

CONTINUING EDUCATION



HOW IT WORKS: Kindergarten through Grade 12 teachers in the North American Division are eligible for credit toward denominational recertification for successful completion of a test on the content of this article. The test does not provide college credit or credit toward state or regional teacher certification.

Inspiration/Revelation: What It Is and How It Works Part I: The Prophetic Gift in Operation

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GOAL STATEMENT

This continuing education study material is intended to serve as a refresher course for classroom teachers who are called upon in religion courses to explain the methodology God employed in communicating His divine truths and expectations to human beings alienated from His presence because of their sinful condition. For other teachers, this continuing education course may serve to strengthen their commitment as Seventh-day Adventist church members to the work of one believed to have been God's most recent prophet, Ellen G. White, in a day when her prophetic gift and contribution to this church are being increasingly questioned and challenged.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

After studying Part I of this continuing educa-

tion minicourse, you should be able to do the following:

1. Differentiate between the concepts of "inspiration," "revelation," and "illumination" as they relate to the phenomena of prophetism.
2. Differentiate between the seven modalities employed by God in different ages as He seeks to communicate with mankind.
3. Differentiate between the correct employment of physical phenomena as an *evidence* of supernatural activity (whether of the Holy Spirit, or of an unholy spirit) and the incorrect employment of these phenomena as a validating *test* of authentic prophethood.
4. Understand the validity of the concept of plenary (thought) inspiration as an adequate explanation of the methodology God uses to communicate through His chosen prophets.

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Associate Secretary, Ellen G. White Estate
General Conference of SDA

5. Understand the inherent dangers in uncritical acceptance of the spurious “verbal” and “encounter” concepts of inspiration.

Introduction

Before the entrance of sin, God communicated with human beings directly through face-to-face contact and personal fellowship. With the advent of sin this relationship was ruptured and man was alienated from his Maker. To bridge this separating gulf, God employed as many as seven modalities of communication—the “divers manners” of Hebrews 1:1—as He sought to bring mankind back into a personal relationship with Him.

Prophetic night dreams and “open visions” during the day were the methods God most frequently employed in communicating with men and women of His special choosing who came to be known as “seers,” “prophets,” or special “messengers.”

The lot of the prophet was seldom an easy one, as Jesus intimated by His oft-cited observation that “a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”¹

Seventh-day Adventists believe, upon the basis of Biblical evidence² as well as empirical data, that one “masterbuilder” (1 Corinthians 3:10) of their denomination, Ellen G. White, was the recipient of the gift of prophecy. Solomon averred that “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), and criticism of the prophets continues to this day.

Misunderstanding also continues concerning the manner in which the prophetic gift operates. Satan has a vested interest in creating confusion as well as rejection of the prophetic gift by the people it was intended to benefit, “for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded.”³ The “very last deception of Satan” in the Seventh-day Adventist Church just before Jesus returns will be the twofold work of (1) destroying the credibility of Ellen White as an authentic, reliable prophet of the Lord, and (2) creating a “satanic” “hatred” against her ministry and writings—satanic in its intensity as well as in its origin.⁴

Satan’s “special object” in these last days is to “prevent this light from coming to the people of God” who so desperately need it to walk safely through the minefield that the enemy of all souls has so artfully booby trapped.⁵

And what is Satan’s methodology for securing this objective? He will work “ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies.”⁶ For

example, in addition to the two methods mentioned above, satanic agencies seek to keep souls under a cloud of doubt,⁷ in a hurried state, and in a state of disappointment.

This is Satan’s plan—his goal and his strategy. This minicourse is dedicated to the proposition that he shall not succeed!

I. Definitions

Three terms in particular need adequate working definitions as we seek to understand Biblical and modern prophetism. The following definitions may be helpful:

1. *Inspiration*. Biblical, prophetic inspiration may be said to be a *process* by which God enables a man or woman of His special choosing both to receive and to communicate accurately, adequately, and reliably God’s messages for His people.⁸

We sometimes tend to say of a particular painter, author, musical composer, or performing artist, “He was inspired!” Indeed, he may have been. But it was a *different kind* of inspiration than that which was possessed by the prophets of God. When Paul wrote to the young ministerial intern Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), he chose to employ the Greek term *theopneusis*, which is a contraction of two other Greek words *Theos* (God) and *pneuma* (breath). What he was saying, literally, was, “All Scripture is *God-breathed*.”⁹

While some take this to be simply a delightful literary metaphor, yet it is also true—and significant—that while the prophet experienced the physical phenomena of the trance-like vision state, God breathed, *literally*; the prophet did not breathe while in this condition.¹⁰

The prophet’s inspiration is different *in kind*, rather than different *in degree*, from any other form of inspiration.

The apostle Peter adds to our limited Biblical store of information on inspiration by stating that the prophets—these “holy men of God”—spoke as they were “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). The Greek term Peter employs is *phero-meni*, from *phero*: “to carry a load, to move.” Luke employed the expression twice¹¹ in describing the action of a tempestuous wind in “driving” a sailing vessel upon which he and Paul were traveling. The implication is clear: The prophets were “moved by the Divine initiative and borne by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God along ways of His choosing to ends of His appointment.”¹²

2. *Revelation*. Biblical, special revelation, we would hold, further, to be the *content* of the message communicated by God to His prophet in the process of inspiration. Adventists hold this content—the prophetic message—to be infallible

(inerrant), trustworthy (all sufficient, reliable), and authoritative (binding upon the Christian).

This concept is predicted on three corollaries: (a) Man is unable, through his own resources or by his own observation, to perceive certain kinds of information; (b) God is pleased to speak; and (c) this act takes place and unfolds within human history.¹³

God has revealed Himself, in a limited way, in nature, which gives us glimpses of His power, His wisdom, and His glory. But nature is unable to reveal clearly God's person, His holiness, His redeeming love, and His everlasting purposes for mankind. Thus, supernatural revelation transcends the "natural" revelation of God in nature, and consists chiefly in God's manifesting of Himself and His will through direct intercourse with humanity.¹⁴

God speaks! In Old Testament Jeremiah speaks for all of the prophets when he testifies that "the Lord . . . touched my mouth, And . . . said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (chap. 1:9). In the New Testament Paul assures us that the Holy Spirit "speaketh expressly" (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul continues, elsewhere, to assure us that God reveals His mysteries to the prophets by revelation, which is a progressive work¹⁵; Paul contrasts natural knowledge with information that is revealed by the Holy Spirit. This knowledge is attainable in no other way and from no other source.¹⁶

3. *Illumination.* Since the implied answer to Paul's rhetorical question, "Are all prophets?"¹⁷ is negative, there remains one further task of the Holy Spirit, if those *not* possessed of the prophetic gift are to grasp the will of God for them.

Illumination may be defined as the work of that same Holy Spirit who indicated God's message to the prophet by which He now enables the hearer or reader of the prophet's words to comprehend the spiritual truths and discern God's message to himself.

This work of the Holy Spirit is comprehended in the words of Jesus to His disciples concerning the coming of the Comforter: He will teach you all things,¹⁸ He will remind you of Jesus' words (the only current source of which is the writings of the prophets!),¹⁹ and in doing this work He will guide you into all the truth the human mind is capable of comprehending.²⁰

Concerning the work of this illumination, Ellen White once spoke of the three ways by which "the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others": (a) through an understanding of what inspired writers through the ages have written for our admonition, (b) through providential circumstances (signs); and (c) through the direct impression of the Holy Spirit on the individual Christian's mind and heart.²¹

II. An Operational Gift

The Divine Initiative

It all started with God. He made the first move.

The very first words of our English Bible are these: "In the beginning God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). Three times in the last book of the Bible Jesus identifies Himself as "Alpha and Omega."²² Those are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—the language in which John wrote the book of Revelation. What did that cryptic expression mean? Among other things, Jesus perhaps was saying, "I was here when everything began; and I will be here when all is fulfilled."

