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32 See William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 316, who lists various possible criteria for nonnormativeness within Scripture: "limited recipient, limited cultural conditions for fulfillment, limited cultural rationale, or a limiting larger context." Even these cases, Larkin argues, involve only the form, and not the meaning of Scripture, and call for the reduction of the cultural-specific form to a principle, and the substitution of a contemporary form compatible with it. See Larkin, pp. 316-318, for illustrations drawn from the way the NT writers used the OT.

33 See David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 103-128.

34 See the reprint of these in P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 299, 300.

35 RH 11/25/1884.

36 See George W. Reid, "Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 69-76, for analysis of the traditional SDA hermeneutic as essentially the same as upheld by ATS, in opposition to the new historical-critical paradigm shift in the Seventh-day Adventist Church starting in the 1950's.

37 What some describe in a distorted way as "proof-text" method is simply the principle of "the Bible as its own expositor" discussed as IIIA above and utilized by Jesus and all the NT writers. There is, of course, an illegitimate "proof-text" approach which takes biblical passages in isolation without regard for their original context, and makes them "prove" what in fact they do not teach. This illegitimate usage of biblical texts has been a pit into which proponents of the historical-critical method have fallen no less often than those following the historical-grammatical approach.

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ELLEN WHITE ON THEOLOGY, ITS METHODS, AND THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

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Seventh-day Adventists consider Ellen White (1827-1915) one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its most influential writer. The following discussion focuses on how she views theology, theological method, and its use in advancing divine truth. First we will look at her attitude toward theology. Then we will investigate what she has to say about theological methods.

Ellen White distinguishes two types of theology. The theology she approves of she calls "true" or "sound" theology. Theology she warns against is popular or objectionable theology.

Ellen White's Attitude Toward Theology

Characteristics of True Theology. Ellen White would like to see "in every school" a theology characterized by "the most simple theory."¹ The Bible contains a "system of theology and philosophy" that is both "simple and complete,"² yet "sublime."³ It is so profoundly simple that even a child can understand it. Yet at the same time, so profoundly sublime that it baffles the intellectual giant.⁴

Scripture's "grand central theme" consists of "God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption."⁵ The "central truth" of a vital theology is the "atonement of Christ;" thus, students will be exposed to "the wonderful theme of redemption."⁶ Its purpose is to make "us wise

unto salvation." It reveals "the love of God as shown in the plan of redemption" and provides the essential knowledge of Christ as our Savior.⁷

A vital theology is to be "saturated with the love of Christ." Its effect produces in believers a practical wholistic lifestyle: The diffusion of this love throughout the body "touches every vital part,—the brain, the heart, the helping hands, the feet," enabling people to stand firmly for God.⁸ It brings true vitality to the church and leads "to the doing of works that will bear fruit after the similitude of the character of God."⁹

True theology, as stated by Wycliffe, centers around the "distinctive doctrines of Protestantism—salvation through faith in Christ, and the sole infallibility of the Scripture."¹⁰ It continues the process of reform that began with the Protestant Reformation to lead people away from a dependence on human and ecclesiastical traditions. Among proponents who gave leadership to a vital theology she lists individuals in the Reformation heritage such as Wycliffe,¹¹ Luther,¹² Zwingli¹³ and Wesley.¹⁴ This she places in sharp contrast to Satan's strategy in directing people's attention to the "opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, . . . the voice of the majority" for deciding what is truth for faith.¹⁵

Characteristics of Popular Theology. Popular theology is characterized by false interpretations of Scripture. The origin of many of these errors may be traced to the "ages of papal darkness, that is the Dark Ages."¹⁶

The nature of this theology is speculative. It exalts human theories based on philosophy and theology above the Word of God and stands in sharp contrast to the eternal truths taught by the Bible writers.¹⁷ Its presence is widespread. "To a large degree," Ellen White writes, "theology, as studied and taught, is but a record of human speculation."¹⁸

Objectionable theology mixes religion with harmful amusements. She specifically rejects a theology which advocates that it is necessary for the health of patients to play cards and dance as a "pleasurable excitement to keep their spirits up."¹⁹

Major errors. Throughout her writings she comments on many errors in popular theology. Among the most prominent are the

doctrine of natural immortality,²⁰ the ministering spirits of the dead,²¹ the everlasting punishing in hell,²² the consciousness of the dead,²³ the transference of the biblical day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday,²⁴ and the abolition of God's moral law, the Decalogue.²⁵

Results of erroneous theology. The problem with erroneous theology is its detrimental effects on mind and judgment which exposes believers to temptations. The study of these speculations confuses the mind.²⁶ Says Ellen White, it "perverts the judgment and opens the door to temptation, and through its influence Satan seeks to turn hearts from the truth." For a defense she recommends "an intelligent love for the truth" which "sanctifies the receiver, and keeps him from the enemy's deceptive snares."²⁷

The theological errors which were introduced into the church during the ages of papal supremacy had a devastating effect. They created "an erroneous conception of God"²⁸ which led many to doubt and skepticism about the Bible as the Word of God.²⁹ "Thousands upon thousands" have become skeptics and unbelievers.³⁰

