

# Holmes, Claude Ernest (1881–1953)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is North American Division Archives, Statistics, and Research director. Previously, he was professor of church history and systematic theology at Southwestern Adventist University. An ordained minister, he pastored in Colorado and Kansas. He is assistant editor of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Review and Herald, 2013) and currently is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. He also taught at the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (2013-18) and recently wrote the *Pocket Dictionary for Understanding Adventism* (Pacific Press, 2020).

A linotype operator, author, and religious liberty lobbyist, Claude E. Holmes was also a militant defender of Adventist fundamentalism who strenuously advocated for perfectionism and the inerrancy of Ellen White's writings.



Claude E. Holmes

Used with permission of the family.

## Background and Life to 1910

Claude was born May 17, 1881, at Fayette, Iowa, to Ernest (1856-1896) and Almina Ward (1845-1942) Holmes.<sup>1</sup> He attended Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, and while there received a call in 1901 to work at the Review and Herald in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>2</sup> After the disastrous fire that burned the publishing house to the ground on December 30, 1902, Holmes moved with the Review to the Washington, D.C. area.

On September 26, 1904, Claude married Edna R. Begley.<sup>3</sup> A daughter, Lucile Rose Holmes, was born to the couple on January 25, 1908. While working as a linotype operator at the Review, Holmes also took classes at Washington Training College (renamed Washington Missionary College in 1914), located about a mile away in Takoma Park, Maryland. As a student, he participated in the self-styled Young Men's Literary Society with future luminaries LeRoy E. Froom and Carlyle B. Haynes. Claude edited a quarterly they called *The Bulletin* launched in early 1906.<sup>4</sup> One of the talks he gave at a meeting of the society, entitled "What Seventh-day Adventist Young Men of To-day Are Facing," addressed a wide range of issues from health reform to dress, warning against the insidious internal and external temptations that contributed to the spread of evil.<sup>5</sup>

From 1906 to 1910 Holmes published several articles that reflected some of his early interests. One of these expressed his frustration as a linotype operator with “ignorance and carelessness” from poorly written copy. “From the view-point of the linotype operator, I would say that there seems to be a great lack of accuracy and legibility in writing.” Spelling and grammar could be remedied by taking better care, using a dictionary, and further education. He pointed out that perfection in his work was made more difficult by the imperfection of others.<sup>6</sup>

Another important theme he emphasized during this formative time was the simplicity and authority of the Bible. He was concerned about erroneous ideas creeping into Adventism so he sought to defend a literal creation—in one instance noting how the first verse of the Bible overthrows “many modern beliefs.”

In a subsequent article he called for young people to live lives of purity. He warned against the children of Israel who wandered in the wilderness for their failings.<sup>8</sup> Similarly another piece, this one on the story of Moses, urged young people to “investigate” their lives lest they not be ready when Christ returned and to train for Christian warfare against sin. Adventist schools could help young people to hone their spiritual “armor” but the most important “B.A.” degree wasn’t a degree that could be earned in a school but being “Born Again.”<sup>9</sup> In another article he exhorted Adventist young people to be among those who “will soon be judged as *perfect*.” After all, he wrote: “God says man must be perfect. We have no reason for not seeking that perfection now, as we can not [sic] excuse ourselves by saying it is impossible for us to attain.”<sup>10</sup>

Another formative theme that emerges in Holmes’ early writings is the absolute perfection of the Bible. He expressed concerns about “scientists” who were becoming “confused” in their haste to undermine the Scriptures. “If scientists and critics would take the plain statements of the bible and believe them,” he admonished, “they would, in a few minutes, arrive at the same place in their conclusions as they now do after about forty years wandering in the wilderness of skepticism and doubt.”<sup>11</sup>

He proposed some overly literalistic readings of passages as evidence for the Bible as the source of “absolute truth.” For example, he took the “thousand” who “shall fall at thy side” and the “ten thousand at thy right hand” in Psalm 91 to mean that 11,000 would fall at the sides of each member of the 144,000 end-time faithful in Revelation. That meant that the composition of the 144,000 had just about been determined, because 144,000 multiplied by 11,000 was approximately equal to the world population at the time!<sup>12</sup> A year later he wrote that the Bible was the only safety during the “cyclone” of end time events. Just as modern meteorological methods for predicting storms had increased in accuracy, Holmes believed the Bible provides the same accuracy as “predicting the approach of the terrible storms of the last days.”<sup>13</sup> In this way he was reflecting modernist assumptions about classifying knowledge and precision characteristic of his era.