Paul highlights the uniqueness of the Christian religion by showing that while we were still in the state and act of sin Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). All of the great non-Christian religions of the world are alike in one respect: They all show man in search of God. In Christianity alone do we find God in search of man. The central message of Christianity was embodied in the three parables of the "lost" of Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy. In each of these parables we are shown a God who cared deeply, and who acted on the basis of this concern.

God's concern for man prompted Him to bring into existence the office of prophet. While the liturgical priesthood spoke to God on behalf of man, the prophet spoke to man on behalf of God. God had a message to communicate, and He chose special human messengers to be His agency.

While every Christian is the recipient of at least one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit ("spiritual gifts"),²³ it is still God the Holy Spirit who decides which man or woman receives which gift.²⁴ And the gift of prophecy was given to "some,"²⁵ but not to "all."²⁶ Prophecy is the pre-eminent gift²⁷; and the most a human being may scripturally do is to "covet earnestly the best gifts."²⁸ God alone chooses who will be His prophets.

And, having made that choice, God speaks! Twice in the stately, measured cadences of Hebrews 1:1, 2, we are told that God had already spoken, first through the prophets and then more recently through His Son. Revelation 1:1 suggests what might well be called "God's chain of command" (to borrow a phrase from Bill Gothard).

God's Chain of Command

Just as all three members of the Godhead participated in the creation of this world,²⁹ just so do all three participate in the process of inspiration: The Father gives the message to the Son,³⁰ the Son gives it to the Holy Spirit,³¹ and the Holy Spirit moves upon the prophets.³²

The Godhead delivers the message to "his angel," Gabriel; and Gabriel delivers it to God's servants, the prophets.³³ And thus the prophets

could authoritatively declare to their fellow beings, "Hear, therefore, the word of the Lord."³⁴

Two points of significance immediately suggest themselves from these facts:

1. Of all the billions of angels created by God,³⁵ we today know the names of only two—Lucifer ("light bearer"), who was number one, and who fell; and Gabriel, originally number two, who later became number one. And it was the angel Gabriel, heaven's highest, who communicated God's messages to "his servants, the prophets." Only heaven's highest was good enough for this special task.

2. The prophets are called "his servants," that is, God's servants. Now, a servant is, by definition, "one who is sent"—sent by a superior, of course. Jesus made it abundantly clear that the servant was "not greater than his lord."³⁶ If, then, the message-bearing servant (prophet) is ignored, slighted, or—worse yet—rejected outright, the One who is *really* rejected is the One who gave the message to the prophet.

Seven Modalities of God's Communication

What were some of these "divers manners" by which God communicated with mankind? There seem to have been at least seven methods:

1. *Theophanies* (visible manifestations of God; face-to-face communication). Abraham met the preincarnate Christ and two angels near his tent on the plains of Mamre (Genesis 18); Jacob wrestled with an "angel" at Peniel, only to discover "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30); and Moses spoke to the Lord in the mount "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

2. *Angels*. Those "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14) have often come to mankind, to bring messages of hope and comfort (Daniel 10:11, 12; Genesis 32:1), to direct the servants of the Lord to those whose hearts were receptive to God's truth (Acts 8:26), or to warn of imminent disaster if God's word was not heeded (Genesis 3:24).

3. *Audible voice of God*. Sometimes God spoke on His own! At Sinai the Ten Commandments were spoken audibly, jointly, by the Father and the Son in a transcendent "duet"³⁷ that literally caused the earth (as well as the hearts of the human hearers) to tremble.

Upon occasion the audible voice of God addressed the high priest from the Shekinah—that exceeding bright glory that rested between the cherubim in the center of the ark of the covenant.³⁸ The Shekinah was the visible manifestation of God's presence in the desert tabernacle.

And, of course, God's voice was heard three times during the earthly ministry of our Lord—at Christ's baptism, upon the mount of transfiguration, and when the Greek philosophers called upon Him in the temple during the week that preceded the crucifixion. At these times God was heard commanding men to heed the message of His beloved Son.³⁹

4. *Optics*. During the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel, the high priest's breastplate had two large stones imbedded at the top—the Urim and the Thummim. The high priest could ask questions, and Jehovah would respond. If the answer were "yes," one stone would glow with a halo of light and glory; if the answer were "no," the opposite stone would be partially obscured by a shadow or a vapor.⁴⁰

The high priest had another means of receiving answers from God. In the most holy place the angel on the right side of the ark would glow in a halo of light if the answer were affirmative, or a shadow would be cast over the angel on the left if the answer were negative.⁴¹

5. *Casting of lots*. In Old Testament times God also communicated with His people by means of casting lots. A modern counterpart is "drawing straws"—a number of straws of different lengths are held in the hand, with all the ends appearing to be even, the difference of length being hidden by the hand. After the straws are drawn, and are compared, it is easy to determine who drew the longest or the shortest.

Lots were cast upon goats, upon cities, and upon men. The most celebrated instance of the latter was the discovery of Achan and his theft of the "goodly Babylonish garment" as the cause of Israel's humiliating defeat of Ai.⁴²

Interestingly, there is only one instance in the New Testament of determining God's will by the casting of lots—the selection of Matthias to take the place vacated by Judas among the 12 apostles.⁴³ When and why this method fell into disuse is not revealed; but we do know that when the practice of casting lots was resorted to by the Austin, Pennsylvania, SDA church for the purpose of selecting church officers, Ellen White wrote from Australia, "I have no faith in casting lots. . . . To cast lots for the officers of the church is not in God's order. Let men of responsibility be called upon to select the officers of the church."⁴⁴

6. *"Open" visions of the day*. The trancelike state into which a prophet entered when going into vision has already been referred to, and will be dealt with more fully below. Both the Old and the New Testaments are replete with references to prophets receiving visions from the Lord.⁴⁵

7. *Prophetic dreams of the night*. Often the prophets would receive messages from the Lord in the "night seasons" as well as during the day.

There is no evidence that physical phenomena accompanied the prophetic night dreams, nor is there evidence that the kind of messages given at night were in any way different from those transmitted in the visions of the day.

Ellen White was once asked if she, a prophet, experienced ordinary dreams at night as noninspired people did. She smiled and said that she did. The next question was inevitable: How are you able to differentiate between ordinary dreams and inspired dreams? Her response was right to the point: "The same angel messenger stands by my side instructing me in the visions of the night, as stands beside me instructing me in the visions of the day."⁴⁶

Physical Phenomena

When in vision state, the prophets experienced supernatural physical phenomena. The tenth chapter of Daniel best illustrates the nature and scope of such singular phenomena. Daniel tells us that in this condition he saw things that others about him did not see (verse 7); he sustained a loss of natural strength (verse 8) and then was endowed with supernatural strength (verses 10, 11, 16, 18, 19). He was totally unconscious of his immediate surroundings (verse 9), and he did not breathe during this time (verse 17).

Ellen White experienced all these phenomena in the vision state. However, it should be noted that although her lungs did not function at such times, the heart did continue to circulate blood through the body; her face did not lose color.

Perhaps, as already noted above, there may be a startlingly literal interpretation to *theopneusis*—"God-breathed"—as it related to the physical phenomena associated with a prophet in vision.

In Ellen White's experience, the physical phenomena of "open visions" were more characteristic of her earlier years; from the 1880's onward all of her inspired messages apparently came from the Lord in prophetic dreams. This leads us to consider the purpose of physical phenomena.

First, physical phenomena were not prerequisites for receiving messages from God. The prophetic dreams of the night seem to make this clear. But God, who has a purpose for everything He does, obviously had a purpose in providing these dramatic supernatural exhibitions.

Perhaps the dramatic nature of these exhibitions gives us a clue to Heaven's intention. In the case of Ellen White, we have a 17-year-old girl claiming, "I have a vision from the Lord!" "Well," one might wonder, "how do we know?"