Unsound theology confuses the intellect and disqualifies a person for teaching. Speaking of Dr. Kellogg, she says, his "theology is not sound; his mind is confused, and unless he sees his danger, his foundation will be swept away when the test comes. Unless he sees his danger and makes a decided change, he can not be endorsed as a safe, all-round teacher."³¹

Incorrect approaches. There are two dangers against which Ellen White especially warns. One is a "scientific theology" which had come into the Battle Creek church in 1906. Its impact led people away from a true faith in God and raised questions about her writings.³²

The second danger is the work of higher criticism, also called historical criticism. It is the use of the historical-critical method for the study of the Bible. This approach she characterizes as "dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing" the Scriptures. The result is the destruction of faith in Scripture as the Word of God.³³ She considered it to be one of Satan's tools of deception. Through its "pleasing sentiments," she says, "the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths."³⁴

The reason for her strong opposition to higher criticism is that

it "is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation; it is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives."³⁵ She compares its influence to the destructive effect of tradition and rabbinical teaching in Christ's days.³⁶

In a sermon she ironically contrasts the higher critics, whom she identifies as "poor, finite man on probation," with the true Higher Critic, "the Lord God of the universe who has spread the canopy of the heavens above us, and has made the stars and called them forth in their order."³⁷

Motives for Studying Theology

Too often the study of theology is pursued with an incorrect motive: "An ambition to become acquainted with philosophers and theologians, a desire to present Christianity to the people in learned terms and propositions."³⁸ This is contrary to the true theology of Scripture with its emphasis on clarity and plainness.

Correct motives are directed by a desire to nourish food for both mind and soul.³⁹ When it comes to motives for studying theology in non-SDA institutions Ellen White calls attention to the motives of the Waldenses studying in Roman Catholic institutions. The purpose of their study was evangelistic: sowing "the seeds of truth in other minds" while getting an education. However, this mission was not for all young people and leadership is to handpick those qualified. It was only for those who possessed the special spiritual qualifications: "Strong young men, rooted and grounded in the faith" with "a living connection with God."⁴⁰

Today's objectives for such a study would be similar: Students "would have a wider field for study and observation," be associated "with different classes of minds," and obtain "an acquaintance with the workings and results of popular methods of education, and a knowledge of theology as taught in the leading institutions of learning." This education will prepare students for the specific mission of laboring for "the educated classes" as well as combating "the prevailing errors of our time."⁴¹

The Objectives of Theology

Researching and interpreting the Bible is a delicate occupation. Ellen White points out that "all who handle the word of God

are engaged in a most solemn and sacred work."⁴² The objectives of this important work that Ellen White sees follow.

Use Correct Principles of Interpretation. One of the foremost objectives for those engaged in theology is finding the correct principles to interpret the Bible. These principles are found in "the Bible and the Bible only." There students will discover the vital principle that "the Bible is its own interpreter."⁴³ This principle she fully endorses in her account of the conflict between the Protestant reformers and the papacy.⁴⁴ The principle of the Bible interpreting itself, one part of Scripture interprets another⁴⁵ within its own biblical context⁴⁶ is basic for all interpretation.

Acquire Sound Wisdom. A correct interpretation of Scripture requires the possession of sound wisdom. This wisdom comes only with much personal effort. "We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study."⁴⁷ The study of Scripture generates the quality of wisdom necessary for successful discovery of truth.

Search for Salvation. God desires that all should obtain salvation. This salvation "depends on a knowledge of the truth contained in the Scriptures." It is, therefore, obvious that one of the most important tasks of individuals engaged in theology is to "search the precious Bible with hungry hearts."⁴⁸

The Bible, she remarks, "contains the science of all sciences, the science of salvation."⁴⁹ The quest for truth, therefore, should never stop. "The more we study the Word with a simple, trustful heart, the more we understand the path we must travel in order to reach the Paradise of God."⁵⁰

Study Qualifies for Soul-winning. Again and again we are impressed with Ellen White's stress on the practicality of Bible research. The gospel truths must be shared.⁵¹ It is through digging "deep in the Scriptures of truth," with weeping, fasting and praying that a person becomes qualified "to go forth and watch for souls as they that must give an account."⁵² Thus Bible study is crucial in the development of soul-winning strategies.

Concentrate on the Biblical Text. Another objective of theology is to understand the biblical text. Ellen White encourages a search to discover the meaning of difficult passages. Some Scriptural passages "are easily understood," but "the true meaning of

other parts is not so readily discerned."⁵³ This underscores the need for serious Bible study so as to grasp the meaning of these difficult passages.

There is the need to discover the deeper meaning of Bible passages. In the words of Scripture there lies a significance that must be discovered, going beyond the surface. In reflecting on Christ as "the truth," she says, "His words are truth, and they have a deeper significance than appears on the surface."⁵⁴

Ellen White warns against a shallow understanding of the truth. "We must not be satisfied with superficial knowledge," but "seek to learn the full meaning of the words of truth, and to drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles."⁵⁵ This enterprise, demands "careful thought as to the meaning of the sacred text."⁵⁶ Much searching of the Bible, therefore, is an indispensable requirement for its understanding.

