated a number of challenges, including “a confusion over the locus of authority within the structure” (p. 291). Expressing concern over “the continued rejection of [women’s] ordination” and “the overwhelming male structural makeup” (p. 302), Jackson maintains that “true representation does not occur beyond the local conference level” (p. 299). She further suggests that “the General Conference has sent mixed messages regarding the locus of authority that have added to the confusion over who has the final say on various matters of church practice” (p. 299). Ultimately, she calls for a revised organizational model capable of addressing the “tension between the majority from the developing world who impact the decisions in the church and those from the developed world who are largely financing those decisions” (p. 300). The overall tone of the chapter is decidedly critical of the current church structure, yet it offers no constructive alternative. As a result, some readers may be left wondering what form of church organization she ultimately envisions.

Chapter 21, “Healthcare and Medical Work,” by Anne Collier-Freed and Denis Kaiser, offers a positive assessment of Adventist contributions in these vital areas. The chapter addresses (1) the roots of healthful living among Adventists, (2) the development of Adventist health care networks, and (3) distinctive Adventist health innovations. After underscoring the pioneering role of Adventists in preventive medicine—illustrated by the recognition of Loma Linda, California, as one of the world’s five “Blue Zones” (p. 314)—the authors also issue a sobering caution: “the lifestyles of a growing number of Adventists are beginning to reflect more the lifestyle habits of the surrounding culture” (p. 318).

In chapter 22, “Adventist Education,” Lisa Beardsley-Hardy and George R. Knight open with a helpful historical overview and then identify key philosophical anchor points; patterns of institutional growth; developments in professional education in medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy; as well as issues related to educational effectiveness and ongoing challenges. The chapter notes that “fully qualified medical education programs” are currently offered in the Philippines, Rwanda, and Mexico (p. 325); this list, however, could be updated to include Argentina, Peru, and Brazil. In addition, some readers might expect

greater attention to the graduate programs in theology offered around the world today—for example, at the General Conference institutions of Adventist Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines and Adventist University of Africa in Kenya, besides others.

The authors underscore that

the central pillar in the denomination’s epistemology is God’s special revelation found in the Bible, which not only provides revealed knowledge from beyond the human realm, but offers a framework for understanding and evaluating all other sources of knowledge, including science and nature (God’s general revelation), reason, intuition, and established authorities. (p. 326)

Within this framework, the prophetic ministry of Ellen White is understood as “magnifying God’s truth as found in the Bible and applying the principles of that truth to the contemporary world” (p. 326).

Lawrence T. Geraty’s chapter 23, “Adventists and Archaeology,” offers an insightful survey of Adventist archaeological contributions related to the lands of the Bible. He identifies Lynn H. Wood, Edwin R. Thiele, and Siegfried H. Horn as the founders of Adventist archaeology and gives special attention to the Heshbon and Madaba Plains projects. Geraty also highlights the contributions of Andrews University, Southern Adventist University, and other Adventist institutions of higher learning to this field. He underscores the fact that Adventists understand themselves to be a “people of the Book” and, consequently, “they have been keenly interested in archaeological discoveries” (p. 337).

Chapter 24, “Youth and Family Ministry,” by Melanie Bockmann, addresses the relevance and mission of both family ministries and youth ministries, as well as some challenges and resources associated with them. She cautions that

while the original Adventist movement was youth-driven, the church has experienced a demographic shift during the past 150-plus years, particularly in North America. Although the median age of a Seventh-day Adventist worldwide is thirty-two, a 2008 study found that the median age of a Seventh-day Adventist in North America is fifty-one. (p. 361)

Among the existing initiatives aimed at addressing this serious challenge, Bockmann mentions the progressive *The One Project* and the conservative Generation

of Youth for Christ (GYC) (pp. 363–364). Yet one is left wondering what other concrete strategies might also be implemented by the official departments of the church.

Part VI, “Global Church,” comprises chapters 25 through 31. Overall, this section provides a helpful overview of Seventh-day Adventism worldwide, though its coverage of the various regions is somewhat uneven.

In chapter 25, “The Development of Adventist Missiology,” Chigemezi N. Wogu traces the development of Adventist missiology from “shut-door missiology” to “open-door missiology,” and eventually to a “cross-cultural worldwide mission” (pp. 372–378). He then examines Adventist mission praxis, strategies, and contemporary challenges, including issues related to migration and engagement with secular and postmodern contexts (pp. 378–382).

