

of the evolutionary theory," he declared in the *Review and Herald* in 1968, "we must keep in clear perspective—the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy are not on trial." It soon became evident that Ritland's days as director were numbered, that Marsh was now more attuned than he to the pulse of the church. In 1971, Ritland, finding it increasingly difficult to function within the constraints imposed by the administration in Takoma Park, resigned his position as director of the Geoscience Research Institute and joined Marsh in what was becoming an Adventist Siberia, the An-

draws University Biology Department. The church's brief experiment with "open-mindedness" thus came to an end.

Under its new director, Robert H. Brown, the Institute quickly swung into line behind the Pierson administration. Those scientists who resisted the revival of the White-Price-Marsh philosophy soon found themselves without a platform or, worse yet, without a job. . . .

Adventist leaders as late as the mid-1970s still considered evolutionary biology and geology to be "sciences of satanic origin."

*for the first time, two days of those discussions on Ellen White. Many consider that in Spectrum's 25 years of existence it is these pages that have most affected Adventist thinking. It is a fact that extra copies of this issue quickly sold out.*

*What follows are excerpts from Couperus' introduction and from the two days of the 1919 discussions that followed it in Spectrum.*

## Introduction

The struggle that has been present in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to come to an acceptable and honest decision about the place which the writings of Ellen White should have for our church and those in other churches is illustrated by the discussions which took place at the Bible Conference in Takoma Park, from July 1-21, 1919, and which was followed immediately by a three-weeks long meeting of the Bible and History Teachers Council. In the *Review and Herald* of Aug. 14, 1919, W. E. Howell lists 22 delegates from our colleges attending the Bible and History Teachers Council, and other evidence indicates that the total number attending the Bible Conference was over 50. The president of the General Conference at that time, Arthur G. Daniells, reported on the Bible Conference in the *Review and Herald* of Aug. 21, 1919, and informs us that the meeting was attended "by editors, Bible and history teachers from our colleges and seminaries, and members of the General Conference Committee." Among those present at the Bible Conference, besides A. G. Daniells, were G. B. Thompson, field secretary of the General Conference; F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*; M. E. Kern, formerly president of the Foreign Mission Seminary (now Columbia Union College); W. W. Prescott, formerly

## The 1919 Bible Conference



by Molleurus Couperus  
Vol. 10, No. 1 (May 1979)

*Molleurus Couperus, now retired in Angwin, California, has lived one of the most physically and intellectually adventurous Adventist lives of his generation. It is not surprising that he became the first editor of Spectrum, serving through its first six volumes. Couperus, born in Holland, graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) and the College of Medical Evangelists. He served as a missionary in what was then the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). He later settled in the United States, where for many years he chaired the department of dermatology at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine.*

*On his hundreds of international*

*trips he met many famous figures, including King Hussein of Jordan, whom he treated when the king was still a child, and Louis B. Leakey, the world-renowned Eastern African anthropologist of early man. Leakey many times stayed at Couperus' home and lectured in Couperus' course on physical anthropology at the University of California at Los Angeles.*

*In the crucial first years of its existence, Couperus established Spectrum's reputation for excellence and irenic independence. (See the excerpt from Richard Osborn's essay printed above.) Couperus' editorial coups continued after he left the editorship. He secured for Spectrum a long-lost transcript discovered by the denomination's archivist, Donald Yost. The 2,400 pages record discussions of two meetings held in Takoma Park, Maryland in 1919: a Bible Conference, held July 1-21, followed by a three-week long Bible and History Teachers Council attended by some of the church's highest elected leaders, including General Conference President A. G. Daniells. The full transcript has yet to be published. However, 60 years after the event, Spectrum published,*

editor of the *Review and Herald* and then a field secretary of the General Conference (who had a major part in the revision of the book *The Great Controversy* in 1911); H. C. Lacey, religion teacher at the Foreign Mission Seminary; W. E. Howell, editor of the *Christian Educator*; W. G. Wirth, a religion teacher at Pacific Union College, and later at the College of Medical Evangelists; M. C. Wilcox, book editor for the Pacific Press; A. O. Tait, editor of the *Signs of the Times*; C. M. Sorenson, history teacher at Emmanuel Missionary College; C. S. Longacre, secretary of the Religious Liberty Association; W. H. Wakeham, Bible teacher at Emmanuel Missionary College; J. N. Anderson, Bible teacher at the Washington Foreign Mission Seminary; C. L. Taylor, head of the Bible Department, Canadian Junior College; L. L. Caviness, associate editor of the *Review and Herald*; and T. M. French, head of the school of theology at Emmanuel Missionary College. . . .