Understand the Historical-Cultural Setting. A realistic picture of the historical, cultural context of biblical episodes leads to an improved understanding of both the past and the present. To achieve this Ellen White suggests going back in our minds to the original scene. She illustrates this by an episode from the life of Christ, inviting the readers to "enter into the thoughts and feelings" of His disciples. "Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deep lessons."⁵⁷ In doing so, Ellen White does not endorse the view that the key to the knowledge of the Bible is its socio-cultural context of the surrounding religious, political, and social institutions. The proper and supreme context of the Bible for understanding is the revelation of God embodied in the Bible itself.

Separate Truth from Errors. Ellen White challenges the researcher to rescue God's truth from the erroneous interpretations that have accumulated throughout the centuries: "There is a great work to be done by the earnest Bible student; for gems of truth are to be gathered up, and separated from the companionship of error."⁵⁸ Errors have crept into theology over many centuries, but the Bible will be the guide to separate error from truth. "There are errors and inconsistencies which many denounce as the teaching of the Bible that are really false interpretations of Scripture, adopted

during the ages of papal darkness."⁵⁹ What looks like an inconsistency or error does not seem to be one in fact for those who "cling to the Bible as it reads, and stop. . . criticisms in regard to its validity."⁶⁰

Bible Study: Medium of Communication. Ellen White says that "the Bible is the mine of the unsearchable riches of Christ."⁶¹ She encourages digging deep into this most precious mine to gather its magnificent gems. "The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator, and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will." Such study "is the medium of communication between God and man."⁶²

Avoid Criticism: Affirm God's Character. In colorful terms she addresses those trying "to correct the errors of the Bible:" "In seeking to make plain or unravel mysteries hid for ages from mortal man, they are like a man floundering about in the mud, unable to extricate himself and yet telling others how to get out of the muddy sea they themselves are in."⁶³ Confidently she adds, "No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said."⁶⁴ Instead of criticizing the Bible we must reveal to the world God's true character.⁶⁵

Recognize Unfolding Nature of Scripture. Bible truth is progressive. It "is an advancing truth."⁶⁶ It is true that "we have some understanding of the inspired books of the Old and New Testament," but "there is much that even in our day we do not see and comprehend."⁶⁷ There is "need of deep research"⁶⁸ to discover "new aspects of truth in both the Old and New Testament," and see "the exceeding breadth and compass of truths which we imagine we understand, but of which we have only a superficial knowledge."⁶⁹

There is a "need for thorough and continuous searching of the Scriptures for greater light. We must watch with earnestness that we may discern any ray of light which God shall present to us."⁷⁰ "We are to catch the first gleamings of truth," she says, that "through prayerful study clearer light may be obtained, which can be brought before others."⁷¹ It is God's will that His people "should be ever moving forward, to receive the increased and ever-increasing light which is shining for them."⁷² "We must walk in the increasing light."⁷³ It is obvious that the new light and advanced

truth brings new responsibilities that will profoundly effect the behavior and mission of the church.

Examine the Foundations of Our Faith. Ellen White indicates that the new light God has given to Seventh-day Adventists should "lead us to a diligent study of the Scriptures, and a most critical examination of the positions which we hold. God would have all the bearings and positions of truth thoroughly and perseveringly searched, with prayer and fasting." Its purpose being that the believers' faith should "be firmly founded upon the word of God so that when the testing time shall come and they are brought before councils to answer for their faith they may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."⁷⁴

Ellen White encourages an open-minded attitude towards the traditional Seventh-day Adventist interpretations, saying that "there is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error."⁷⁵

She warns against the idea that all teachings of the church are infallible. The fact that certain doctrines have been held "as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation."⁷⁶ She says that "in closely investigating every jot and tittle which we think is established truth, in comparing scripture with scripture, we may discover errors in our interpretations of Scripture." She confidently promises that if such a "search is properly conducted, jewels of inestimable value will be found. The word of God is the mine of the unsearchable riches of Christ."⁷⁷

"Truth is eternal," she says, "and conflict with error will only make manifest its strength. . . . If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it."⁷⁸ This "investigation," however, should follow the proper principles of interpretation.

Principles Underlying Methods of Theology

Ellen White bases the methods of theology on three characteristics of the Bible: uniqueness, authority and unity.

The Uniqueness of the Bible. *Authorship.* The Bible is

different from all other books. Its uniqueness rests in its divine authorship. "The Bible," Ellen White says, "points to God as its author."⁷⁹ All its revealed truths are "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet this awareness does not come without thoughtful study. "The evidence of the truth of God's word is in the word itself."⁸⁰ This means that one must become personally acquainted with the Bible. "A settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures," she writes, comes "through personal experience," in "a knowledge of God and His word."⁸¹

Infallibility and Trustworthiness. When theologians deal with the Bible they must have confidence in its accuracy and reliability. Assurance in its accuracy is associated with the understanding of inspiration. Ellen White views inspiration as a process. First, God qualifies persons to communicate His truth.⁸² Then, He guides "the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write."⁸³ She observes that the Bible has been written in human language and "everything that is human is imperfect."⁸⁴ But although God communicates His testimony "through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God."⁸⁵ It is important not to forget the function of the Bible: It "was given for practical purposes."⁸⁶ Human language, therefore, imperfect though it may be, can still function as an accurate and trustworthy vehicle for communication of eternal truths.