Holmes early on cultivated a strong anti-intellectual proclivity. Merely repeating “the labored arguments of some learned theologian,” will lead one astray, he wrote in 1908. Instead he urged young people to use “your own

simple arguments."<sup>14</sup> Modern universities failed at making "well-founded Christians" he declared, although he expressed thanks that "our [Adventist] schools are taking decided steps in advancement."<sup>15</sup>

## Denominational Work 1914-1918

After 1910 Holmes took a break from writing extensively for church publications, but resumed again during World War I (1914-1918), writing mainly on religious liberty and the dangers of papal influence in America and the need for purity on the part of the remnant church in order to be prepared for Christ's Second Advent. He did some writing for *Liberty* beginning in 1914,<sup>16</sup> and in April of that year gave a talk before the American Federation of Patriotic Societies in Washington, D.C. on the sharp contrast between Protestantism and Catholicism. "True Protestantism is aggressive," he contended, standing up "for Bible principles of religion, for free press, free speech, and free schools." America is "founded upon Protestant principles of government—the equality of men and the complete separation of church and state," he wrote. By way of contrast, "proofs" from "Catholic sources" showed "beyond doubt" that "one of the chief purposes of Romanism is to accomplish the downfall and destruction of Protestantism and Protestant effort throughout the world." The best evidence, for Holmes, was the missionary work Catholics were doing in the United States. "By making our country 'dominantly Catholic' it is hoped to strike a deathblow to Protestantism and its missionary activity all over the world. Such a deep-laid design should awaken to action every Protestant."<sup>17</sup>

Such outspoken presentations earned him a place as an associate editor of *Liberty* for most of 1916. After 1917 Holmes did not publish anything in denominational periodicals for over a decade due to internecine conflict. During these years he undertook a sniping campaign in which he believed he was the true heir of Adventist orthodoxy.

## Fundamentalist Diatribes

During the late 1910s Holmes became convinced that denominational leaders, especially A. G. Daniells, the General Conference president, and W. W. Prescott, influential author, editor, and educational leader, were misleading the denomination. Holmes and J. S. Washburn, long-time minister and evangelist, launched an attack on the *Protestant Magazine* that Prescott edited, contributing to the periodical's demise in 1915 after only six years of publication.<sup>18</sup> Holmes was especially worried about church leaders who refused to uphold the inerrancy of Ellen White's writings. This was the source, he believed, of a lowering of standards in the denomination. He and Washburn believed that these leaders were withholding Ellen White's unpublished materials, or perhaps even worse, manipulating them during her final years and especially after her death in 1915.

In 1917, while Daniells was on a trip to Asia, Holmes gained access to the General Conference vault where he was able to make copies of unpublished testimonies (letters and manuscripts) by Ellen White. Holmes, who was already reputed to be a "living index" to Ellen White's writings, believed that there was vital information in these

unpublished documents about a divisive controversy over the meaning of “the daily” in Daniel 8:13 in which veteran church leaders such as S. N. Haskell opposed the position taken by Prescott and Daniells.<sup>19</sup> He also suspected that individuals such as Prescott, who contributed to the revisions in the 1911 edition of Ellen White’s book *The Great Controversy*, had tampered with her writings in other ways. As historian Paul McGraw put it: “Holmes sought the ammunition necessary to combat Daniells and Prescott.”<sup>20</sup>

When Daniells returned from his trip, he told Holmes that he would be fired if he did not return all copies he made of the unpublished testimonies that he had copied during his surreptitious visits to the vault. Holmes admitted to making seven copies of the unpublished testimonies, but he and others refused to return their copies. As a result, he was terminated from denominational employment.<sup>21</sup> Daniells, who had to continue traveling, left the matter with Prescott to handle, which further infuriated Holmes. For a time Holmes remained in the Takoma Park area but in the early 1920s relocated to Oak Park, Illinois, where he continued to work in the printing trade and circulated diatribes against church leaders.

Holmes and Washburn were convinced that Daniells and Prescott were up to no good at the 1919 Bible Conference held in Takoma Park. In reports they received from these meetings, they discovered that some denominational leaders presented a view of Ellen White’s writings that was more flexible than the inerrantist position they deemed essential. Anything less was to undermine the literalistic and proof-texting approach to inspired writings that they believed was necessary to uphold a faithful reading. Holmes styled this particular Adventist meeting the “Council of Darkness” and “Diet of Doubts.” It was “the crowning act in the program of doubt and darkness and criticism . . . enveloping Washington.” It was the “omega” of apostasy that Ellen White warned about. Holmes and Washburn believed it their calling to squelch this “new theology.”<sup>22</sup> As they saw it, Daniells, Prescott, and their allies were in effect pushing modernist heresy. In a scathing pamphlet he published in 1920 entitled, *Have We An Infallible “Spirit of Prophecy?”*, Holmes asked:

One tells me her books are not in harmony with facts historically, another that she is wrong scientifically, still another disputes her claims theologically and another questions her authorship, and another discredits her writings grammatically and rhetorically. Is there anything left? If these claims are all true how much Spirit of Prophecy does the remnant church possess?<sup>23</sup>

In a letter to W. C. White in 1926, Holmes re-articulated his concern: “I love your mother’s writings. They are all scripture to me.”<sup>24</sup> Holmes reflected a view popularized by the contemporaneous Fundamentalist movement in American culture that emphasized the inerrancy of inspired writings and took a militant approach to defending them. “The very honor of God is at stake in the integrity of his messenger,” he wrote in his 1920 pamphlet. Responding to objections that he put Ellen White’s writings on too high a level, he added: “Several have said to me: ‘Oh, you are making a pope out of Mrs. White,’ I reply, ‘Never!’ I would not lower the dignity and authority of God’s messenger by putting her on a par with a Pope. She is far above and superior to any Pope.” He expounded further: “Sister White is inspired, as much as any Bible prophet, and her revelations are not limited to moral

questions.”<sup>25</sup>

Such heated rhetoric continued up to the highly politicized 1922 General Conference session when Daniells was replaced by W. A. Spicer as church president (they in effect traded places in the denomination’s two top roles as General Conference president and secretary). Ultimately the denomination would repudiate Washburn and Holmes’ muckraking efforts. An official vote by the delegates condemned their work to “destroy the good names of honored officials.”<sup>26</sup> Spicer took a much more tactful approach, refusing to take positions on controversial topics and admonishing Holmes to take a more conciliatory and charitable approach when disagreeing with others.

## Later Years

Eventually, church leaders re-engaged Holmes in the late 1920s through his continued interest in religious liberty. He began slowly to publish again within church periodicals, but initially only on that topic.<sup>27</sup> Religious liberty remained his passion even as he failed to extend the same religious liberty to denominational opponents when it came to differences of Adventist orthodoxy.

Holmes during these later years would slowly rehabilitate himself, especially as the list of those he suspected as unorthodox shortened through retirement or death. The slow trickle of articles turned into a steady stream from 1933 on with five articles alone in *The Watchman Magazine* and an additional article in *Signs of the Times* during that year. He eventually renewed writing on signs of the end in various periodicals, including *Present Truth*, a new Adventist evangelistic periodical launched in 1917 and published until 1955. For his part, Holmes does not appear to have been repentant in the least bit for his divisive behavior.

Holmes discontinued publishing articles from 1937 to 1941, possibly due to the illness of his wife, Edna, who passed away in 1941. Holmes married Helen Taylor Jewell (1883-1959) on August 13, 1945. The couple moved to Largo, Florida, in April 1953, but Claude Holmes died just a few weeks later on June 10, 1953, at the age of 72.<sup>28</sup> He is buried in the Clearwater Cemetery.<sup>29</sup>

---

## SOURCES

Bruinsma, Reinder. *Seventh-day Adventist Attitudes Toward Roman Catholicism, 1844-1965*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994.