The record of the 1919 Bible Conference was lost until December 1974, when Dr. F. Donald Yost found two packages wrapped in paper at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Takoma Park. The packages contained some 2,400 pages of typewritten material, transcribed from stenographic notes taken at the Conference.

## July 30, 1919

**W. W. Prescott:** How should we use the writings of the spirit of prophecy as an authority by which to settle historical questions?

**A. G. Daniells:** Well, now, as I understand it, Sister White never claimed to be an authority on history, and never claimed to be a dogmatic teacher on theology. She never outlined a course of theology, like Mrs. Eddy's book on teach-

ing. She just gave out fragmentary statements, but left the pastors and evangelists and preachers to work out all these problems of scripture and of theology and of history. She never claimed to be an authority on history; and as I have understood it, where the history related to the interpretation of prophecy was clear and expressive, she wove it into her writings; but I have always understood that, as far as she was concerned, she was ready to correct in revision such statements as she thought should be corrected. I have never gone to her writings, and taken the history that I found in her writings, as the positive statement of history regarding the fulfillment of prophecy. I do not know how others may view that, but I have felt that I should deal with history in the same way that I am

exhorted to deal with the Bible—prove it all carefully and thoroughly, and then let her go on and make such revisions from time to time as seem best.

Just one more thought: Now you know something about that little book, "The Life of Paul." You know the difficulty we got into about that. We could never claim inspiration in the whole thought and makeup of the book, because it has been thrown aside because it was badly put together. Credits were not given to the proper authorities, and some of that crept into "The Great Controversy,"—the lack of credits; and in the revision of that book those things were carefully run down and made right. Personally that has never shaken my faith, but there are men who have been greatly hurt by it, and I think it is because they claimed too much for these writings. Just as Brother White says, there is a danger in going away from the Book, and claiming too much. Let it have its full weight, just as God has fixed it, and then I think we will stand without being shaken when some of these things do appear that we can not harmonize with our theory. . . .

I will tell you one thing, a great victory will be gained if we get a liberal spirit so that we will treat brethren who differ with us on the interpretation of the Testimonies in the same Christian way we treat them when they differ on the interpretation of the Bible. That will be a good deal gained, and it is worth gaining, I want to tell you, for I have been under criticism ever since the controversy started at Battle Creek. Isn't it a strange thing that when I and some of my associates fought that heresy year after year, and we got message after message from the spirit of prophecy—some of them very comforting and uplifting messages—and all that time we were counted as

## Our Best Titles

Soquel Through a Glass  
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Missionaries to the Dark  
Continents of Politics

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Adventism and the Church  
of Baseball

—*John Hoyt*

heretics on the spirit of prophecy? How do you account for that? Why didn't the spirit of prophecy get after us? I claim that I know as well as any man whether I believe in the spirit of prophecy or not. I do not ask people to accept my views, but I would like the confidence of brothers where we differ in interpretation. If we can engender that spirit, it will be a great help; and I believe we have to teach it right in our schools.

Suppose students come to you with questions about the Bible that you do not know what to do with,—or do you always know? I would like to go to a teacher for a year that would tell me everything in here that puzzles me! What do you do when students come to you with such questions?

**W. H. Wakeham:** I tell them I do not know, and I do not lose their confidence, either.

**A. G. Daniells:** Well, when they come to you with something in the spirit of prophecy that is puzzling, why not say, as Peter did, that there are some things hard to be understood. I do not think that destroys the confidence of the people. But we have got the idea that we have got to just assume full and complete knowledge of everything about the spirit of prophecy and take an extreme position in order to be loyal and to be true to it. . . .

## August 1, 1919

**C. M. Sorenson:** Does Sister White use the word "inspiration" concerning her own writings, or is that merely a theory we have worked up ourselves? I ask for information? I have never seen that in her writings.

**A. G. Daniells:** I hardly know where to begin or what to say. I think I must repeat this, that our difficulty lies in two points, especially. One is on infallibility and the other is on verbal inspiration. I think James White foresaw difficul-

ties along this line away back at the beginning. He knew that he took Sister White's testimonies and helped to write them out and make them clear and grammatical and plain. He knew that he was doing that right along. And he knew that the secretaries they employed took them and put them into grammatical condition, transposed sentences, completed sentences, and used words that Sister White did not herself write in her original copy. He saw that, and yet he saw some brethren who did not know this, and who had great confidence in the Testimonies, just believing and teaching that these words were given to Sister White as well as the thought. And he tried to correct that idea. You will find those statements in the *Review and Herald*, like the one Brother Wilcox read

the other day. If that explanation had been accepted and passed on down, we would have been free from a great many perplexities that we have now.