In the early days of a prophet's ministry, when he has made few written or spoken pronouncements it is difficult to apply the test of consistency with previously inspired testimony (Isaiah 8:20).

The test of fruitage (Matthew 7:16, 20) is equally difficult to apply until a few years pass and results are seen in the life of the prophet and in the lives of those who have followed the prophet's counsels. The test of fulfilled prediction (Jeremiah 28:9, Deuteronomy 18:22) cannot be applied until enough time has elapsed to allow a judgment about whether any prophecies made have come to pass.

Obviously, God needed to do something to arrest attention, to suddenly cause people to sit up and take notice. Physical phenomena serve this purpose. God had used such methods before (probably for the same reason) at Pentecost when tongues of fire were seen above the heads of the 120, and these men and women spoke contemporary languages they had never previously studied.⁴⁷

Perhaps God used physical phenomena to validate the fact that something supernatural was here at work. Of course, witnesses would still need to validate, to authenticate the messages by means of the conventional Bible tests.

However, the fact that Satan can and does counterfeit many natural and supernatural phenomena should lead us to make a crucial distinction: Physical phenomena are an *evidence* of supernatural activity, but they are never to be a *test* of the authenticity or legitimacy of a prophet.

Today it has become fashionable among the critics of Ellen White to call for a "demythologizing" of Adventists's historic prophet. One critic in particular recently called for the burying of legendary tales involving "magic."

Concerning stories of Mrs. White holding a large Bible for an extended period of time on her outstretched, upraised hand while in vision, this critic alleges that at the 1919 Bible Conference it was declared emphatically that the event never really happened, that no one had ever seen it; indeed, no one was even there to witness it!⁴⁸

If, however, we go to the transcript of the 1919 Bible Conference,⁴⁹ we notice, first of all, that the record has been substantially misquoted by the critic. We find General Conference President Arthur G. Daniells discussing the use of physical phenomena as "proofs or evidence of the genuineness of the gift." And he opposes such use as proof of legitimacy—a position the White Estate continues to hold today!

Instead, said Daniells, "I believe that the strongest proof is found in the fruits of this gift to the church, not in physical and outward demonstrations."

Then, addressing more directly the question of the stories about Ellen White holding a large, heavy Bible on an outstretched hand while in vision, looking away from the pages and yet quoting the texts to which a finger of the opposite

hand pointed, Elder Daniells declared: "I do not know whether that was ever done or not. I am not sure. I did not see it, and I do not know that I ever talked with anybody that did see it."⁵⁰

One does not need to look far to discover why Daniells had not witnessed such an event. This writer has uncovered four instances thus far where Ellen White held a Bible in vision: three times in 1845 and once in 1847.⁵¹ Arthur Daniells was not born until 1858, at least 11 years after the latest recorded Bible-holding incident took place.

Research shows that physical phenomena was more characteristic of the earlier days of Mrs. White's experience. Indeed, the last "open vision" of record took place at a camp meeting in Portland, Oregon, in 1884, only six years after Daniells entered the gospel ministry.⁵²

We should not be surprised, then, that Daniells never witnessed Mrs. White holding a large Bible in vision. He probably saw very few other manifestations of physical phenomena, which ceased shortly after he entered the ministry. Nor is it surprising that he had not met any contemporaries who had observed such phenomena—they were probably too young, too!

Some critics hold that the evidence behind at least two of the Bible-holding stories is not reliable because the stories were not recorded until 45 years after the events took place; and because they were written down by a denominational historian who was not always careful in his research. While there may be some validity to this concern, the fact remains that the White Estate still holds in its vault an eyewitness account of the event, known to have been written sometime between 1847 and 1860. The observer was Otis Nichols, and the incident he reported took place during what was probably Ellen White's longest vision, at Randolph, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1845.

During this vision, which lasted approximately four hours, Ellen Harmon (who was unmarried at the time) picked up "a heavy large quarto family Bible" and lifted it up "as high as she could reach." The Bible was "open in one hand," and she then proceeded "to turn over the leaves with the other hand and place her finger upon certain passages and correctly utter their words"—all this with her head facing in another direction! In this activity "she continued for a long time."⁵³

Ellen White believed this account to be an accurate record of a genuine experience, because she quoted three paragraphs from it in an autobiographical account published in 1860.⁵⁴

Arthur G. Daniells never said that the event did not happen, as the critic alleges. Instead, he simply said that he didn't see it and didn't know anyone who had. However, had Elder Daniells (who was a member of the White Estate board of trustees) taken the effort to go to the vault and

examine the documentary evidence that still is preserved there, he would have had no doubt about whether Ellen White ever held a Bible in vision, or about whether she breathed while in her open visions of the day.⁵⁵

We must emphasize at this point that the position of the church today is the same as it has always been. Physical phenomena are an evidence of supernatural activity, but it should never be used as a *proof* because Satan can counterfeit much of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Basic Vehicles of Prophetic Messages

The messages given to the prophets were generally given in two different kinds of packaging: (1) the prophets witnessed events unfolding from past, present, or future historical incidents, such as Moses watching the creation of the world, or the apostle John observing both the second and third comings of Christ. Ellen White witnessed many events of the past, present, and future during her 70-year prophetic ministry.

The prophets also saw symbolic or parablelike events. These representations seemed just as real as the other kind, but of course, the beasts Daniel saw and later wrote about in the seventh chapter of his prophecy never really existed. Ellen White had a number of parablelike visions; perhaps one of the better known was one in which she saw a ship that was on a collision course with an iceberg. The captain instructed the helmsman to hit the iceberg head on rather than to allow the ship to suffer a more severe glancing blow. The incident illustrated the church's meeting the "Alpha" pantheism heresy of John Harvey Kellogg at the beginning of the twentieth century in a bruising (but not fatal) head-on confrontation. During this time the providential intervention of the Lord was witnessed in a remarkable manner.⁵⁶

2. The prophets also heard the voice of a member of the Godhead, or of the angel Gabriel, speaking messages of counsel, instruction, admonition, and sometimes of warning and reproof. These voices apparently were unaccompanied by scenes of events, although Ellen White does tell us that she entered into direct conversation with Jesus Christ on a number of occasions.

The Writing Task: The Prophet's Options

Once the prophet received instruction from the Lord, by whatever method the divine mind selected, his immediate task was that of composition, of writing out the message he had received. In this task the prophet had several options to choose among, as far as the source of the words chosen was concerned:

1. The prophet might choose to follow the role model of a newspaper reporter, simply quoting the words of the heavenly personage who had deliv-

ered the message. Ellen White's invariable custom was to place the directly quoted words of the angel within quotation marks, thus making it immediately evident to the reader that these were Gabriel's words, not hers.⁵⁷

2. More often the prophet simply put the message into his or her own words. (More will be said about this aspect in discussing, below, the prophet's unique contribution to such a ministry.)

Ellen White was once asked if the nine-inch-from-the-ground skirt length she advocated came directly from the Lord, or if it was simply her own idea. She responded that the Lord caused three groups of women to pass before her in vision. The first group were dressed in the peculiar fashion of the day, with excessively long skirts that swept the filth of the street. Obviously, from a health standpoint, these skirts were too long. A second group then came into view whose skirts were obviously too short. Then Mrs. White was shown a third group of women wearing skirts short enough to clear the filth of the street, but long enough to be modest and healthful. These skirts appeared in vision to be about nine inches from the ground, and Ellen White described them thus.

The angel had not specified any length in inches; and in response to the question of a reader of the *Review and Herald*, Mrs. White declared:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.⁵⁸

Incidentally, this statement has been used by one contemporary critic to suggest that Ellen White claimed she always used only her own words, or else the words of an angel (appropriately designated by quotation marks). And then the critic charges her with untruthfulness by demonstrating that she often used the literary productions of others!

The context of Mrs. White's statement demonstrates that the critic is misapplying her statement. But study of the passage does lead us to a third option, exercised by prophets in many different periods:

3. The prophet sometimes might opt to use words of another author. This was true both of Bible prophets and of Ellen White. Sometimes the other source might be an inspired prophet of the Lord; but sometimes the person copied was not inspired. And, generally speaking, the prophets did not cite their sources or provide bibliographical data as modern researchers do.

Critics today accuse Ellen White of plagiarism because she quoted a number of noninspired authors without giving appropriate credit. Let us look at this charge—and the practice as used by prophetic writers—in detail.

The "Copying" Charge

As we will study in more detail in the second of this series of three presentations, no charge has been leveled against Ellen White in her professional capacity as a prophet of the Lord that had not already been made against the prophets of the Bible—whether the charge be that of copying, or of having made unfulfilled prophecies, or of having made some errors in what was written or said, or of having to go back and change something that was said by the prophet—even matters of major substance that had to be corrected.

We will deal here only with the charge of copying other writers—inspired or uninspired. Originality is not now, nor has it ever been, a test of an individual's prophetic inspiration, as Robert W. Olson perceptively pointed out to the religion editor of *Newsweek* magazine; and therefore, literary "borrowing does not dilute her [Mrs. White's] claims to inspiration."⁵⁹

The Biblical writers copied from one another without attribution of source, and apparently felt no compunctions about such practice:

Micah (4:1-3) borrowed from Isaiah (2:2-4). The scribe who compiled 2 Kings (18-20) also borrowed from Isaiah (36-39). Matthew and Luke borrowed heavily from Mark as well as from another common source. None of these ever acknowledged their borrowing. (See the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 178, 179.)⁶⁰

In fact, many scholars openly acknowledge that some 91 percent of the Gospel of Mark was copied by Matthew and Luke when they wrote their respective Gospels!

Of perhaps greater interest, however, is the fact that the writers of the Bible would from time to time copy (or "borrow") the literary productions of noninspired authors, including pagan writers. For example, about 600 B.C. Epimenides wrote:

They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies! But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever; For in thee we live and move and have our being.⁶¹

Sound vaguely familiar? Well, the Apostle Paul twice used some of these words, once in Titus 1:12 ("One of themselves, even a prophet of their own said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies") and again in his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens, in Acts 17:28 ("For in him we live, and move, and have our being").

Jesus did not invent the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12. A generation earlier Rabbi Hillel had already written: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof."

The thoughts—and even some of the words—of the Lord's Prayer may be found in earlier ritual prayers known as the *Ha-Kaddish*.⁶²

Substantial chunks of John's Apocalypse—the Book of Revelation—are lifted bodily from the

Book of Enoch, a pseudepigraphical work known to have been circulated some 150 years before John wrote the last book of the Bible; and even Jude borrowed a line ("Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints") from the same source.⁶³

Indeed, some 15 apocryphal or pseudepigraphical books are cited in our New Testament—generally without attribution to their source.

Doctor Luke tells us that he did a substantial amount of research and investigation in sources then available to him before he wrote the Gospel that bears his name:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, . . . it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1, 3, 4), NASB.⁶⁴

In commenting on this passage, Robert W. Olson perceptively remarks:

Luke did not acquire his information through visions or dreams but through his own research. Yet while material in the gospel of Luke was not given by direct revelation it was nonetheless written under divine inspiration. He did not write to tell his readers something new, but to assure them of what was true—"that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." What Luke wrote was not original, but it was dependable. God led Luke to use the right sources. (See the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 669).⁶⁵

Because an inspired writer quotes from an uninspired writer, it does not follow that the earlier writer must now be seen somehow as having come under the umbrella of inspiration. *Inspiration is a process, not a content.*

Just as Biblical authors used noninspired sources, Ellen White also copied from the writings of authors who were not inspired.⁶⁶

Divine Dreams Alone Do Not a Prophet Make

Just because an individual receives a dream from the Lord, it does not automatically follow that, *ipso facto*, that individual is a prophet of the Lord.

To suit His providential purposes God has often given dreams to pagans as well as to Christians. However, the receipt of such messages does not thereby transform the recipient into an authentic prophet. Perhaps a helpful differentiation might be the following: The nonprophet is generally not called to the task of guiding the church at large. The direction, rather, is primarily intended for the individual himself (or perhaps for someone close to the recipient). Such experiences are often isolated experiences rather than a continuing relationship that is typical of the prophetic order.

In Biblical times God gave divine (but nonprophetic) dreams to many: Abimelech (Genesis 20:3-7), Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker

(Genesis 40:8-19), and to one of the Pharaohs (Genesis 41:1-7), to the Midianite soldier (Judges 7:13, 14), to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2 and 4), to Joseph of Nazareth (Matthew 2:13, 14), to Claudia, Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19), and to the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8), to mention only a few.

In the history of the early Seventh-day Adventist Church certain believers received divine, but nonprophetic, dreams. J. N. Loughborough had as many as 20 such dreams, which Ellen White apparently accepted as being of divine origin.⁶⁷ William Miller, who started the Millerite movement, but who never accepted the seventh-day Sabbath, had a most remarkable parablelike dream.⁶⁸ Annie Smith, sister of Uriah Smith, and Captain Joseph Bates both had a remarkable "double dream" the same night, which had an even more remarkable fulfillment the following night.⁶⁹ And James White had several unusual dreams that J. N. Loughborough shared with posterity.⁷⁰

The pages of the *Adventist Review* and other regional denominational periodicals have occasionally carried contemporary stories of Christians and pagans alike who have been led by a divine dream. But these persons were not prophets, nor were they considered to be such by their peers.

III. Three Theories of Inspiration/Revelation

There are at least three theories regarding the definition of inspiration and the way it operates in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in other Christian bodies today. Two are false and dangerous, for reasons that will shortly be made clear. Let us examine these theories in some detail:

Theory of Verbal Inspiration

Over the years a number of Seventh-day Adventists, including some of our ministers and Bible teachers, have held the verbal view of inspiration, despite counsels of Ellen White to the contrary.

This view is a rather mechanical one, since it perceives the prophet's role as simply that of a stenographer who takes down the boss's dictation word for word. In this model the stenographer is not at liberty to change anything that has been given by the dictator: no synonyms may ever be employed; no failing to dot an "i" or to cross a "t" is permitted.

This view seems to suggest that God, or the angel, puts a heavenly hand over the hand of the prophet and guides it—literally—so that every word, every syllable comes directly from God. The prophet, in this view, is not at liberty to change anything or to state the message in his own words. This mechanical view is strictly, stringently

literalistic, with infallibility residing at the point of the written word.

This limited view of inspiration provides no opportunity for translation into other languages, and has other even more serious limitations and dangers.⁷¹

The strict verbalist has a problem with Matthew 27:9, 10. Here Matthew does something that every teacher and preacher has done innumerable times. Matthew is probably thinking of one name, but out of his pen mistakenly comes another name. As he applies a messianic prophecy to Christ—the prediction that He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver—he attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah. However, in all the book of Jeremiah, there is not one reference to this prophecy. The alert reader will recognize that Matthew actually meant to attribute this prophecy to *Zechariah* (chap. 11:12, 13).

The person who believes in plenary (thought) inspiration has no problem with this slip of the pen. But the verbalist finds a serious problem here. Did God make this mistake in dictating Matthew's gospel?

This is not the only problem for the verbalist. God the Father spoke audibly three times during the earthly ministry of His Son. The first time was immediately following Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. The problem is, exactly what did the heavenly voice say?

According to Matthew (chap. 3:17), the Father spoke in the third person singular: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But Mark's account (chap. 1:11) has the Father speaking in the second person singular: "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Exactly what *did* the Father say? The plenarist does not see the discrepancy between the accounts as being a problem; he believes that it is the thought that is inspired, not the exact words. There is no disagreement between Matthew and Mark as to the essence of what God said.