Gilbert M. Valentine’s chapter 26, “Adventists in North America,” provides a historical survey that, understandably, overlaps to a considerable extent with the history of the worldwide church, which has largely revolved around North America. Consistent with his issue-oriented approach, Valentine underscores the “conflict between the North American church and the General Conference over where authority resides to ordain women to ministry” (p. 393). Citing Ronald D. Graybill, he further notes that “progressive theologians came to see her [Ellen White’s] authority as ‘formative,’ while fundamentalist Adventists continue to view her as ‘normative’” (p. 396). Regardless of this polarization (and the labels attached to it), over the years the official statements of the denomination have expressed her authority as both formative and normative.¹³ In this case, would the author place the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself also within the fundamentalist camp?

Expressing concern over the church’s commitment to a short chronology for the age of the earth, Valentine observes,

Even as converging lines of scientific evidence increasingly challenge the idea of a short chronology, the church, in its official statements, has become assertive concerning its view, venturing in 2015 to further tighten its Fundamental Belief on creation, seeing it [as] fundamental to the church’s stance on the seventh-day Sabbath. (p. 396)

Here the author puts himself at odds with the official statement of the church on this crucial matter.

It is evident that Valentine would welcome greater theological openness. He further contends, “As the Seventh-day Adventist Church approaches the end of the second century since its founding in the midst of

disappointed hope of an imminent Second Advent, it finds itself needing to adjust theologically and practically to a continuing delay in the arrival of the Parousia” (p. 398). Some readers may therefore ask what specific adjustments the author envisions.

In chapter 27, Daniel Heinz addresses “Adventists in Europe” in a balanced and judicious manner. After examining several crises, internal tensions, and emerging challenges facing the church on that continent (pp. 409–413), he concludes, “For European Adventists to survive and even grow, Adventists will need to gain a new missionary vision to share the Adventist message within a complex, post-Christian society without betraying their identity as a biblically faithful, end-time movement” (p. 413).

Chapter 28, “Adventists in Australia and the Pacific,” by Wendy Jackson, is a rich and perceptive essay that explores the challenges the church encountered in seeking to reach the Indigenous peoples of the South Pacific Islands. Jackson concludes that “the story of Adventism in the Pacific is very much the story of a church learning that adaptation and contextualization are important in worldwide mission” (p. 427). She further observes that “a clearer understanding of the importance of cultural awareness and working with cultural authority structures has also developed and has been shown to be fruitful” (p. 428).

Boubakar Sanou’s essay on “Adventists in Africa” in chapter 29 adopts an exclusively missiological rather than historical approach and is organized into two main sections. The first, “Pathways for Adventist Mission in Africa,” outlines the church’s primary outreach strategies, emphasizing education, health care, literature evangelism, and humanitarian services. The second, “Challenges to Adventist Mission in Africa,” addresses issues such as African traditional religion and social structures, ethnocentrism, racism, tribalism, dual religious allegiance, and the influence of the prosperity gospel. Regrettably, the continent’s extraordinarily rich Adventist history is largely absent from this chapter and, consequently, from the volume as a whole.

Floyd Greenleaf’s (1931–2022) treatment of “Adventists in Latin America” in chapter 30 offers a concise synthesis of his two-volume work *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean* (1992),¹⁴ as well as his later study, *A Land of Hope: The Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South America* (2011).¹⁵ Some readers might expect further developments and a more substantial updating in this chapter. Even so, one must acknowledge the remarkable contribution of this esteemed historian of the church.

Chapter 31, “Adventists in Asia and Global Themes,” by Christie Chui-Shan Chow, likewise adopts

a predominantly missiological perspective, drawing attention to several major challenges confronting the church across that extremely vast and diverse region of the world, with just brief allusions to such huge countries as China and India. The chapter is quite informative from that perspective, but one is also left wanting a more in-depth historical exposition.

The final section of the volume is Part VII, “Culture, Ethics, and Politics,” which comprises chapters 32 through 38. In chapter 32, “Adventists and Racial Equality,” Benjamin Baker surveys Black-and-white racial tensions¹⁶ within Seventh-day Adventism in the United States, South Africa, and England. From Baker’s perspective, the church “has always prided itself on being ‘not of this world’ [John 18:36], yet in the most quintessential of Christian principles—treating all people equitably despite color—has in fact reflected the racism of its host nations and often even fallen behind them in racial progress” (p. 477). Regrettably, this assessment has proven accurate in many contexts; however, in other settings the church has likely experienced genuine success.