The sacred text has been remarkably preserved by God throughout history in spite of the work of some copyists, who, influenced by tradition, when copies were few, have tried to improve the text "when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain."⁸⁷

The Bible is "to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will."⁸⁸ "Man is fallible," she states, "but God's Word is infallible."⁸⁹ The Bible is "the unerring standard" by which all ideas must be tested.⁹⁰

Ellen White rejects the claim that the Bible contains contradictions. Such a conclusion derives from a "superficial knowledge" of the Bible.⁹¹ Rightly understood it reveals "perfect harmony."⁹²

The Authority of the Bible. *Source.* Like its uniqueness, the authority of the Bible is rooted in God's authorship. It is "God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with

our ears."⁹³ Consequently the Bible is the "only infallible authority in religion."⁹⁴ Humans are to receive it as the "supreme authority."⁹⁵

Extent. Its authority extends over faith, doctrine, experience,⁹⁶ history,⁹⁷ science,⁹⁸ human wisdom,⁹⁹ and extra biblical revelation.¹⁰⁰ Ellen White always recognizes the Bible as the supreme norm by which everything, including her own works, ought to be tested.¹⁰¹

Although not in favor of creeds, she urges people to adopt a creed for their lives: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed."¹⁰²

In speaking about the extent of its superiority, she states that "God's holy word needs not the torch light glimmer of earth to make its glories distinguishable," because "it is light in itself—the glory of God revealed, and beside it every other light is dim."¹⁰³ Therefore she warns: "Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God."¹⁰⁴

This view has far reaching implications for the theological approach to Scripture. It means that a study of the Bible itself is far more valuable than the study of the great writers of theology.¹⁰⁵

The Unity of the Bible. Fundamental to the unity of the Bible is its divine authorship.¹⁰⁶ This view has profound implications on the nature and relationship of the books that make up the Scriptures.

Harmony of Scripture. A unique characteristic of the Bible is the harmony that exists between the books that compose it. Although written by various persons, each writer, "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all."¹⁰⁷

Many do not see this unity. First, it requires divine illumination. Ellen White points out that only "the illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread."¹⁰⁸ Second, biblical harmony is discovered through a thorough research of the Scripture. Said she, "He who earnestly searches the Scriptures will see that harmony exists between the various parts of the Bible; he will discover the bearing

of one passage upon another, and the reward of his toil will be exceedingly precious."¹⁰⁹

Progressive revelation. An understanding of the concept of progressive revelation as the unfolding of previous divine revelation is important in perceiving the unity of the Bible. This concept is a divine design that is carefully interwoven throughout the Scriptures. Ellen White writes that "the Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw a fitting opportunity to impress man at sundry times and divers places. Men wrote as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost."¹¹⁰

Progressive revelation can be illustrated with the ancient prophets. They received special illumination from the Spirit, but they did not fully comprehend "the import of the revelations committed to them. The meaning was to be unfolded from age to age, as the people of God should need the instruction therein contained."¹¹¹ These new insights "unfolded from age to age" were always in full harmony with previous revelations.

Ellen White saw a striking example of progressive revelation in the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. She states: "The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other."¹¹² This intimate unity explains her statement that "the Savior is revealed in the Old Testament as clearly as in the New."¹¹³ "The New Testament does not present a new religion; the Old Testament does not present a religion to be superseded by the New. The New Testament is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old."¹¹⁴

Divine revelation in the lives of the Bible writers brought about unique literary productions characterized by a harmonious unity in diversity, not uniformity. She wrote: "The Lord gave His word. . . through different writers, each having his own individuality. Each has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds."¹¹⁵ Consequently "the thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mold, making the very hearing monotonous. In such uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty."¹¹⁶ The distinctive-

ness of the different Bible books are needed for the biblical message to penetrate human hearts.

Limitations of Theology

Theology as practiced by human beings has serious limitations. "In the Word of God many queries are raised," Ellen White writes, "that the most profound scholars can never answer."¹¹⁷ The reason for this is that the "word of God, like the character of its divine Author, presents mysteries that can never be fully comprehended by finite beings."¹¹⁸ In the research of the Scriptures one may go as deep as possible, "and yet there is an infinity beyond."¹¹⁹

To keep human achievements in theology in their proper perspectives she brings out that it must "be emphasized, and often repeated, that the mysteries of the Bible are not because God has sought to conceal truth, but because our own weakness or ignorance makes us incapable of comprehending or appropriating truth. The limitation is not in His purpose but in our capacity."¹²⁰

The differences between the finite creature and the infinite Creator should always be kept in mind by the researcher and interpreter. This difference, Ellen White says, makes it impossible "for created beings to attain to a full understanding of God and His works."¹²¹ "The depth of human intellect may be measured; the works of human authors may be mastered; but the highest, deepest, broadest flight of the imagination cannot find out God. There is infinity beyond all that we can comprehend."¹²²

Illustrating the magnitude and grandeur of the Word of God, she writes, "It is impossible for any human mind to exhaust even one truth or promise of the Bible. One catches the glory from one point of view, another from another point; yet we can discern only gleamings. The full radiance is beyond our vision. As we contemplate the great things of God's Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us we behold a boundless, shoreless sea."¹²³

This view of human limitations should keep persons humble in their theological statements.

Proper Methods of Theology

Miller's Principles Endorsed. William Miller's principles of interpretation, which underlie the foundations of SDA theology, Ellen White fully endorses. Said she: "Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted." His method consisted of "simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation."¹²⁴

The successful use of these methods is intimately connected with the exercise of genuine faith: "Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering."¹²⁵ Several of the following concepts can be found among Miller's principles.

Bible only. In light of the general departure from Bible truth Ellen White stresses the "need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty."¹²⁶ She states that "searching the Scriptures alone will bring the knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent."¹²⁷

In the quest for an understanding of Bible truth it is not imperative to study extra-biblical sources while they may illuminate certain backgrounds, the divine revelation in the Scriptures is fully adequate. "All that man needs to know and can know of God," she says, "has been revealed in His Word and in the life of His Son, the great Teacher."¹²⁸

The whole canon of the Scriptures should be the context in which the student operates. The student "should learn to view the Word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts."¹²⁹ This view cautions against the practice of using a "canon within a canon" that draws conclusions from a constricted Bible in which a certain topic is elevated to function as most important theme at the expense of equally important other themes.

The Role of the Spirit of Prophecy. The relation between the Bible and the operation of the Spirit of Prophecy at the end of time (Rev 12:17; 19:10) is carefully defined. The Bible, Ellen White writes, assures true believers continual guidance by the Holy Spirit. God also has promised in the Bible to give "visions in the 'last days,' not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to

correct those who err from Bible truth."¹³⁰ The reason for this role of the Holy Spirit in the end-time is because "little heed is given to the Bible." Through the Spirit of Prophecy "the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."¹³¹ Ellen White makes the following comparison: "In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit."¹³²

The Testimonies. What is the relation of Ellen White's messages or testimonies to the Bible? They are not an addition to the Bible, but an aid in its understanding. "God," she said, "has seen fit in this manner to bring the minds of His people to His word, to give them a clearer understanding of it."¹³³ They are not to give "new light" but "to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed." She emphasizes that "additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse."¹³⁴

Although these testimonies are not new light, they contain light that corrects errors and defines truth: "The Lord has given me much light that I want the people to have for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for His people." She adds that "this is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors and to specify what is truth."¹³⁵

The establishment of the foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church shows the intimate relationship between the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Often Ellen White's visions would confirm the results of the Bible studies of the Adventist Sabbath-keepers during the formative years. However, there were a few times when the Bible conferences were stalled and her visions broke the deadlock and guided the believers to the correct biblical solution. The truth—"especially concerning the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the message of Heaven for these last days, as given by the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation," she says, "has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord." It is God Himself, she declares, who "through His Word and the testimony

of His Spirit" has revealed the permanence of these "fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority."¹³⁶

Definition of the "Bible only." An analysis of Ellen White's use of the phrase "the Bible and the Bible only" reveals that she contrasts it with human "views and ideas,"¹³⁷ erroneous traditions on the Sabbath and the Law of God,¹³⁸ mistaken opinions of scholars, scientists, theologians,¹³⁹ "sayings and doings of men,"¹⁴⁰ "human wisdom,"¹⁴¹ false visions,¹⁴² views of the churches steeped in "popular theology" from which the early Adventists separated themselves,¹⁴³ the "religions of fable and tradition," "imaginary religion," "a religion of words and forms," and "tradition and human theories and maxims."¹⁴⁴ These phrases show that she uses the "Bible only" to contrast biblical truth with the *unbiblical* positions of religious traditions, experience, ecclesiastical position and human reason.

The expression the "Bible only" was never contrasted with her own writings. In Ellen White's mind there was perfect harmony between the Bible and her writings because "the Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and the author of the spirit of prophecy."¹⁴⁵ Therefore, "it is impossible that the teachings of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word."¹⁴⁶

This unique relationship between the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy has given the latter a place above all extra-biblical sources. Consequently in the study of the Bible the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy (Ellen White) hold a superior position over other research tools. Ellen White maintains that her writings while in harmony with the Bible are not to be added to the Bible. As noted above she maintains that the Spirit of Prophecy writings are the "lesser light to lead men and women to the great light [the Bible]."