**F. M. Wilcox:** Articles were published in those early *Reviews* disclaiming that.

**A. G. Daniells:** Yes, but you know there are some brethren who go in all over. We could mention some old and some young who think they cannot believe the Testimonies without just putting them up as absolutely infallible and word-inspired, taking the whole thing as given verbally by the Lord. They do not see how to believe them and how to get good out of them except in that way and I suppose some people would feel that if they did not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, they could not have confidence in it, and take it as the great Book that they now see it to be. Some men are technical, and can hardly understand it in any other way. Some other men are not so technical in logic, but they have great faith and great confidence, and so they can go through on another line of thought. I am sure there has been advocated an idea of infallibility in Sister White and verbal inspiration in the Testimonies that has led people to expect too much and make too great claims, and so we have gotten into difficulty.

Now, as I have studied it these years since I was thrown into the controversy at Battle Creek, I have endeavored to ascertain the truth and then be true to the truth. I do not know how to do except that way. It will never help me, or help the people, to make a false claim to evade some trouble. I know we have difficulties here, but let us dispose of some of the main things first. Brethren, are we going to evade difficulties or help out the difficulties by taking a false position? [Voices: No!] Well, then let us

## Our Best Titles

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Profit or Prophet?  
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Friendly Fire in Sacred  
Groves  
—*Glenn Coe*

Silent Sanctuary: Growing  
Up in Kansas  
—*Kent Seltman*

take an honest, true position, and reach our end somehow, because I never will put up a false claim to evade something that will come up a little later on. That is not honest and it is not Christian, and so I take my stand there.

In Australia I saw *The Desire of Ages* being made up, and I saw the rewriting of chapters, some of them written over and over again. I saw that, and when I talked with Sister Davis about it, I tell you I had to square up to this thing and begin to settle things about the spirit of prophecy. If these false positions had never been taken, the thing would be much plainer than it is today. What was charged was plagiarism would all have been simplified, and I believe men would have been saved to the cause if from the start we had understood this thing as it should have been. With those

false views held, we face difficulties in straightening up. We will not meet those difficulties by resorting to a false claim. We could meet them just for today by saying, "Brethren, I believe in the verbal inspiration of the Testimonies; I believe in the infallibility of the one through whom they came, and everything that is written there I will take and I will stand on that against all comers."

If we did that, I would just take everything from A to Z, exactly as it was written, without making any explanations to any one; and I would not eat butter or salt or eggs if I believed that the Lord gave the words in those Testimonies to Sister White for the whole body of people in this world. But I do not believe it.

**M. E. Kern:** You couldn't and keep your conscience clear.

amendment. The National Reform Association, formed in 1864, spearheaded this drive, and it was this right-wing movement that particularly disturbed Mrs. White and other Adventists.

Ellen White shared the evangelical idea that the Sunday-Sabbath was crucial to the future of civilization. Only, she turned the concept on its head by declaring that the enforcement of a Sunday-Sabbath would destroy America and civilization at large rather than improve the world. Like other evangelicals, she ascribed cosmic significance to the Sunday-Sabbath, but in a negative rather than a positive sense. The real confrontation between her and evangelicals on the sabbatarian issue involved the question of whether to protect the American republic and Anglo-American civilization with [a] national Sabbath or without it. Again, Mrs. White and other Adventists hoped to preserve a Protestant America by staving off Sunday legislation. In 1888 and 1889, an anxious Adventist minority contributed to the defeat of Blair's Sunday legislation to prevent a Protestant apostasy and national ruin. As a prophetic people, Adventists used their voice to sustain the republic as long as possible, borrowing time to preach Adventism throughout the world. Paradoxically, they wished to delay the end in order to preach that the end was soon. . . .

In the 1880s, however, it was still plausible for Ellen White to project that "when Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall stretch over the abyss to clasp hands with *spiritualism*, when under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods

## The World of E. G. White and The End of the World



Jonathan Butler  
Vol. 10, No. 2 (August 1979)

*Jonathan Butler is probably the most creative of a brilliant generation of trained historians of Adventism (see profile on Ronald Numbers in this issue). Butler received his B.A. from La Sierra University, his B.D. from the SDA Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in the history of American religion from the University of Chicago, where he studied under Martin*

*Marty, America's best-known historian of religion. He has taught history at both Union College and La Sierra University. Below is the first of the many original essays that he has published in many journals. Butler has written Softly and Tenderly: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870-1920 (Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991), and with Ronald Numbers co-edited The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the 19th Century (University of Tennessee Press, 1992).*

Many evangelicals were quite willing to rely fully on voluntary means in working toward a Christian commonwealth that worshipped on a "Christian Sabbath," but there were a number who sought guarantees of the nation's Christian character by constitutional