In chapter 33, Heidi Olson Campbell’s essay, “Women in Adventism,” addresses the role of women in the church in a forceful and at times provocative tone. She contends that “after White’s death, church leadership imbibed conservative evangelical gender views, and reinterpreted White to support a more conservative stance on gender roles than had existed during her lifetime” (p. 493). In her view, “for a church with so many women, Adventism exhibited many masculine traits. Fundamentalism proved attractive because it promised increased male participation” (p. 500). She supports her argument by asserting that “beginning in the early 1900s, and increasingly after 1915, the *Review and Herald* discouraged women from paid work and encouraged them to focus on motherhood” (pp. 500–501) and that “denominational rhetoric began to increasingly match fundamentalist rhetoric in relation to gender” (p. 501).

From Campbell’s perspective, even the classic and widely read *Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories* by Arthur S. Maxwell portrayed boys and girls “in stereotypical fashion” and “depicted a growing rhetorical binary of gender roles” (p. 501). She further observes that, following White’s death, her writings were employed to reinforce what is characterized as fundamentalist gender roles, a tendency she believes was perpetuated in compilations such as *Messages to Young People* (1930), *The Adventist Home* (1952), and *Sons and Daughters of God* (1956). Yet some readers may wonder whether it is fair to discredit those publications on the basis of modern ideologies that were not a matter of concern when they were written or compiled.

Campbell presents her arguments in clear and unequivocal terms; nevertheless, some readers may

wish for greater clarification of what she means by “fundamentalism” and “gender,” as well as by “a growing rhetorical binary of gender roles.” Does she employ “fundamentalism” in the historical sense associated with early twentieth-century American Evangelicalism, or more broadly as a reference to religious rigidity and intolerance? Similarly, is “gender” understood in the biblical sense of male and female (Gen 1:27), or in a more expansive sense aligned with contemporary gender theory, which would seem to fit her reference to a “rhetorical binary”?

In chapter 34, “Adventists and Ethics,” Zdravko Plantak addresses a wide range of issues, including slavery, racism, pacifism and noncombatancy, the sanctity of life, abortion and end-of-life care, marriage and divorce, sexuality, as well as social and environmental concerns. Consistent with the broader claim that Adventism was adversely influenced by fundamentalism in the 1920s, Plantak contends that “instead of engaging emerging practical issues of justice and social justice, the church became distracted by theological debate, sought acceptance by the fundamentalist community, and was caught up in the problem of two world wars” (p. 518). In his assessment, the denomination is “moving away, in following the siren song of fundamentalism, from a robust framework of moral philosophy and natural law that the Adventist pioneers brought to bear on such questions” (p. 519). He expresses regret that the church has not been more actively involved in human rights and social activism (p. 520). However, it seems quite evident that the New Testament does not primarily call the church to social or political activism.

Kevin M. Burton’s chapter 35, “Adventists and the Military,” focuses primarily on the American context—where Adventism originated and continues to find an important reference point—while still acknowledging significant developments beyond the United States. The chapter emphasizes that, historically, Seventh-day Adventists have generally adopted noncombatant roles in the military, viewing themselves as conscientious cooperators. Yet, the assertion that “Adventists made social justice central to the church’s very fabric” (p. 527) could be misunderstood if removed from its immediate context—namely, a number of Adventist members and leaders publicly defied the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (including White) or assisted escaped slaves. And I would add that this historical stance differs substantially from some contemporary forms of social and political activism driven by ideologies at odds with biblical principles.

Some conclusions in this chapter are questionable. For instance, Burton affirms that “as Adventism spread to other nations, reluctant noncombatancy developed into conscientious cooperation, guided by the principle that Adventists were committed to saving life, not taking

it” (p. 535). While this may be true for the United States of America, in many other countries around the world Seventh-day Adventists still uphold noncombatancy, which remains the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The chapter concludes with the rhetorical sentence, “At present, Adventists are united in their agreement to disagree about the state and the propriety of involvement in its military” (p. 537). Again, this observation may reflect the situation in some regions (such as North America), but it does not accurately represent the stance held in many other parts of the world.

Douglas Morgan’s chapter 36, “Adventists and Politics,” focuses exclusively on the relationship between Seventh-day Adventists and American politics. Drawing heavily on his major work *Adventism and the American Republic* (2001), Morgan shows how early Adventists eventually “forged a link with the new Republican Party that would remain tight for more than a century” (p. 543). He notes, however, that this connection began to fragment in the 1980s and that “by the 2010s the historic link between a strong majority of Adventists and the Republican Party had broken down entirely” (p. 554). But one might wonder whether, during that “more than a century,” American Blacks and Latino Americans also supported the Republican Party. The chapter would have been strengthened by at least a brief consideration of Adventist political engagement beyond the United States.