The Use of Non-Inspired Christian Writings. As to the religious value of non-inspired Christian sources, she says, "the opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority,—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith."¹⁴⁷

On the value of commentaries she remarks that "many think that they must consult commentaries on the Scriptures in order to

understand the meaning of the word of God." She does not object to their use, stating, "We would not take the position that commentaries should not be studied," but cautions that "it will take much discernment to discover the truth of God under the mass of the words of men."¹⁴⁸ She says, "many think it essential to acquire an extensive knowledge of historical and theological writings" because "they suppose that this knowledge will be an aid to them in teaching the gospel" but "their laborious study of the opinions of men tends to the enfeebling of their ministry, rather than to its strengthening."¹⁴⁹

Bible: Self-interpreting. Ellen White believes that Scripture is the key to understand Scripture and to unlock the treasure house of truth. She recommends Miller's rule: "Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound it to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom, is my rule, not the Bible."¹⁵⁰

In explaining her position she remarks, "we are not to accept the opinions of commentators as the voice of God" because "they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor."¹⁵¹ The operation of this method she places within the broad perspective of Christ's role within the great controversy between good and evil.¹⁵²

Theological methods, therefore, must be derived from the Bible. The two following methods are the result of this rule.

The Analogy of Scripture. For the understanding and development of doctrine Ellen White endorses Miller's method of the analogy of Scripture: "To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error."¹⁵³ This method teaches that to understand Bible doctrine correctly, it is first necessary to collect all Scripture passages on a certain subject, and then to try formulating the doctrine without the slightest contradiction.

She explains it as follows: "Make the Bible its own expositor, bringing together all that is said concerning a given subject at

different times and under varied circumstances."¹⁵⁴ "Compare verse with verse, and you will find that Scripture is the key which unlocks Scripture."¹⁵⁵ One passage of Scripture will prove "a key to unlock other passages, and in this way light is shed upon the hidden meaning of the word, By comparing different texts treating the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident."¹⁵⁶

This method began to be extensively used during the Protestant Reformation¹⁵⁷ and is still to be employed. She not only recommends this method of Bible study in a general way but recommends the use of this method to understand difficult passages.¹⁵⁸ It is the method on the basis of which the Bible student discovers the hidden or true meaning of the text,¹⁵⁹ to gain new insights,¹⁶⁰ to correct misinterpretations,¹⁶¹ and to solve theological disagreements and perplexities among believers.¹⁶²

Typology. The second approach again derived from Scripture is the typological method. It is intended to reveal the true meaning of the type and the fulfillment of its antitype. Ellen White fully endorses the typological method as legitimate in the formulation of doctrine.

Its importance she illustrates by the experience of Christ's disciples whose faith was founded on the testimony about Christ in "the types and prophecies of the Old Testament."¹⁶³ Christ the "originator" of the Jewish ceremonial system of worship of types and symbols designed it to teach "spiritual and heavenly things"¹⁶⁴ and important truths concerning the atonement.¹⁶⁵ Its ritual, pointing to "future redemption,"¹⁶⁶ represented the "gospel in symbol."¹⁶⁷ "Great truths" are revealed by this system which has as its "central object" to point people to "the Lamb of God that was to take away the sin of the world."¹⁶⁸ The scope of the typological method is immense for it pertains not only to Christ's sacrifice at the cross but also to His heavenly priesthood which lasts till the end of the world.¹⁶⁹

Contextual Considerations. Ellen White approves of Miller's method that "every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible."¹⁷⁰ This means that each word of a particular subject must be in harmony with the context of the whole Bible.

She opposes the proof text method, which disregards the proper context, warning against the practice of some who "in order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices" use certain "passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite."¹⁷¹ Her personal use of texts indicates that she has no objection against using a string of texts to proof a point provided they are in harmony with the whole Biblical context on the subject.

Lifestyle and Theology

Using proper methods in theology will not automatically guarantee sound theology, new truth, proper insights, concepts, or discoveries. The lifestyle of the theologians is crucial to the value and quality of their theology.

The successful outcome of correct methods of theology Ellen White links intimately with the spiritual condition of the interpreter. Correct theological discoveries, therefore, come only as the results of diligent and prayerful study of the Bible.

Persons engaged in the pursuit of theology, be they professionals or laity, must have a vital connection with Christ,¹⁷² daily growing in grace,¹⁷³ and living a righteous life.¹⁷⁴ Their lifestyle has to be characterized by walking obediently in the present light,¹⁷⁵ including the light of health reform,¹⁷⁶ and involves purging sin from their lives.¹⁷⁷ Humility instead of pride should dominate their attitudes¹⁷⁸ and a willingness to accept and apply old truths.¹⁷⁹ Chosen and illuminated by the Holy Spirit,¹⁸⁰ they will constantly advance in proportion to the light¹⁸¹ and recognize the Spirit of Prophecy as a continuing source of truth.¹⁸²

When any of these lifestyle characteristics are absent there is no assurance that the result of their theological study is sound or can be trusted.

Finally, it is important to realize that it is a lifestyle of cherishing Christ's principles which is the determining element in the judgment.¹⁸³ "Those whom Christ commends in the Judgment, may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them."¹⁸⁴ Among the saved will be

persons who have had "no opportunity to understand the philosophy of theology"¹⁸⁵ as known in the popular theology of the world.

Endnotes

- 1 MS 156, 1898 (*Evangelism*, p. 223).
- 2 *Special Testimonies on Education*, p. 53.
- 3 *That I May Know Him*, p. 8; see "The Bible a Means of Both Mental and Moral Culture," *Review and Herald*, Sep. 25, 1883.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Education*, p. 190.
- 6 MS 156, 1898 (*Evangelism*, p. 223).
- 7 *Special Testimonies on Education*, 53. See also, *Counsels to Parents, Students and Teachers*, p. 422; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 129.
- 8 "Principles of Service," *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1910.
- 9 "What God Is," *Southern Review*, Jan. 1, 1901.
- 10 *Great Controversy*, p. 89; Cf. *ibid.*, p. 102.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-96.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 120-170. Luther's hope for the success of true theology was the younger, not the older generation for they had not yet been educated in error (Ellen G. White, "Summoned to Augsburg," *Signs of the Times*, 06-28-83).
- 13 *Great Controversy*, pp. 171-184.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 253-264.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 595.
- 16 *Testimonies*, 5:710,711.
- 17 *Great Controversy*, p. 126. See also Ellen G. White, "Luther at Wittenberg," *Signs of the Times*, June 7, 1883.
- 18 *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 380.
- 19 *Manuscript Releases*, 5:380. This view was the result of the theology of Dr. Jackson.
- 20 *Great Controversy*, p. 551.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4:356.
- 23 *The Faith I Live By*, p. 174; White, *Great Controversy*, p. 546.
- 24 *1888 Materials*, p. 780.
- 25 *Great Controversy*, pp. 260-264.
- 26 *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 380.
- 27 "The Christian Pathway," *Signs of the Times*, Mar. 6, 1884.
- 28 *Testimonies*, 5:710,711.
- 29 *Great Controversy*, p. 525.
- 30 *Testimonies*, 5:710,711.
- 31 *Battle Creek Letters*, 87.
- 32 "Hold Fast the Beginning of Your Confidence," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 9, 1906. See *The Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters*, p. 66; White, MS 61, June 3, 1906.
- 33 *Education*, p. 227.
- 34 *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 474. His other tools are "evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism (*ibid.*).
- 35 *Education*, p. 227.
- 36 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 142.
- 37 MS 43a, 1894.
- 38 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 442.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Testimonies*, 5:583, 584; Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 1:354.
- 41 *Testimonies*, 5:584.

- 42 MS 4, 1896 in *Manuscript Releases*, 4:55.
 43 See e.g., *Great Controversy*, p. 173. Cf. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 106.
 44 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 187.
 45 *Child Guidance*, p. 511.
 46 See *Great Controversy*, pp. 102, 126, 132, 173.
 47 *Christian Education*, p. 58.
 48 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 111.
 49 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
 50 *Upward Look*, p. 54.
 51 See MS 4, 1896 in *Manuscript Releases*, 4:55, 56.
 52 "My People Have Committed Two Evils," *Signs of the Times*, Oct. 2, 1893.
 53 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 108.
 54 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 110. See *Christian Education*, p. 59; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 90-91.
 55 "Search the Scriptures," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 9, 1883.
 56 *Ibid.*
 57 *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 1.
 58 "The Bible Our Guide," *Bible Echo*, Oct. 15, 1892.
 59 *Testimonies*, 5:710.
 60 *Selected Messages*, 1:18.
 61 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 107.
 62 *Great Controversy*, p. 69.
 63 *Selected Messages*, 1:16.
 64 *Ibid.*
 65 *Testimonies*, 5:710.
 66 *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 33.
 67 "Imperative Necessity of Searching for Truth," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 15, 1892.
 68 *Ibid.*
 69 "Bible Our Guide."
 70 *Testimonies*, 5:708.
 71 *Ibid.*
 72 *Ibid.*, pp. 708-709.
 73 *Writers and Editors*, p. 33.
 74 *Testimonies*, 5:708.
 75 "Christ Our Hope," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1892; White, *Writers and Editors*, p. 35.
 76 *Ibid.*
 77 "Treasure Hidden," *Review and Herald*, July 12, 1898.
 78 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 107.
 79 *Great Controversy*, p. v.
 80 *Testimonies*, 8:157.
 81 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 462.
 82 *Selected Messages*, 1:26.
 83 *Ibid.*
 84 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 85 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 86 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 87 *Early Writings*, pp. 220-221.
 88 *Great Controversy*, p. vii.
 89 "A Missionary Appeal," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1885.
 90 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 462.
 91 *Selected Messages*, 1:20.
 92 *Christian Education*, p. 194.
 93 *Testimonies*, 6:393.
 94 See *Great Controversy*, p. 238. Cf. *ibid.* p. 177.
 95 *Testimonies*, 6:402.

