Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880-1930)

Denis Kaiser, Andrews University

Date of Award
2016

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy

School
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Program
Religion, Adventist Studies PhD

First Advisor
Merlin D. Burt

Second Advisor
Jerry A. Moon

Third Advisor
Denis Fortin

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

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

This was a documentary study based primarily on published and unpublished primary sources produced by selected Seventh-day Adventists between 1845 and 1930.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

Conclusions

The study identified five general stages in the development of Seventh-day Adventist perceptions of divine inspiration. (1) From 1845 to 1883 they believed in the divine inspiration of both Scripture and Ellen White's writings without clarifying the particulars. Scripture was nevertheless seen as having supreme authority, being the only basis for faith and practice. (2) From 1883 to 1888 the theory of degrees of inspiration gained some influence within the denomination in the attempt to vindicate White's writings against critics. (3) That theory experienced its demise after 1888 when various people connected to the Signs of the Times advocated the verbal inspiration of Scripture and, in some cases, of White's writings. (4) Her return to the United States in 1900 and the subsequent Kellogg crisis urged several advocates of verbal inspiration either to modify their view or to reject her inspiration altogether. (5) After the controversy over the correct interpretation of the tâmîd (continual, daily) in Daniel 8 and the revision of the Great Controversy in 1911, relations of the proponents of verbal and thought inspiration swayed between severe tensions and collegial cooperation. Adventist discussions about inspiration revolved primarily around perceptions of Ellen White's inspiration. Throughout her life, Ellen White maintained, however, a dynamic view that allowed for diverse non-dominating operations of the Holy Spirit, which did not fit any particular theory of inspiration.

Subject Area

Seventh-day Adventists--Doctrines--Inspiration, Inspiration--Religious aspects, Seventh-day Adventists--History, White, Ellen Gould Harmon, 1827-1915

Recommended Citation


https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/1621

Seventh-day Adventists are post-tribulation premillennialists who accept the Bible teaching on a literal 1000 years in Revelation 20 that immediately follows the literal second coming of Christ described in Revelation 19. In contrast to almost all premillennialist groups they do not believe in a 1000-year kingdom on earth during the millennium. All information for History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s wiki comes from the below links. Any source is valid, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Pictures, videos, biodata, and files relating to History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are also acceptable encyclopedic sources. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Seventh-day_Adventist_Church. Seventh-day Adventists were inspired by love for Jesus and conviction that He was coming soon, by confidence in divine prophecies, and by belief that the Spirit of Prophecy was manifested in Ellen White. They were, in consequence, willing to dare anything. As we mark 150 years of Seventh-day Adventists being united for mission, there is more need than ever for Adventist men and women of all ages, and all ethnic and social backgrounds, to follow the example of our founders. Founded in love for our Savior and His love for sinners, we need to proclaim Christ and Him crucified, His longing that men and women be whole, and His desire that we “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev.