

Perspectives on 150 years of Seventh-day Adventist historiography

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Abstract

This is a study of the way the Adventist church has understood and used history from the 1850s to the present. In the decades leading up to 1888, Adventist thought leaders understood true history as being a means of demonstrating the actions of God in human affairs, demonstrating the way in which Adventists were the heirs of God's promises and the principal agents of his current engagement in the world. The pursuit of history was in the hands of lay people and minimally-trained clergy, as professional historical endeavour with its secular perspectives lacked the necessary spiritual insight. Shaped by the concepts of Restorationism, Adventist writers idealised prophetic, Protestant Reformation and Evangelical Revival history and envisioned themselves as continuing and completing the processes initiated by reformers in earlier times. Attempts in the early Twentieth Century to develop better historiographical practices fell victim to the surge of fundamentalist thinking that followed the passing of Ellen White. The practice of history in Adventism from the second half of the Twentieth Century (1958-present) demonstrates the tensions created by a growing emphasis on critical historical engagement by professionally-trained historians dealing more broadly with religious and secular history as well as the history of the Adventist movement. Recent Adventist approaches demonstrate more awareness of the complexities of history, and the implications for a denomination with a historically-grounded approach to a biblical understanding, especially of prophecy.

Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of the Twenty-first Century maintains an impressive world-wide tertiary education system for the purpose of advancing the mission of the church. Among the disciplines common to its universities and colleges is history, taught as an important element of a well-rounded education, and as a key discipline for a movement founded on a historical interpretation of scripture. The importance of history to the Adventist church is also evident in the institutional repositories and archives, and the establishment of research centres in each Division of the world church tasked with exploring the legacy of pioneer Adventists, particularly the special role of E. G. White. Seventh-day Adventism emerged from the Millerite groups that survived The Great Disappointment of 1844, establishing its core doctrines, denominational name and structure by 1863. Since then it has established a presence in 203 nations.¹ Core to Adventist theology and outlook has been a particular concern with history, which it owes to its Millerite roots. William Miller (1781-1849) was a son of the Enlightenment deeply influenced by the writings of Robert Ingersoll (1733-1799), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), and Ethan Allen (1738-1789), but swapped sceptical rationalism after his very evangelical conversion to the Baptist faith in 1816 for a

¹ For the general history of Adventism, its ideas and personalities, see Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Revised Edition (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000); and *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Don F. Neufeld, editor, Second Revised Edition (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996). The *Encyclopedia* comprises Volumes 10 and 11 of the *Commentary Reference Series*.

‘common sense’ hermeneutic that had a huge impact on his reading and interpretation of the Bible. With a kind of mathematical precision,² Miller interpreted scripture in the light of history – it is no accident that his principal work in its many editions was entitled *Evidences from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year A.D. 1843, and of His Personal Reign for 1,000 Years* (first edition 1833, expanded 1836 and thereafter). Miller always demanded *evidence*; *Scripture* was, for him, authority; *history* was the supporting cast that appeared to spotlight his era as a time when remarkable fulfilments of Bible prophecy were anticipated.³

Early Sabbatarian Adventism cherished all three of Miller’s components: evidence, Scripture and history. Two of its three co-founders were formerly ardent Restorationists: Joseph Bates (1792-1872) and James White (1821-1881) had been members of the Christian Connection as well as Millerite ministers.⁴ The third co-founder of Sabbatarian Adventism, Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915), was a Methodist well schooled in John Wesley’s notion of ‘Primitive Godliness.’ During a thirty-year period, 1858-1888, with the concepts of Restorationism and Millerism in the backs of their minds, Adventists idealised biblical/prophetic, Protestant Reformation and Evangelical Revival history, envisioning themselves as continuing and completing the processes initiated by Christian reformers of earlier times. History, for the Adventists, was a means of demonstrating the engagement of God in human affairs, with the Adventists themselves as the heirs of God’s promises and the objects of his current activity in the world. The pursuit of history was in the hands of lay people or minimally-trained clergy and teachers; professional historical endeavour was little considered because it was seen as lacking necessary spiritual insight, being consumed with worldly affairs. Thus, for early Adventists, history was always subordinate to theology, as a tool by which biblical interpretation could be validated. Early Adventists were not interested in history as a discipline, but only as a product.