- 96 See *Great Controversy*, p. vii.
 97 *Bible Echo*, Aug. 1891; White, *Christian Education*, p. 65. Here she said that in the Bible only can we find "the history of our race unsullied by human prejudice or human pride."
 98 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 181.
 99 See *SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1079.
 100 *Selected Messages*, 2:85-100.
 101 *Ibid.*
 102 *Selected Messages*, 1:416.
 103 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 111.
 104 *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:919.
 105 "Bible Study," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 11, 1881.
 106 *Great Controversy*, p. v.
 107 *Ibid.*
 108 *Selected Messages*, p. 20.
 109 "Bible Our Guide," Cf. "Searching for Truth."
 110 *Selected Messages*, 1:19-20.
 111 *Great Controversy*, p. 344.
 112 *Selected Messages*, 2:104.
 113 *Desire of Ages*, p. 799.
 114 *Testimonies*, 6:392.
 115 *Selected Messages*, 1:21-22.
 116 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
 117 *Ibid.*, 3:310.
 118 *Steps to Christ*, p. 106.
 119 "Bible Study."
 120 *Education*, p. 170.
 121 "The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration," *Bible Echo*, July 15, 1889.
 122 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 113.
 123 *Education*, p. 171.
 124 "Notes of Travel," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.
 125 *Ibid.*
 126 *Great Controversy*, p. 204, 205.
 127 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 415.
 128 MS 124, 1903 in *Bible Commentary*, 6:1079.
 129 *Education*, p. 190.
 130 *Early Writings*, p. 78.
 131 "An Open Letter . . .," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903.
 132 *Testimonies*, 5:661.
 133 *Ibid.*, p. 663.
 134 *Ibid.*, p. 665.
 135 Letter 127, 1910 in *Selected Messages*, 3:32. The published source has a typographical error. It refers to Letter 117 instead of 127.
 136 *Selected Messages*, 1:208.
 137 "Missionary Appeal."
 138 *Great Controversy*, p. 448.
 139 *Ibid.*, p. 595.
 140 *Counsels on Sabbath Work*, p. 84.
 141 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 200.
 142 *Selected Messages*, 2:85.
 143 *Writers and Editors*, p. 145.
 144 *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 624-626.
 145 Letter 92, 1900.
 146 *Great Controversy*, p. vii.
 147 See *Great Controversy*, p. 595.
 148 *Fundamentals of Education*, pp. 187-188.
 149 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 441.

- 150 "Notes of Travel."
 151 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 106.
 152 See *Education*, p. 190.
 153 "Notes of Travel."
 154 "Search the Scriptures."
 155 *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 437.
 156 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 187; cf. *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 437.
 157 See e.g., *Great Controversy*, p. 203.
 158 *Christian Education*, 59; *Steps to Christ*, p. 90-91.
 159 *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 187; "Bible Study" *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 26, 1895.
 160 See, *Testimonies*, 4:499.
 161 MS 4, 1896 in *Manuscript Releases*, 4:56.
 162 *Great Controversy*, pp. 354, 423; cf. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 476.
 163 *Desire of Ages*, p. 799.
 164 *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:933.
 165 *Great Controversy*, p. 420.
 166 *SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1094.
 167 *Prophet and Kings*, p. 489.
 168 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.
 169 *Ibid.*, 365; *Great Controversy*, p. 352.
 170 "Notes of Travel."
 171 *Great Controversy*, p. 521. Cf. Judas' approach in White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 719.
 172 *Writers and Editors*, p. 35; *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 130-131.
 173 *Testimonies*, 5:706.
 174 *Writers and Editors*, pp. 34, 35.
 175 *My Life Today*, p. 310. Cf. *Testimonies*, 2:67.
 176 *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 70-71.
 177 *Ministry of Healing*, pp. 464-465.
 178 "Be Zealous and Repent," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 23, 1890.
 179 *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127; *Testimonies*, 5:369.
 180 *Gospel Workers*, p. 297; "Be Zealous."
 181 *Testimonies*, 5:534.
 182 See, *Life Sketches*, pp. 198-200.
 183 *Maranatha*, p. 320.
 184 *Desire of Ages*, p. 638.
 185 "Ye Did It To Me," *Signs of the Times*, August 7, 1893.

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THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORLD VIEWS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY

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Next year (1994) marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great Disappointment (October, 1844) and the subsequent development of the Seventh-day Adventist church.¹ Since this time the denomination produced a Bible commentary (7 volumes),² a Bible Dictionary,³ a couple of Sourcebooks,⁴ and an Encyclopedia,⁵ as well as major books on various biblical topics.⁷ It has not as yet published a full-fledged systematic theology in which all doctrines unfold in an inner coherence to form a system true to Scripture.⁸

Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists consider themselves a "people of the Book." They believe in the Bible as God's word. It is a reliable presentation of divine thoughts in human language, and is best understood when Scripture interprets Scripture (*sola Scriptura*). Furthermore they believe that all of the Bible (*tota scriptura*) and only the Bible (*prima scriptura*) is the foundation of doctrinal truths.

But this has not been the customary method of approach throughout the history of theology. Rather, throughout much of the Christian era, theologians have relied upon extra-biblical sources to inform and interpret biblical truths. This reaching beyond the Bible has often distorted the comprehension of biblical truths. Such a method could do the same to Adventist theology if we ever lose