

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

WHICH ARE
REVEALED,
WORDS OR
IDEAS?

URIAH SMITH

Which Are Revealed, Words or Ideas?

Ellen G. White

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Overview

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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by Uriah Smith

In the *Review* of October 18, 1887, we took occasion to offer a few remarks concerning the course of those who are making a specialty of opposing Sister White and her work. Their stronghold is to place her in a false light, misrepresent our position in reference to her work, and having bolstered up to their satisfaction this man of straw, then engage in childish glee in hurling at it their clubs of ridicule and condemnation.

For instance, they say, "We know her *words* are not inspired," thus covertly implying that she claims and we hold that they are; and then they produce what they suppose to be a stunning fact that she sometimes herself changes the phraseology of her sentences, employs amanuenses to assist in preparing her works for the press, and inserts quotations from history. "Are these all inspired, too?" they sneeringly ask.

All we deemed it necessary to say in reply, in the paper referred to, was to deny in *toto* the implied charge, and ask who holds, or has ever contended that her words were inspired; and who now argues that the words, the mere language, of even the Scriptures themselves are inspired?

Another false light they throw upon the subject by saying that she can not go into a community and work miracles in proof of her mission as the ancient prophets did. We replied that she does not claim to be playing the role of Moses: that the title "prophetess" is an epithet which her opponents throw after her, not one which she assumes herself, and that the ancient prophets, so far as we are aware, did not go around vaunting their prophetic calling, and asking the people to come out and see them work a miracle in proof of their claim. Hence this representation is doubly foolish, inasmuch as, first, it puts the old prophets in a wrong light; and, secondly, even if it represented them correctly, it would still be illogical to take their course to condemn hers, since she does not claim to be acting the part they acted.

A brother in Arkansas wishes more light on some of these points, and asks wherein Sister White's position is not like that of Moses, inasmuch as it was through Moses that God communicated instruction to the people. We answer that if God's dealing with Moses had

stopped at that point, there would have been perhaps some ground for comparison; but it did not: 1. Moses was a mediator between God and the people; which no one is now. 2. A new dispensation had then come; which is not the case now. 3. A whole nation was then migrating bodily from one country to another, and must have a head and leader; but no such movement is now in progress, no such agencies are required, and no one is called upon to take any such position.

The question is asked, further, Did not Elijah call the people together and work before them a stupendous miracle? and was not this to show who was the true prophet? We answer, No; it was to show who was the *true God*. Elijah, it is true, claimed to be a prophet of Jehovah, and no one seemed to dispute his claim. There was no issue on that point. But the question to be settled was whether Elijah's God was the Lord, or whether Baal was. And the miracle decided the question very emphatically.

But further, the questioner says, "Is not a word a sign of an idea? and how then can an idea be inspired, and the signs that transfer the idea from one mind to another be uninspired?" *Ans.*—If there was but one word by which an idea could be expressed, this would be so; but when there are perhaps a hundred ways of expressing the same idea, the case becomes very different. Of course, if the Holy Spirit should give a person words to write he would be obliged to use those very words, without change; but when simply a scene or view is presented before a person, and no language is given, he would be at liberty to describe it in his own words, as might seem to him best to express the truth in the case. And if, having written it out once, a better way of expressing it should occur to him, it would be perfectly legitimate for him to scratch out all he had written and write it over again, keeping strictly to the ideas and facts which had been show him; and in the second writing there would be the divinely communicated idea just as much as in the first, while in neither case could it be said that the words employed were dictated by the Holy Spirit, but were left to the judgment of the individual himself.

Much of what the prophets have written in the Scriptures are words spoken directly by the Lord, and are not their own words. In these cases, of course, the words are inspired. In Sister White's

writings she often records words spoken by angels. Such words, of course, she gives as she hears them, and has no discretionary power in regard to the terms to be used, or the construction to be followed. These are not her words, and are not to be changed. But much of what the penmen of the Bible have said they might have written in different phraseology, and the truths uttered have been inspired truths to the same extent that they are now....

When John on the Isle of Patmos heard the voice of majesty and love addressing him, as he was wrapped in the Spirit, the voice said unto him, "What thou *seest* write," not "Write the *words* that I shall give thee." [Revelation 1:11](#). And when John says, in [verse 12](#), "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me," he might have said, "And I turned to see who was speaking with me," and this would have been just as much inspiration as the former. These examples will illustrate what we mean by saying that the words may not be inspired, while at the same time the ideas, the facts, the truths, which those words convey, may be divinely communicated.

The same method of reasoning which opposers adopt in regard to Sister White when they ask if her amanuenses, and the historians she quotes, were inspired too, the infidel uses against the word of God itself. We call our English Bible an inspired book; but the English is a translation from the original Hebrew. Other translations have been made, and the translators differ much in the phraseology of their translations; whereupon the infidel asks, Are these translators all inspired, too? And he asks it on just as good ground, and with just as much reason, as those referred to above ask the same question with reference to the writings of Sister White.—Editorial, [The Review and Herald, March 13, 1888](#).

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