Campbell, Michael W. *The 1919 Bible Conference: The Untold Story of Adventism’s Struggle with Fundamentalism*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2019.

Campbell, Michael W. “Holmes, Claude Ernest,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Jerry Moon and Denis Fortin, rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013).

"Claude Ernest Holmes." *FamilySearch*. Accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/9Z3M-26N>.

"Claude Ernest Holmes." *Find A Grave*. Memorial ID No. 72190073, June 11, 2011. Accessed December 25, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72190073/claude-ernest-holmes>

Flynt, Harold L. "Claude E. Holmes obituary." *Southern Tidings*, July 8, 1953.

Haloviak, Bert B. "In the Shadow of the 'Daily': Background and Aftermath of the 1919 Bible and History Teachers' Conference," unpublished paper, 1979.

Harp, Gillis J. *Protestants and American Conservatism: A Short History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Holmes, Claude E. "The Accuracy of the Bible." *Youth's Instructor*, October 23, 1906.

Holmes, Claude E. "The Bible Untouched." *Youth's Instructor*, January 14, 1908.

Holmes, Claude E. "Criticisms of the Testimonies Answered," circular, ca. 1920s.

Holmes, Claude E. "Do and Trust." *Youth's Instructor*, September 1, 1908.

Holmes, Claude E. "Don't Be a Mummy." *ARH*, September 3, 1908.

Holmes, Claude E. "Fettering Our Free Press." *Liberty*, First Quarter 1916.

Holmes, Claude E. "The Gospel to Every Creature," *Youth's Instructor*, September 14, 1909 and September 21, 1909.

Holmes, Claude E. *Have We An Infallible "Spirit of Prophecy"?* Takoma Park, MD: [The Author], April 1, 1920 (White Estate Document File 352).

Holmes, Claude E. "History and Sunday Laws." *Youth's Instructor*, October 27, 1908.

Holmes, Claude E. "How to Solicit Donations." *ARH*, September 10, 1908.

Holmes, Claude E. *Imperiled Democracy*. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1938.

Holmes, Claude E. "An International Movement to Christianize Political Governments." *Liberty*, First Quarter 1915.

Holmes, C[laude] E. "Latter-day Revivals." *ARH*, August 22, 1907.

Holmes, Claude E. "Official American Documents on Religious Liberty." *Liberty*, Fourth Quarter, 1914.

Holmes, Claude E. "One Thing I Do." *ARH*, November 7, 1907.

Holmes, C[laude] E. "Organizations Indorsing Religious Legislation." *ARH*, July 25, 1912.

Holmes, Claude E. "Our World Has the Blind Stagers." *The Watchman Magazine*, April 1932.

Holmes, Claude E. "Pass Your Own Volstead Act." *The Watchman Magazine*, October 1, 1931.

- Holmes, Claude E. "The People Are the Anchor of the Constitution." *Liberty*, First Quarter 1940.
- Holmes, Claude E. "Perfection Required." *Youth's Instructor*, December 24, 1907.
- Holmes, Claude E. "Putting Pressure on Our Free Press." *Liberty*, First Quarter 1943.
- Holmes, C[laude] E. "Seed Thoughts." *ARH*, September 27, 1906.
- Holmes, Claude E. "Socialism and Christianity." *Youth's Instructor*, May 25, 1909.
- Holmes, Claude E. "Suggestions by an Operator." *ARH*, January 7, 1909.
- Holmes, Claude E. "The True and the False Church." *ARH*, January 14, 1915.
- Holmes, C. E. "What Seventh-day Adventist Young Men of To-day Are Facing." *Youth's Instructor*, May 8, 1906.
- Holmes, Claude E. "A Word to the Young." *Youth's Instructor*, July 21, 1908.
- Kaiser, Denis. "Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880-1930)." Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2016.
- Knight, George R. *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.
- McGraw, Paul. "Without a Living Prophet," *Ministry*, December 2000, 11-15.
- Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996. S.v. "Holmes, Claude E."
- Valentine, Gilbert M. "Exiting the General Conference Presidency—Part 1." *Spectrum*, December 17, 2019, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2019/exiting-general-conference-presidency-part-1>.
- Valentine, Gilbert M. *W. W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism's Second Generation* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005.