In chapter 37, “Adventists, Popular Culture, and the Arts,” Lisa Clark Diller portrays Seventh-day Adventism in largely critical terms, characterizing it as a sectarian movement whose “commitments to being ‘separate from the world’ were strengthened by the theology of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12, and the message to ‘come out of Babylon’ (Rev 18:4)” (pp. 559–560). She notes that

when more Adventists in North America began attending movies and listening to popular music in the 1980s, concerned elders tapped into both the sectarian element of Adventist heritage as well as the broader burgeoning evangelical culture wars to warn about the dangers of “slipping away” from the denominationally distinctive practices. (p. 565)

Diller’s one-sided approach can easily give the impression that engagement with popular culture is more valuable than preserving the church’s moral values.

Emphasizing creativity and justice, Diller suggests that “investing in beauty alongside justice” forms part of the church’s calling in anticipation of the kingdom of God (p. 564), although it is unclear how such an investment

would actually anticipate the kingdom. Yet she contends that “the politically quietist tradition of the church” has limited deeper engagement with justice initiatives such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and similar movements (p. 569). At any rate, this chapter may illustrate how a primarily sociocultural analysis of popular culture—apart from the great controversy framework and without explicit biblical parameters—can easily lead to the assumption that virtually all expressions of popular art are neutral and therefore acceptable.

Finally, in chapter 38, “Epilogue: Adventism in the Larger Protestant World,” Alec Ryrie points out that “America’s antebellum ferment produced very few enduring successful movements, among them being the Mormons and the Seventh-day Adventists” (p. 573). He highlights three foundational characteristics of Adventism—namely apocalypticism, anticlericalism, and apoliticism—and their respective risks. For example, regarding the 1844 transition in Christ’s heavenly priestly ministry, Ryrie sees the danger of “claiming that something has happened when to any outside observer it is plain that nothing has” (p. 575). Meanwhile, the author stresses that

a vital ingredient of Adventists’ success is that—unlike, for example, their distant cousins the Jehovah’s Witnesses—they have managed to hold onto apocalypticism without being unbalanced by it and removing themselves from societal involvement, such as in education, the operation of medical institutions, and some level of engagement with public policy issues relating to religious freedom and health. (pp. 576–577)

A survey of the entire volume reveals a generally rich and reliable use of sources, as evidenced by the extensive endnotes and the “Further Selected Readings” sections appended to each chapter. Nevertheless, it is difficult to overlook the fact that, with very few exceptions, the sources cited are exclusively in English, with little acknowledgment of significant contributions published in other languages.

In the introduction, the editors affirm that “the volume seeks to take seriously the role of Adventist beliefs and lifestyle that have influenced and continue to influence many people within American culture and many other countries around the world” (p. 2), and this emphasis sets the tone of the work as a whole. But some committed Adventist readers may feel uneasy with what appears to be a one-sided and at times combative tone—for example, in chapters 33 (“Women in Adventism”) and 37 (“Adventists, Popular Culture, and the Arts”). To

reduce potential misunderstanding, the authors might have devoted more space to alternative viewpoints before articulating their own positions as definitively as they did.

Given the wide spectrum of contributors, it is not surprising to find an uneven quality of research and topic coverage, and a diversity of literary styles, methodological approaches, and theological perspectives. Even so, it would be beneficial for general readers if the official, mainstream views of Adventism were more clearly represented, without overlooking other important perspectives. Some chapters accomplish this very well, but not all. Thus, despite its valuable content, the book should be read with discernment.