Another problem for the verbalist is Pilate's superscription on the signboard he ordered placed on Christ's cross. What did that signboard say? The four Gospel writers give four slightly different accounts of what the sign stated.

Which one was correct? To the plenarist it makes no difference. But the literal verbalist is in a quandary. And it doesn't help to recall that the signboard was in three languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), because we have four different accounts, not three!

Matthew and Luke illustrate yet another kind of problem for the strict verbalist in the way they handle the Sermon on the Mount.

No one today has read or heard the actual Sermon on the Mount. Probably Ellen White's book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, comes

closest to a complete account of a sermon that took virtually all day to preach.

Matthew simply gives an outline of the sermon in chapters 5-7 of his Gospel. But Luke doesn't even give that much. If all we had was Luke's Gospel, we'd never even know there was a *Sermon* on the Mount. For Luke takes the ingredients of the sermon, and plugs in some here and some there as it suits his purpose.

To understand why the material is handled this way, we have to recognize that Matthew was writing to Jews, who liked sermons. So Matthew used a sermon format—indeed, a sermon outline—to display Jesus' ideas from this incomparable discourse, which by some has been called the charter or constitution of the Christian church.

Luke, however, was writing for Greeks, who couldn't have cared less about sermons, as such. They, instead, liked to dwell in the realm of ideas. So Luke took the ideas of the Sermon on the Mount and used them evangelistically, some here and some there, as it served his purpose in dealing with his audience.

The plenarist has no problem with this approach because he sees the *ideas* as being inspired. But the strict verbalist is here in a great deal of trouble. Who is right? Was it a sermon or not? Many questions are raised, but few answers are forthcoming.

Other illustrations could be cited, such as Matthew's listing of the order of Christ's miracles in a somewhat different order than Luke's Gospel. Problems such as these leave the strict verbalist in a real quandary. However, we shall leave him there for now, and proceed to examine the plenary theory of inspiration.

Theory of Plenary Inspiration

In contrast with the view of verbal inspiration, the plenary theory of inspiration suggests that thoughts—rather than words—are inspired. The plenary view is not forced to grapple with the problems of the verbalist. For the Seventh-day Adventist, this view has the added advantage of having been accepted and advocated by Ellen White.⁷²

Let us examine in some detail the manner in which Mrs. White explicates her views. These views have been praised by a number of non-SDA theologians as one of the most comprehensive and concise statements on the subject of plenary inspiration to be found anywhere in print.

1. *The purpose of inspiration.* Ellen White uses two interesting analogies to illustrate the purpose of inspiration. First she likens inspiration to a map—a guide or chartbook for the human family. The purpose of this map is to show weak, erring, mortal human beings the way to heaven, so that they need never lose their way.⁷³ Then she also com-

pires inspiration to “hidden treasure”—or precious jewels that may be discovered by arduous digging.⁷⁴ And then, in summation, Mrs. White remarks that no one need ever be lost for want of this most crucial information unless he is willfully blind.⁷⁵

2. *The human element.* Next, Mrs. White recognized the existence of the human element. God committed the preparation of His Word to finite men,⁷⁶ thus, in a sense, making problems for Himself. Why? Because “everything that is human is imperfect.”⁷⁷

Speaking to the workers at Battle Creek, in a different context, Mrs. White amplified this thought: “No one has so great a mind, or is so skillful, but that the work will be imperfect after he has done his very best.”⁷⁸

Since the Bible writers had to express their ideas in human idioms, the concepts could not be given in some grand superhuman language.⁷⁹ Infinite ideas can never be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought.⁸⁰ The Lord has to speak to human beings in imperfect speech in order that our dull, earthly perception may comprehend His words.⁸¹

In an apt analogy, John Calvin once suggested that God, through the prophets, talked “baby talk” to us humans, much as a cooing mother lisps to her little child in the universal language of love.

3. *The existence of discrepancies.* Ellen White addressed the question of discrepancies, mistakes, or errors in a forthright manner. She does not just suggest that these are possible; she says that they are “probable.”⁸² But she goes on, more importantly, to point out that all of these mistakes will not change a single doctrine, or cause anyone to stumble who is not already inclined to do so. These persons will “manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”⁸³

4. *Unique divine-human blending.* Paul incisively pointed out that “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Two elements are thus introduced into the analogy: the “treasure,” and the “earthen vessels.” Mrs. White develops these two elements by first commenting that, indeed, the Ten Commandments are verbally inspired, being of “divine and not human composition.” The servant of the Lord then goes on, interestingly:

But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”⁸⁴

Again, commenting that “In the work of God for man’s redemption, divinity and humanity are combined,” Mrs. White elaborates along a somewhat similar vein:

The union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God;” yet they are expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs.⁸⁵

Thus the truths conveyed by inspired writers are all inspired treasure. But the human element—the “language of men,” is the earthen vessel—that is, the packaging.

Earle Hilgert has suggested that the *human* aspect of the inspired writings, ancient and modern, is revealed in five different ways:

a. *The writer expresses himself in his own style.* The Bible has many major stylistic differences in its various books.

b. *The writer expresses himself at his own level of literary ability.* For example, the sentence structure of the book of Revelation is crude. John strings his ideas along with the connector *and* like a string of box cars in a freight train. Stylistically, this book is elementary, not elevated. Its author was a fisherman who was educated by Jesus for three years. John received his education in truth, rather than in rhetoric. In contrast to the book of Revelation, the book of Hebrews exhibits a most elevated stylistic form. Indeed, because of its use of balanced phrases and clauses, some higher critics don’t think that Paul wrote it. But Paul undoubtedly had the equivalent of a Ph.D. from the school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, and he may well have attended the university at Tarsus before he went to Jerusalem.

c. *The writer reveals his own personality.* The Gospel of John can be summed up in one four-letter word—*love*. The concept permeates John’s Gospel and all three of his epistles. John, more than any of the other apostles, imbibed this spirit, and yielded himself most fully to Christ’s transforming love.⁸⁶ And thus his epistles, especially, breathe out this spirit of love.⁸⁷ His favorite theme was the infinite love of Christ.⁸⁸

d. *The writer also uses his own words*—words of his selection, and in so doing,

e. *The writer draws on his own personal background and experience.* Luke was called the “beloved physician.” And indeed, a whole volume has been written on the medical terminology employed in the Gospel of Luke. Luke writes with the perception of a scientist. For example, he is the only one of the four Gospel writers to mention that Jesus “sweat . . . as it were great drops of blood.”

Amos speaks the language of the herdsman, the shepherd.

And Paul? Trained in the methodology and phraseology of philosophy, Paul wrote some things that to a fisherman like Peter were “hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16).⁸⁹

Then, the *divine* aspect, the work of the Holy Spirit, is revealed in four ways, as suggested by T. Housel Jemison:

a. *He enlightens the mind*: The writer is enabled to comprehend truth.

b. *He prompts the thinking*: That is, He stimulates the reasoning processes.

c. *He enlightens the memory*: The prophet is thus enabled to recall events and ideas.

d. *He directs attention to matters to be recorded*: This deals specifically with the selection of topic and content.⁹⁰

5. *Verbal Versus Plenary*. Mrs. White states directly that it is not the words of the Scriptures that are inspired, but rather the men who wrote them—the prophets were “God’s penmen, not His pen.”⁹¹

The semantic problem here is recognized—a given word may convey different ideas to different people. Yet if a writer or speaker is intellectually honest, he can usually convey his meaning plainly.⁹² The same truth may be expressed in different ways without essential contradiction.⁹³

Basically, “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.”⁹⁴

6. *What the Bible is not*: The Bible does not represent the words, the logic, or the rhetoric of God.⁹⁵ “God, as a writer, is not represented.”⁹⁶ Indeed, God says that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8, 9). But the Bible does point to God as its “Author.”⁹⁷ Christ “Himself [is] the Author of these revealed truths.”⁹⁸

7. *Totality*. Ellen White took the Bible just as it stood—“I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.”⁹⁹ And she urged her hearers and readers to “cling to your Bible, as it reads.”¹⁰⁰ Amplifying this thought elsewhere, she continues, “Every chapter and every verse is a communication of God to man.”¹⁰¹

8. *God’s superintendency*. The Lord miraculously preserved the Bible through the centuries in essentially its present form.¹⁰² Indeed, the preservation of the Bible is as much a miracle as its inspiration.