---

## NOTES

1. Genealogical information at "Claude Ernest Holmes," *FamilySearch*, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/9Z3M-26N>.
2. Harold L. Flynt, "Claude E. Holmes obituary," *Southern Tidings*, July 8, 1953, 10.
3. Pennsylvania, U.S., Marriages, 1852-1968, at FamilySearch, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VF9Q-CBG?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=9Z3M-26N>.

4. Sanford M. Harlan (as told by Nathaniel Krum), "Teen-ager of 1901: Part Six--Conclusion," *Youth's Instructor*, February 5, 1957, 19.
5. C. E. Holmes, "What Seventh-day Adventist Young Men of To-day Are Facing," *Youth's Instructor*, May 8, 1906, 2.
6. Claude E. Holmes, "Suggestions by an Operator," *ARH*, January 7, 1909, 27.
7. C[laude] E. Holmes, "Seed Thoughts," *ARH*, September 27, 1906, 11.
8. Claude E. Holmes, "One Thing I Do," *ARH*, November 7, 1907, 23.
9. Claude E. Holmes, "Don't Be a Mummy," *ARH*, September 3, 1908, 28-29; this quip appears again in *Youth's Instructor*, May 16, 1916, 7.
10. Claude E. Holmes, "Perfection Required," *Youth's Instructor*, December 24, 1907, 2.
11. Claude E. Holmes, "The Bible Untouched," *Youth's Instructor*, January 14, 1908, 5.
12. Claude E. Holmes, "'Thy Word is Truth,'" *Youth's Instructor*, April 16, 1907, 1.
13. Claude E. Holmes, "A Word to the Young," *Youth's Instructor*, July 21, 1908, 12.
14. Claude E. Holmes, "Do and Trust," *Youth's Instructor*, September 1, 1908, 10.
15. Claude E. Holmes, "Good Products Turned Out," *Youth's Instructor*, September 15, 1908, 4.
16. For example, Claude E. Holmes, "Official American Documents on Religious Liberty," *Liberty*, Fourth Quarter, 1914, 178-181, 190.
17. Claude E. Holmes, "The Destruction of Protestantism and Its Mission Work Deliberately Planned by Roman Catholics," *Youth's Instructor*, September 29, 1914, 7-8, 13. For a contextualization of Holmes' anti-Catholicism, see Reinder Bruinsma, *Seventh-day Adventist Attitudes Toward Roman Catholicism, 1844-1965* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 253.
18. Gilbert M. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism's Second Generation*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 265.
19. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 139; Gilbert M. Valentine, "Prescott, William Warren (1855-1944)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed February 9, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=E9ZU>; Gerald Wheeler, "Haskell, Stephen Nelson (1834-1922)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed February 9, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=69G2>.
20. Paul McGraw, "Without a Living Prophet," *Ministry*, December 2000, 12.
21. General Conference Committee Minutes, March 27, 1917.



22. Quoted in Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*, 283.
  23. Claude E. Holmes, *Have We An Infallible "Spirit of Prophecy"?*, April 1, 1920 (White Estate Document File 352), 8.
  24. Claude E. Holmes to W. C. White, October 31, 1926, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.
  25. Holmes, *Have We An Infallible "Spirit of Prophecy"?*.
  26. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*, 283.
  27. Claude E. Holmes, "Championship of Religious Liberty," *The Watchman Magazine*, August 1931, 10-11, 27-28; "Pass Your Own Volstead Act," *The Watchman Magazine*, October 1, 1931, 8-9, 33; and "Can I Drink What I Please?," *The Watchman Magazine*, March 1933, 8-9, 11.
  28. Flynt, "Claude E. Holmes obituary."
  29. "Claude Ernest Holmes," *Find A Grave*, Memorial ID No. 72190073, June 11, 2011, accessed December 25, 2021, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72190073/claude-ernest-holmes>.
- 

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000