Endnotes

- 1 Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000). Cf. Denis Fortin's book review in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001): 321–323. The book was reprinted in 2023 by Review and Herald with the same internal layout but with a different cover and as an independent volume from the Commentary Reference Series.
- 2 Ellen G. White, "A Confusion of the Sacred and the Common," March 5, 1909, Ms 107, 1909, published in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:39.
- 3 Alberto R. Timm, "Understanding Inspiration: The Symphonic and Wholistic Nature of Scripture," *Ministry*, August 1999, 12–15; and Alberto R. Timm, "How Reliable Is the Bible?," *University and College Dialogue* 13, no. 3 (2001): 12–14.
- 4 Uriah Smith, *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1865), 280–281.
- 5 Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy; or, An Exposition of Rev. 13:11–17* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872), 83: "Slavery, to be sure, on the ground of political expediency, has been abolished. For the time being, the ballots and bayonets of its opponents have outnumbered those of its partisans. But has this changed the disposition by which it has heretofore been fostered? Has it converted the South? Have they been brought to look upon it as an evil which should be given up on account of its own intrinsic wrong? . . . The disease is driven in from the surface, but it is not cured. It may be a source of serious trouble hereafter." Smith retained this statement in the second (1874) and third (1876) editions of his book but dropped it from the fourth (1884) edition. See Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy; or, An Exposition of Rev. 13:11–17*, 4th ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1884), 107–108.
- 6 E.g., Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea, eds., *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), cf. Niel-Erik Andreasen's book review in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30, no. 3 (1992): 247–248; and Ekkehardt Mueller and Eike Mueller, eds., *The Sabbath in the New Testament and in Theology*, Biblical Research Institute Studies on the Biblical Sabbath 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2023).
- 7 Daniel K. Bediako and Ekkehardt Mueller, eds., *The Sabbath in the Old Testament and the Intertestamental Period: Implications for Christians in the Twenty-First Century*, Biblical Research Institute Studies on the Biblical Sabbath 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2021); and Ekkehardt Mueller and Eike Mueller, *The Sabbath in the New Testament and in Theology*.
- 8 Hans K. LaRondelle, *Perfection and Perfectionism: A Dogmatic-Ethical Study of Biblical Perfection and Phenomenal Perfectionism*, 2nd ed. (Berrien

Spring, MI: Andrews University Press, 1975). See also Dan-Adrian Petre, "Striking a Balance: Adventism and the Quest for Perfection," *Reflections* 84 (October–December 2023): 2–10.

9 For a helpful critical analysis of the moral atonement theory, see George R. Knight, *My Gripe with God: A Study in Divine Justice and the Problem of the Cross* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1990). A revised and expanded edition of this book was published under the title *The Cross of Christ: God's Work for Us* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008).

10 Clinton Wahlen, ed., "What Are Human Beings that You Remember Them?" *Proceedings of the Third International Bible Conference, Nof Ginosar and Jerusalem, June 11–21, 2012* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Donny Chrissutianto, "The Doctrine of the State of the Dead and Its Relationship to the Sanctuary Doctrine in Seventh-day Adventist Theology, 1844–1874: A Historical and Theological Study" (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines, 2017); and Alberto R. Timm, *On Death, Dying, and the Future Hope* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2022).

11 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 21st ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2025), 52.

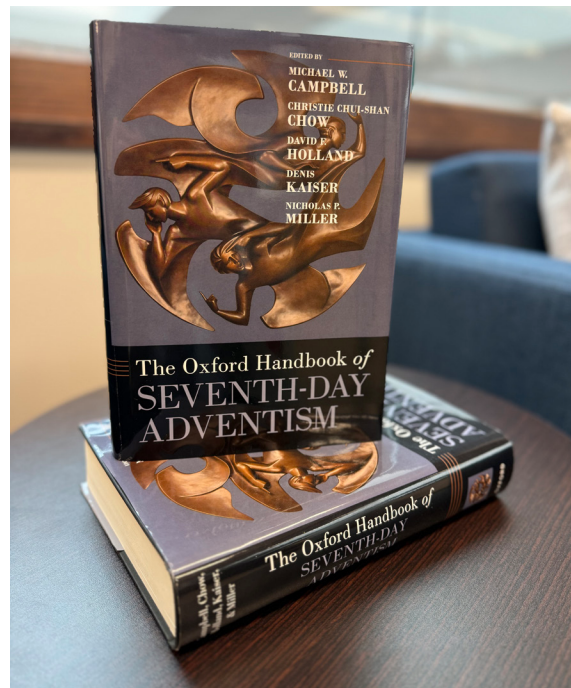
12 The studies on the Lord's Supper and foot washing were published simultaneously in French and German: [Jean Zurcher], ed., *Cène et ablution des pies*, Études en ecclésiologie adventiste 1 (Bern, Switzerland: Comité de Recherche Biblique, 1991); and [Jean Zurcher], ed., *Abendmahl und Fußwaschung*, Studien zur adventistischen Ekklesiologie 1 (Hamburg, Germany: Saatkorn-Verlag, 1991).

13 See Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond, eds., *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 381–411.

14 Floyd Greenleaf, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992).

15 Floyd Greenleaf, *A Land of Hope: The Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South America* (Tatui, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2011).

16 For the sake of clarification, throughout the chapter the term "Blacks" is consistently written in uppercase, whereas "whites" appears in lowercase for reasons that are never explained.



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Biblical Research Institute

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*

12501 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Phone: 301.680.6790

Fax: 301.680.6788

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