Of course, the Bible was not given in “one unbroken line of utterance.” Rather, through successive generations, it was given, piece by piece, as a beneficent Providence recognized various needs in different places. “The Bible was given for practical purposes.”¹⁰³

The continuing hand of God is seen in the giving of the messages, in the recording of the messages, in the gathering of the books into the Canon, and in the preservation of the Bible through successive ages.¹⁰⁴

9. *Unity*. Ellen White draws an interesting distinction with regard to unity: While there is not always “apparent” unity, there is, however, a “spiritual unity.” And this unity she likens to one grand golden thread, running through the whole, which is discovered by the “illuminated soul.”

However, to trace out this unity requires the searcher to exercise patience, thought, and prayer.¹⁰⁵

In the days when Britannia ruled the waves, and ships were propelled by wind rather than by steam or oil, the ships of His Majesty’s royal navy all carried rope that had a crimson thread woven through its entire length. This thread served two purposes: It made identification easy in cases of suspected theft; and it also assured the sailors (whose lives often depended upon the quality of the rope they handled) that they had the very best.

Applying this analogy to the Bible, the blood of Jesus is the crimson thread that runs throughout the whole Scripture. This unity is exhibited in at least five areas, according to Jemison:

a. Purpose: the story of the plan of salvation.

b. Theme: Jesus, the cross, the crown.

c. Harmony of teaching: Old and New Testament doctrines are the same.

d. Development: the steady progression from creation to the fall to redemption to final restoration.

e. Coordination of the prophecies: evident because the same Holy Spirit was at work!¹⁰⁶

10. *Degrees of inspiration*. Ellen White makes it abundantly clear that the Christian is not to assert that one part of the Scripture is inspired and that another is not, or that there are degrees of inspiration among the various books of the Bible. God has not qualified or inspired any man to do this kind of work.¹⁰⁷

Theory of Encounter Inspiration¹⁰⁸

A third view of inspiration goes by a variety of labels: “Neo-orthodoxy,” “existentialism,” (the religious kind), or “encounter” (after one of the more prominent words in its in-house jargon). This view is based, at least in part, on the “I-Thou” concept of Philosopher Martin Buber. The three basic tenets or postulates will now be examined:

Subjective Rather Than Objective

1. *Inspiration is, by its very nature, inherently subjective rather than objective.*

Although the verbalist and plenarist views are quite different and distinct, the former holding that inspiration resides in the exact word used, and the latter believing that the inspiration resides instead in the thought conveyed by the prophet,

both are alike in one respect: They each hold that inspiration is essentially objective rather than subjective.

Until the turn of the century, these were the two basic positions held by the Christian world. Then along came Martin Buber (who is a philosopher rather than a theologian), who helped to develop a new theory of inspiration. This theory holds, among other views, that inspiration is, by its very nature, inherently subjective rather than objective. What does this mean in practical terms?

As "encounter" theology sees it, revelation (or inspiration) is an experience that takes place in an "I-Thou" encounter between the prophet and God. It is then, primarily, an *experience*, with no exchange of information taking place.

Revelation, for the encounter theologian, is "the personal self-disclosure of God to man, not the impartation of truths about God, . . . an 'I-Thou' encounter with God, the full presence of God in the consciousness" of the prophet, as Raoul Dederen has so felicitously phrased it.¹⁰⁹

There is no communication of information in encounter theology. God does not utter a word. No statements of truth of any kind are made in this unique relationship. Truth is seen not as conceptual in an objective sense, but as experiential in a subjective sense.

At this point the encounterist would argue that there *is* a content. But the content is not the impartation of some concept about God, but, rather, the imparting of some *One*—God Himself, addressing the individual Christian's soul and calling for a personal response in the transaction.

Revelation, ultimately, for the encounterist, is the full revelation of God to the full consciousness of the prophet. In this experience there is no communication of ideas, truths, concepts, or messages.

As we noted earlier, the Bible writers convey emphatically that God speaks particularly and uniquely through inspired men. There is simply no twisting such declarations as the one made in 2 Samuel 23:2: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue"!

The inquiry of Zedekiah the king to Jeremiah the prophet is central to a genuinely Biblical view of inspiration: "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jeremiah 37:17).

Nor is this merely an Old Testament view of inspiration. In three places in Acts Luke uses such expressions as "the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake" (chap. 1:16), "God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (chap. 3:21), and "by the mouth of thy servant David [God] hast said," et cetera. Chapter four of 1 Timothy opens with "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that . . .," and the opening words of Hebrews declare that whereas in former

days God spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets, in more recent times He has spoken more directly to mankind through His Son.

The encounterist holds that the prophet *as a person* is inspired (which is true), but that the thoughts and the words the prophet conveys are his own ideas rather than God's ideas (which is false).

Further, the encounterist holds that the prophet is the interpreter of God's self-disclosure in terms relevant to his own day; and those ideas may contain error. They may even be scientifically or historically inaccurate (as, for example, Moses' idea of a seven solar-day literal creation); yet the prophet nevertheless is held to be inspired, since, in this view, inspiration has nothing whatever to do with ideas!

The encounterist lays great stress on context. His purpose is to demonstrate "historical conditioning"—the idea that the prophet is the helpless victim (as well as the product) of his environment, background, education, and climate of thought.

Although the plenarist is also interested in context, he uses it to discover, by examination of the historical circumstances surrounding the giving of a particular message, whether the prophet's words constitute a *principle*—(an unchanging, unerring rule of human behavior) or a *policy* (the application of a principle to a particular situation, in which case the application may change as the situation changes).

2. *Contains the word versus being the word.* The encounterist says that the Bible *contains* the word of God, but that it is *not itself* the word of God. In this view, the Bible is no longer revelation in the pre-twentieth century sense of the word. It is no longer God's revealed word, but rather a *witness* to the revelation experience.

Regarding content, this view sees the Bible as merely the result of its writer's rational reflection upon God's individual and personal self-manifestation to them. In other words, Moses did not receive the Ten Commandments directly from God, nor did he obtain specific instructions concerning the earthly tabernacle, its furnishings, or its ceremonies.

Thus the encounterist does not believe that the concepts conveyed in Scripture are the word of God, as the plenarist believes. The plenarist holds inspiration to be objective—that is, something apart from the individual by which he is daily judged. The encounterist sees the word of God as a personal, subjective experience—an inner experience that is remarkably powerful and compelling. *Experience*, as the encounterist sees it, constitutes the word of God—not ideas, thoughts, conceptions, or propositional truth.

As the prophet attempts to express *his own* ideas or thoughts in describing this "divine-

human encounter” he thus attempts to convey the word of God as he feels it from within. This attempt could be compared to a person’s relating in a prayer meeting testimony what God did for him that week.

For the encounterist, *the prophet is inspired in heart, rather than in head*. Thus the person who hears or reads the prophet’s words also has a subjective experience. Truth is therefore defined as experiential. The experience becomes the word of God for the student, rather than the word of God being defined as the literal words, concepts, and propositions expressed by the prophet.

The plenarist does not disparage the place of experience in the life of the Christian; indeed, in at least 13 locations Ellen White uses the expression *experimental religion*. But human experience *never supercedes* the objective word of God, which must itself determine the validity of *all* experience.¹¹⁰

3. *Quantitative, Not Qualitative*. Finally, for the encounterist, *everyone* is inspired. The prophet simply has a more superlative degree of inspiration than the ordinary individual.

The issue at this point is *a difference in degree versus a difference in kind*. The prophet has a more intense degree of inspiration, it is held, than that of average people. A prophet’s, minister’s, or politician’s eloquence may lead people to do things they would not otherwise do. Because such a person lifts others up out of themselves, he is thus considered “inspired.”

There may certainly be some kind of secular, nonprophetic inspiration. We sometimes think of an artist, a sculptor, a musical composer or performer as being “inspired.” But this ordinary, secular inspiration has nothing whatever to do with the kind of prophetic inspiration spoken of in the Bible.

In Biblical inspiration, the prophet is taken off in vision. He or she may lose natural strength only to receive a supernatural endowment. For the prophet, God breathes—literally; for in the vision state the prophet does not breathe. And while in this state, the prophet receives infallible messages from the Lord.

Ordinary individuals may be moved by the inspired words of the prophet; their lives may be fundamentally altered for the better. But that experience is not the “inspiration” that the Bible writers and Ellen White possessed. When ordinary people are “inspired,” it is some other *kind* of inspiration than the Biblical variety. *It is a difference in kind, not in degree*.

This idea of degrees of inspiration that is so prevalent in encounter theology has, historically, had a certain appeal with Adventism. In 1884 then-General Conference President George I. Butler’s series of ten articles in the *Review and*

Herald posited this idea of degrees of inspiration. Ellen White wrote him a letter of rebuke¹¹¹ in which she came about as close to sarcasm as she ever did, pointing out that God had not inspired this series on inspiration, nor had He approved of the teaching of these views at the sanitarium, college, or publishing house in Battle Creek!

A Significant Difference

At this point, the reader may, rather wearily, say, “What practical difference does it make which position I take?” It makes a big difference. Let us note some of the significant implications that result from accepting the encounterist view:

1. The Bible is no longer the bearer of eternal truths; it is no longer a book of doctrine. It degenerates into merely a witness to the “divine-human encounter” between God and a prophet. It is no longer a statement of truths *from* God or truths *about* God. It is merely the personal view of the prophet giving his subjective reaction to a highly subjective experience.

2. The *reader* of the prophet’s words, then, becomes the authority, the arbiter who decides what (for him) is inspired and what is not. He reads the Bible critically; but he is not obliged to believe what it says *in principle*, conceptually, but rather what he interprets it to mean *to him*. He decides whether a given statement is to be accepted at face value, or whether it is to be accepted at all.

The reader’s subjective experience becomes normative—the standard of what he will accept or reject as binding on his life and experience.

However, if there is no objective revelation as criterion, then there is no way an individual can validate his experience, no way for him to determine whether this experience is from the Holy Spirit or from an unholy spirit. It is simply not enough to say that one’s experience is “self-authenticating.” As John Robertson has so trenchantly commented, “It may also be self-deceiving.”

3. The subjective view is a distortion. It distorts the proper, legitimate place of context. It also distorts the proper place of experience, by making it the criterion for authenticity. The subjective view emphasizes “the autonomy of historical conditioning,” and makes demythologizing of the prophet a necessity to contemporary understanding. Further, it distorts genuine prophetic inspiration by imposing the idea of degrees of inspiration upon it as a central category.

4. In practical terms, the encounter view results in the adoption of the following theological positions:

a. Creation, as taught in Genesis, is neither literal nor scientific. Rather, evolution becomes the favored view, with Genesis being seen as merely recording the quaint ideas extant in the

time of Moses.

b. With regard to the Incarnation of Christ, Jesus was not really a divine-human being. He was only a man. The encounter view rejects supernatural events such as the virgin birth and miracles, as we commonly define them.

5. In demonology, the Bible, says the encounterist, merely reports the common ideas of a time when it was popularly but incorrectly believed that demons possessed the physical bodies of certain unfortunate human victims. Today, says the encounterist, we know that *all* mental illness and insanity are caused by external conditions such as chemical imbalances and unfavorable environment—but not by spirits.

Plenarists can certainly agree that some mental illness, perhaps much of it, is caused by external, nonsupernatural causes; but they cannot accept a view that declares that *all* mental illness is so caused. This author saw too much in his 12 years of mission service to believe otherwise!

In the final analysis, then, the encounterist, subjective view of inspiration ultimately constitutes a denial of the “faith once delivered to the saints.” It is a clever substitution of “cleverly devised fables” for an infallible revelation of truth as given by God through divinely (and objectively) inspired prophets. And those who accept this view risk losing eternal life.

IV. The Purpose of Inspiration/Revelation

Leslie Hardinge, a veteran Seventh-day Adventist college and seminary Bible teacher, once made a very profound statement: “Without analogy, there is no real teaching.” The most effective teaching in the Bible, or anywhere else, is done through metaphor and simile. Let us notice, first, two interesting, helpful metaphors that Bible writers employ in the New Testament to enlarge our understanding of the purpose of inspiration/revelation.

Two Biblical Metaphors

1. The Apostle Paul repeatedly speaks of prophetic inspiration as the gift from the Holy Spirit—one of the so-called “spiritual gifts” (Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12).

A person may receive many kinds of gifts. Some gifts are useless or even embarrassing. However, the most valuable gifts I have ever received were either utilitarian gifts that filled a particular need in my day-to-day existence (such as a pen, an attache case, or a typewriter) or gifts of love in which the sentiment that prompted the gift far transcended the inherent, immediate value of the gift. This sentiment bestowed upon the gift a value it would not otherwise have possessed.

The gift of prophecy can be described in the same terms. To some it is useless. To others it is a continual embarrassment and annoyance, for it cuts across their lifestyle repeatedly, dealing as it does with particulars of day-to-day existence. The carnal heart strenuously objects to the restraints put upon it by inspired revelation.

The choice of the metaphor *gift* is a fortunate one when we come to the question of inspiration/revelation. The purpose of this gift is to promote the work of the ministry of the body (church) of God—to strengthen and guide the church (Ephesians 4:12-15). Notice in particular its four purposes in this connection:

a. The *perfection* of the saints (that they may grow up into Christ).

b. The *unification* of the saints (so that there will be no schism in the body of Christ. See 1 Corinthians 12:25).

c. The *edification* of the saints (inspired writings provide doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. See 2 Timothy 3:16).

d. The *stabilization* of the saints (that they may have an anchor to keep them from drifting about on every wave of doctrine).

2. The Apostle Peter adds a second metaphor, actually borrowing it from one of David’s psalms. He sees prophetic inspiration as resembling a light that shines in a darkened place for a practical and necessary purpose—to keep us from stumbling and falling (2 Peter 1:19). A millenium earlier David had likened the word of God to a “lamp” to the feet, a “light” to the path (Psalm 119:105).

As a “light,” prophetic inspiration serves two valuable functions:

a. One of the main purposes of the prophetic writings (although certainly not their only function) is to reveal future events. Revelation thus helps us to make adequate preparation for coming events and enables us to relate constructively to these events when they occur.¹¹²

However, a less obvious reason for including the prophetic element in Scripture is to validate the Bible’s divine origin—to show that God is its Author. Mortals cannot predict what will happen even moments in advance; but God can tell centuries in advance what will transpire. This function of inspiration was the particular burden of Isaiah.¹¹³

b. Equally important is the function of revelation as light to protect the believer. Inspired writings provide a light that exposes Satan’s goals and his proposed methodology for accomplishing his objective. Truly, “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).

Conclusion

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole mat-

ter” is not only a sound pedagogical device, but also a spiritual imperative.

Inspiration has been seen as a process in which God uniquely imparts eternally important truths through “his servants, the prophets,” who “at sundry times and in divers manners” have spoken to their contemporaries and to those who would later follow to enable them to understand the divine mind and will of God for their lives.

We have, especially in these closing hours of earth’s history, an overriding need to understand how this phenomena operates, so that we may not only have an intelligent understanding of what God is trying to say to us, but also so that we may avoid the perils and pitfalls that arise from the holding of false views.

Paul’s admonition to the saints of the New

Testament—“Quench not the Spirit. [Don’t let the candle go out!] Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)—is but the echo of the counsel of Jehosaphat in the Old Testament: “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20).

In the second presentation in this series we will consider the question of inerrancy and infallibility—Does the true prophet ever err? The experience of Ellen White will be examined in the light of the evidence of Bible prophets.

(Part II of this three-part continuing education series will appear in the December, 1981-January, 1982, issue of the JOURNAL.)

FOOTNOTES

¹ Matthew 13:57. For an especially helpful—and relevant—examination of this phenomenon of rejection, in the context of the current controversy over the role and function of Ellen G. White, see J. R. Spangler’s editorial, “Persecuting the Prophets,” in *Ministry* (February, 1981), pp. 21, 25.

² Joel 2:28-32; Rev. 10:12; 12:17; 10:10; Eph. 4:11-15; 1 Cor. 12:12, 28. See also “Prophecy After New Testament Times,” chapter 8 of T. Housel Jemison’s *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1955), pp. 135-147.

³ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), Book 1, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ _____, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 667.

⁶ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 48.

⁷ _____, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), p. 276.

⁸ Indebtedness in deriving working definitions is acknowledged to Dr. Raoul Dederen’s “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration,” North American Division Bible Conference Notebook, 1974, pp. 1-20.

⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16. *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Italics supplied. See also *The Amplified Bible*.

¹⁰ See Daniel 10:17, also a subsequent discussion of physical phenomena which follows below.

¹¹ Acts 27:17, 27.

¹² *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Chicago, Ill.: The Howard Severance Co., 1915) III:1479, 1480.

¹³ Dederen, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ephesians 3:3-5.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:6-14.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:29.

¹⁸ John 14:26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ John 16:13.

²¹ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 512.

²² Revelation 1:11; 21:6; 22:13.

²³ 1 Corinthians 12:7.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18; cf. also John 15:16.

²⁵ Ephesians 4:11.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:5-7; 12:28; 14:1.

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:31.

²⁹ Genesis 1:2, 26. The “Elohim” of verse 26 is plural noun.

³⁰ Revelation 1:1; John 8:28; 5:19, 30.

³¹ John 16:7, 13, 14.

³² 2 Peter 1:21.

³³ Revelation 1:1; 22:6. Cf. Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26.

³⁴ For example, 1 Kings 22:19. This exact expression appears 36 times in the Old Testament alone; variations appear even more frequently throughout the entire Bible.

³⁵ Revelation 5:11.

³⁶ John 13:16; 15:20.

³⁷ Exodus 20; cf. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 616; and *Seventh-day Adven-*

tist Bible Commentary (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1953), vol. 1, pp. 1103, 1104.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the SDA Pub. Assn., 1870), vol. 1, p. 399; _____, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882), p. 32.

³⁹ Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 12:28.

⁴⁰ Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6; *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 398, 399; _____, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), p. 351.

⁴¹ *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 399; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

⁴² Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 7.

⁴³ Acts 1:26.

⁴⁴ Letter 37, March 4, 1900; cited in *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 328.

⁴⁵ 1 Samuel 3:1; Numbers 12:6; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 16:9.

⁴⁶ Cited by Arthur L. White in quoting his father, William C. White, in *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1969), p. 7.

⁴⁷ See Acts 2.

⁴⁸ From a stenographically prepared transcript of Walter Rea’s lecture, “White Lies,” Adventist Forum, San Diego, California, February 14, 1981, p. 10. In a letter dated July 17, 1981, I requested in writing that Walter Rea grant me permission to quote him directly from his verbatim transcript. In his reply dated July 21, Rea in effect declined the request, tacitly admitting that he might have made some small errors in his presentation to the forum. Instead, he appealed to me not to get into minor nit picking but to stay with the larger issues. Physical phenomena is one such larger issue, and Walter Rea has tended to emphasize it by alleging that published reports of Ellen White’s holding a large Bible in vision are mythical and without foundation.

⁴⁹ Published in *Spectrum X:1* (May, 1979), pp. 23-57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵¹ See, for example, “The Witness of the ‘Big Bible’ ” by Arthur L. White, September 13, 1979, and “Ellen G. White and the Big Bible” by Ron Graybill, 1981, both unpublished manuscripts circulated as working papers among the Ellen G. White Estate staff.

⁵² See *General Conference Bulletin*, January 29, 1893, pp. 19, 20; *SDA Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), p. 374; and Paul Gordon’s monograph, “Revelation-Inspiration: Ellen G. White’s Witness and Experience,” July, 1978, p. 1.

⁵³ Eight-page report of Otis Nichols (undated), p. 7. From internal evidence it is apparent that Nichols could not have written this first-person eyewitness account before 1847; and it is obvious that it could not have been penned after 1860, since Ellen White quotes three paragraphs of it in *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1860), vol. 2, pp. 77-79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See “How the Visions Were Given,” in *Messenger to the Remnant*, pp. 6-8.

⁵⁶ See “The Alpha and the Omega” and “The Foundation of Our Faith” in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 193-208.

⁵⁷ *Review and Herald* (October 8, 1867), cited in *Messenger to the Remnant*, pp. 13, 60, and 79.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ “A False Prophetess?” *Newsweek* (January 19, 1981), p. 72.

⁶⁰ Robert W. Olson, *101 Questions on the Sanctuary and on Ellen White* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), pp. 105, 106.

- ⁶¹ See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 345.
- ⁶² See *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 346, 356.
- ⁶³ *101 Questions on the Sanctuary*, p. 106.
- ⁶⁴ From the *New American Standard Bible*, © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975. Used by permission.
- ⁶⁵ *101 Questions on the Sanctuary*, pp. 106, 107.
- ⁶⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp. 64-85; 105-108.
- ⁶⁷ *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 600-604.
- ⁶⁸ Virgil Robinson, *Reach Out* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), p. 300.
- ⁶⁹ A. W. Spalding, *Pioneer Stories* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1942), pp. 206, 207, cited in *The Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Voice of Prophecy, 1960), pp. 28, 29.
- ⁷⁰ J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, Mich.: General Conference Assn. of SDA, 1892), pp. 231-233.
- ⁷¹ The author acknowledges indebtedness to Dr. Earle Hilgert, who taught a course in "Introduction to New Testament" at the SDA Theological Seminary, January, 1959, in which much of the material in this section of the article was presented.
- ⁷² *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 15-23.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ⁷⁸ *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 562.
- ⁷⁹ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 19, 20.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. vi; _____, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 73.
- ⁸⁵ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 747.
- ⁸⁶ _____, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1940), p. 250.
- ⁸⁷ _____, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1937), pp. 68, 81.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- ⁸⁹ Hilgert, *Loc. cit.*
- ⁹⁰ *A Prophet Among You*.
- ⁹¹ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷ *The Great Controversy*, p. v. Italics supplied.
- ⁹⁸ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 710.
- ⁹⁹ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 17.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ¹⁰¹ *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 449.
- ¹⁰² *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 15.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ¹⁰⁴ T. Housel Jemison, *Christian Beliefs* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1959), p. 22.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 20.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Christian Beliefs*, p. 17.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 23.
- ¹⁰⁸ Indebtedness is acknowledged for many of the ideas in this section to Dr. John L. Robertson, "The Challenge to God's Word," and Dr. Raoul Dederen, *Loc. cit.* Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify individual contributions from existing notes.
- ¹⁰⁹ Dederen, *Loc. cit.*
- ¹¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 512.
- ¹¹¹ Letter 12, 1889, published in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 23.
- ¹¹² See Rev. 1:1, 2; 22:6; John 16:13; 13:19; 14:29; Daniel 2:28; and Amos 3:7.
- ¹¹³ Isaiah 41:21-23; 42:9; 43:9; 44:7, 8; 45:3, 21, 22; 46:9, 10.

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