Nineteenth-century Idealists: Smith, White and Jones

Three prominent Adventist writers who made extensive use of history were Uriah Smith (1832-1903), the most influential editor of Adventist publications; Ellen White (1827-1915), a leading writer whose work gained major influence by reason of her prophetic claims; and Alonzo Trevier Jones (1803-1923), a prolific writer on historical and theological issues during Adventism’s second generation.

Like most early Adventists, Uriah Smith was largely self-educated. Of Smith’s three chief works dealing with history, the most important and influential was published as *Thoughts Critical and Practical on the Book of Revelation* (1867) and *Thoughts Critical and Practical on the Book of Daniel* (1873), before being combined as *The Prophecies of Daniel and Revelation*. Later the tome appeared in many editions and revisions and is still in print. Smith used history to validate his interpretation of biblical apocalyptic, listing his sources at the end to indicate his reliance upon classic works of Protestant

² Miller’s hermeneutical system is well described by Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite hermeneutic of time prophecies in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Arasola, c. 1990).

³ Cf. George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the Word* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1993), 56; note sources for the study of Millerism in Arthur Patrick, *Annotated Introduction to the Field of Adventist Studies for Higher Degree Students* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale College, 2009), 3, 8-9. A recent, substantial contribution to the discipline is David L. Rowe, *God’s Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁴ See entries including ‘Christian Connection,’ ‘Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),’ ‘Primitivism,’ ‘Restoration Movement,’ in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, Daniel G. Reid Coordinating Editor (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

history. His second major historical work was *The United States in Prophecy*, later rewritten as *The Marvel of Nations*, which traced the history of the USA from the perspective that divine providence was guiding its development. He did not discount conventional history, arguing that '[t]here are works already published which leave nothing to be desired in this direction,' but he argued that '[i]f we believe that there is a God who rules in the kingdoms of men (Dan 5: 21), we must look for his providential hand in human history, in the rise, career, and fall of the nations and peoples of the world.'⁵ A third work by Smith that merits consideration in this discussion was *Our Country's Future*, which interpreted Bible prophecies deemed to apply to the future of the USA, with the expectation that history would bear out his version. Smith based much of his historical writing on the work of historians, almost always Protestant historians with whose opinions he agreed. Smith did not see himself as revising such opinions or providing primary research into historical events. He felt that the work of historians had already established the facts; his aim was to provide what they had missed – God's point of view. Smith saw prophecy and history on a continuum: one was history anticipated, the other was prophecy fulfilled.

Ellen White, the most influential writer during Adventism's first seventy years, received formal education only until the third-grade when, at the age of nine, a severe head injury ended her school career. However, like many of her Adventist peers, she was self-educated through a lifetime of reading, though her selection of reading matter was somewhat constrained by her ideological and religious interests. Hence, she read the Protestant historians whose world-views were similar to her own, and she heavily reflected such views in her writings. White outlined in five major volumes – *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), *Prophets and Kings* (1917), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911), *The Great Controversy* (in various editions between 1858-1911) – the activity of God in biblical and religious history from creation to the Second Coming. Like Smith, White took an exclusively providential point of view, explaining each event in terms of God's interaction with the affairs of men.

White's use of history had a special import that the writings of other Adventist authors of her era did not possess. The others could be quite dogmatic in their views, but none claimed direct revelation through supernatural visions in the way White did. During her lifetime, the authority of her historically-related writings was questioned, and White and her son William, who acted as her spokesperson and interpreter both during her life and after her death, made revealing comments on her attitude toward and use of history. Ellen White specifically claimed direct revelation of historical events, which she characteristically described as 'scenes' or 'views,' or which her son depicted as 'flashlight pictures.' On one occasion, William said she was able to stop him while he was reading Wylie's *History of Protestantism* and tell him accurately about events described in the pages he had not yet read aloud, saying that she had seen the events in vision. William emphatically declared that she was not dependent on historians as other writers were. Yet, at the same time, Ellen White disavowed her writings as a standard of historical accuracy, routinely quoting from established Protestant historians whom she considered to be normative in their facts and interpretation, and revising historical details in later editions of her books, a process described by her grandson Arthur L. White as 'the subordination of historical detail to the purpose of the book.'⁶ Despite

⁵ Uriah Smith. *The Marvel of Nations: Our Country: Its past, present and future, and what the Scriptures say of it* (Battle Creek MI: Review and Herald, 1887), preface.

⁶ See for example Ellen G. White, Letter 14, 1889; Letter 48, 1894; Letter 86, 1906; Letter 56, 1911 in E. G. White Research Centre, Avondale College; Introduction to *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View CA: Pacific Press), 1950, x; W. C. White's comment on the

impressing William with her ability to recite history she had not yet heard him read, Ellen in fact had read Protestant history over many years, and it is probably an exaggeration to claim that her visions were the principal source of her historical writings, and only later confirmed by other books.⁷ Her frequent unacknowledged borrowing from historians would cause some distress to her followers from the 1880s onward; turmoil erupted when later generations of Adventists discovered that her writings were not all directly from God.

However, Ellen White was unapologetic in explaining her motives, saying she gave no specific credit where she borrowed, ‘since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.’⁸ More recent researchers have debated the extent to which White copied, paraphrased, or even carelessly distorted the historians she quoted. It is evident that she borrowed significant segments of her history from Uriah Smith, whose historiography was often a light paraphrase of other writers. Therefore, some of White’s historical errors are not original to her, having been copied from Smith.⁹ She did not follow Smith slavishly, however—at one point she censured him for using Gibbon as a source.¹⁰ In fact, Ellen White did not see herself as an historian and she condemned much of the historical profession, which she saw as preoccupied with the achievements of men in wars and the pursuit of human power and greatness. It was sacred history that White considered as being of supreme value, as it revealed the fulfilment of prophecy, the workings of Providence in the great reform movements, and the events associated with the end of time.¹¹

Ex-army officer and leading Adventist theologian and editor Alonzo Jones was another passionate amateur historian. He wrote a number of historical works, some of them many hundreds of pages in length, treating topics as diverse as the empires of pagan and Christian Rome, the history of nations from biblical times to the present, the Reformation, biblical chronology, and the rise of the great nations of his day. Jones’ history was like that of Smith and White – always taking a divine perspective on human affairs. ‘History, properly studied,’ he wrote in the preface to *The Empires of the Bible from the confusion of tongues to the Babylonian Captivity*, ‘is but the study of the grand purposes of God with men and nations. It is evident, therefore, that the proper study of history can be made only upon the basis of the word of God – the Bible. Upon that basis *this* history is composed.’¹² Jones made no pretence of writing history, but merely of compiling and applying it. His contribution was to expound the hand of God in all these affairs, and link history to the Bible, particularly biblical prophecy. Yet Jones differed particularly from Ellen White by claiming no originality and by quoting all his sources

Introduction to *The Great Controversy*, 1911 quoted in Arthur L. White, ‘Toward a factual concept of inspiration, II: the role of the visions and the use of historical sources in the “Great Controversy,”’ Ellen G. White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre, Avondale College, DF65-a, 20, 22, 24-25.

⁷ Donald R. McAdams, ‘Shifting views of inspiration: Ellen G. White studies in the 1970s,’ *Spectrum* 10:4 (March 1980), 28-31.

⁸ Ellen G. White, Introduction to *The Great Controversy* (1950 ed), xii.

⁹ McAdams, 29, 34, 35; Gary Land, ‘From Apologetics to History: the professionalization of Adventist historians.’ *Spectrum* 10:4 (March 1980), 93.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4 (1885), 520.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 441-442.

¹² Alonzo Trevier Jones, *The Empires of the Bible from the confusion of tongues to the Babylonian Captivity* (Battle Creek, MI.: Review and Herald, 1898), preface, v.

as the authority for his historical statements.¹³ In that sense he was the more careful of the early Adventists in his approach to and use of history.

Other early Adventists who wrote historically-oriented works include John Nevins Andrews, John Norton Loughborough and James White. But none of the early Adventist historical writers considered themselves as in any way rewriting the basic historical data: they merely accepted as true the material presented in particular works of history, though Loughborough's approach was quite scholarly. They were not attempting to revise historical opinion, working as if from 'received' texts. Essentially, all saw history as apologetic, not critical. They used history to support their theology, rather than conducting a critical enquiry into the past. To them, history traced the establishment of the pure apostolic church after the resurrection of Jesus, followed by its gradual decline and apostasy. Then, from the Reformation onwards, a gradual restoration of apostolic truth occurred, in which the latest (and last) chapter was the Adventist movement. However, while not acting as historians, they were not afraid to disagree with each other and conduct a robust discussion on issues of applying history to biblical interpretation. They operated in a context of respectful but lively debate.

The capacity to respectfully disagree did not last long. In the years following the death of Ellen White, the church lurched towards a Fundamentalist approach to texts, squashing the earliest signs of the development of a more sound historiographical approach to Adventist and world history. George Knight identified a group of 'apologists' and 'historians' in his study of the stages of maturation of the Church, naming Loughborough along with Mahlon E. Olsen, Arthur W. Spalding, Le Roy E. Froom, and Francis D. Nichol among those who began to move to more historical methods of writing.¹⁴ Michael Campbell further identified two men, Clement L. Benson and Edwin Franklin Alberstworth, as the first truly professionally-trained historians in the Church, the first having a Masters from the University of Nebraska and the latter a PhD from George Washington University. They began to push for the proper training of Adventists in historical methodology, including the critical use of primary sources, the acquisition of suitable resources by Adventist libraries, the development of Adventist scholars with training and exposure outside of the organisation, and the fostering of professional networks to encourage appropriate historiography. Unfortunately, despite their presentations at the 1919 Bible Conference being well-received on the whole, these two men fell victim to the Fundamentalist backlash of the 1920s and both eventually left the organisation under suspicion of being liberals.¹⁵ Discussion of the nature of White's inspired role in the Church was stymied for another fifty years.

Later Twentieth-century professional dialogues: Numbers, McArthur, Land, McAdams et al

The practice of history in Adventism had changed by the end of the Twentieth Century, with its crises and struggles over a growing emphasis on critical historical engagement by professionally-trained historians as they treated religious and secular history as well as the history of the Adventist movement. After the aborted developments of the early part of the century, the creation of a professional historical approach to issues began tentatively in the 1950s, gaining momentum as university-

¹³ Alonzo T. Jones. *The Peopling of the Earth, or historical notes on the tenth chapter of Genesis* (Oakland CA.: Pacific Press, 1887), preface.

¹⁴ George R. Knight, *If I Were the Devil*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2007), 28-29.

¹⁵ Michael Campbell, 'ASDAH's Founding Fathers: A Look at Adventist Historians in the 1910s and the Development of Adventist Historiography,' paper presented at the Association of SDA Historians, April 20, 2007.

educated historians took up positions of scholarship in Adventist institutions in the 1960s and 1970s. From 1969, scholarly debate within the church found a platform through *Spectrum*, the journal of the Association of Adventist Forums, an independent Adventist organisation which, while loyal to the church, frequently explores and debates issues that official church papers, having a (de facto) imprimatur, are reluctant to host. Other publications like *Adventist Heritage: A Journal of Adventist History* and *Adventist Today* also provided sites for historical debate, while increasingly, Adventist historians are willing to seek to publish outside of the Adventist publication network. Recent Adventist approaches demonstrate more awareness of the complexities of history, are less likely to assume the perspective of God, and are more open to alternative and non-linear explanations of events. However, the work of these historians is not uncontested, as lay people, some church administrators and even some historians attempt to preserve the older, safer approach to history in the face of interpretations that appear to threaten established beliefs, and the conflicts generated have led to casualties among Adventist historians.

The first serious critical scholarly analysis of Adventist history took place over the role of Ellen White, beginning in 1970, with a cluster of articles in the Autumn 1970 issue of *Spectrum*, a journal whose independence made this kind of scholarship possible. Donald McAdams produced a valuable overview and evaluation of these debates, characterising the development of Adventist historiography as having been through three generations typical of a movement: the energetic and committed founders; the second generation which idealised the first generation and interpreted them conservatively; and finally the third generation, which feeling safe in a heritage that stretches back beyond living memory, can question the givens more easily.¹⁶ The early critics of Ellen White were polemic rather than scholarly, both during her lifetime and immediately afterward, while her defenders from the 1920-1950s were generally well-researched but apologetic, rather than critical. But from 1970, a different origin and purpose was distinguishable. Frederick E. Harder, of Andrews University, wrote of Ellen White, 'She was not writing history, she was interpreting it,' adding that, 'the history was learned by ordinary means, but the activity of God in the historical situation was seen by revelation.'¹⁷ The research of the next ten years – though not always the debate surrounding it – fitted that basic model.

McAdams considered that what distinguished the modern debates from those of Ellen White's time was a desire 'not to tear down, but to understand.' Unlike her contemporary critics, writers like Branson and Weiss wanted to make White more influential, 'but they insisted upon objective scholarship and a critical examination of sources.'¹⁸ McAdams traced the dialogue between varying scholars, noting William S. Peterson's 1970 critique of White's choice of sources and her 'careless' use of them. W. Paul Bradley, chairman of board of the E. G. White Estate, and John W. Wood came to her defence in replies of differing intensity in 1971, and the responses from Peterson matched Wood in bringing personal feelings into the debate. Ronald Graybill's study published in 1972 managed to disagree with both Peterson and Wood by finding that White was not actually engaged in historical research at all. Rather, her quoting was taken from historians via Uriah Smith, and was in pursuit of religious, not historical, goals.¹⁹

¹⁶ McAdams, 27-28.

¹⁷ McAdams, 28-29.

¹⁸ McAdams, 29.

¹⁹ McAdams, 29-31.

However, this was merely the prelude to more significant Adventist historiographical research. Ron Numbers initiated a major shift in approaches with his seminal study of the health writings of Ellen White. Numbers refused to begin with presuppositions about divine inspiration, restricting himself to more objective, historical criteria. He concluded that ideas which White claimed to have received purely via inspiration were in fact borrowed from concepts in currency at the time through the publications of popular proponents of health reform. Furthermore, Number contended that White changed her ideas over time.²⁰ His major book, *Prophetess of Health* (1976), sent shock waves through academic and administrative church circles. *Time* magazine commented on it, while the church's official paper, *Review and Herald*, tried to minimise the implications by editorialising that it did not challenge the faith of a mature Adventist. Numbers' work was endorsed by a number of respected Adventist scholars as a 'thoroughly researched and clearly written ... first-class piece of historical scholarship.' Several Adventist historians took issue with minor or major aspects of his work, but none contradicted it outright. Church administrators responded in a variety of ways, attempting to tone down its conclusion that White borrowed many of her ideas, while at the same time almost tacitly accepting that Numbers was essentially correct. The ensuing debate opened up the tensions that arise when the historian-believer writes on issues involving divine interaction with humanity.²¹ Since the activity of God is not a matter subject to the usual rules of historical evidence, faith and historical methodology clash. However, the process of dealing with the potentially disturbing conclusions helped move Numbers from a professing Adventist to an unbeliever. He continues to publish copiously in areas of science history and has received many accolades for his work. The debate he began has rumbled on for decades, with another historian, Gary Land, labelling the church's official response as 'inadequate,' and calling on the church to review its stand on inspiration.²²

Benjamin McArthur made an important contribution to the understanding of the role of history within Adventism with his article, 'Where are historians taking the church?' published in *Spectrum*, November 1979. McArthur charted the rise of professional Adventist historians, and saw the dilemma that came with that, as the enthusiastic amateurs of the early movement eventually and inevitably gave way to highly specialised scholars. He observed that historians are no longer the guardians of tradition, but rather have evolved into social critics.²³ The historical methodologies they use are different from the historical approaches of earlier Adventist writers, leading to vastly different conclusions and awakening conflict. He made overt the problem for historians of faith which had emerged during the debate over Numbers' book, stating that: 'The discipline's insistence on finding causal explanation within the temporal realm heightens the problem, for it seemingly counters the assumption that God acts directly in the affairs of humanity,' noting that God's leading was not susceptible to historical methodology.²⁴

McArthur considered that the impact of this new wave of historical research on Ellen White could adversely affect her standing as an inspired writer. He compared the process under way in Adventism with what had happened in the Jewish community, where thinking shifted from blind belief to one with a long historical hindsight. The

²⁰ Land, 94.

²¹ McAdams, 31-34.

²² Land, 95.

²³ Benjamin McArthur, 'Where are historians taking the church?', *Spectrum* 10:3 (November 1979), 9-10.

²⁴ McArthur, 11.

effect in Judaism was one of secularisation, and he feared the same impact on Adventism. Historical scrutiny was likely to lead to a more tentative attitude to White's writings as inspired and prophetic, losing their normative authority. On the other hand, it would move Adventism closer to its tradition of rationalism, claiming that truth could bear the closest scrutiny.²⁵ The paradox was that many Adventists would struggle with the tension between traditional views of White's inspiration and the findings of research which would show other sources than visions for many of her cherished positions. But while these tensions were real, there could be no going back to the former, simple ways. However, McArthur considered that relatively little of the revisionist work had filtered down to the grassroots, and he speculated that conservative attitudes could prove resilient to change.²⁶ Time has shown that this forecast was not too wide of the mark: a fundamentalist attitude to White's inspiration waxes and wanes, but still remains prevalent in many church circles, while the debate has created a church with a much greater diversity of views on White's role than ever before.²⁷

Gary Land was one of the first professionally-trained historians in the church, and one of the first to see himself as a researcher rather than just a teacher. He is part of a group of historians who have taken a professional and critical approach to Adventist history, shaking up established notions. He admires much of the recent scholarship, and recognises the need for more of it, for he sees history at the heart of Adventist identity. Like McArthur, Land wrote a major article exploring the development of historiographical consciousness in Adventism, drawing many similar conclusions. The main area of debate was clearly studies of Ellen White, where the contributions were quite uneven in quality, hardly surprising considering the relatively confined academic world in which many of the participants moved, and their lack of exposure to broader historical research. Nevertheless, Land suggested that the existence of a debate in itself was healthy, prompting further scholarship which eventually delved into the realm of whether or not a distinctive Adventist approach to history could exist. This philosophical debate essentially turned on whether 'the rationale of all history should be illuminated by ecclesiastical history and not vice versa,' as proposed by one conservative historian. Numbers reacted by stating his preference for 'honest agnosticism' as preferable to 'pious fraud,' while others like Land refused to accept unhistorical subordination.²⁸ Land:

pointed out that the traditional way of describing God's hand in history implied an almost deistic separation of God and the world, whereas the Bible presented God as both immanent and transcendent. This meant, then, that God is always active in history. But because, in the light of revelation, some events are more meaningful than others, the Christian historian, rather than emphasizing God's intervention, will seek to understand the meaning of events within a Christian framework.²⁹

In his 1980 article, Land identified further study that needed doing, including work on institutional history, twentieth century history, and intellectual history. That Adventist history also needed to be done by non-Adventist historians, to draw in larger

²⁵ McArthur, 12-13.

²⁶ McArthur, 14.

²⁷ For an illuminating perspective on these issues, see Benjamin McArthur, 'Point of the Spear: Adventist Liberalism and the Study of Ellen White in the 1970s,' *Spectrum* 36:2 (Spring 2008), 45-56.

²⁸ Land, 96.

²⁹ Land, 97.

concerns, was illustrated by a volume Land edited for publication (*Adventism in America: A History*) by a non-Adventist press in 1985. Such scholarship needs to disseminate its findings in popular fashion to inform Adventist audiences while retaining scholarly integrity. There is also a need to take seriously the connection between history and philosophy. Land wrote, ‘if we are to survive and make our research understood, we must be able to articulate the relationship between critical history and religious belief.’ He also called on historians ‘to engage theologians and denominational administrators in dialogue about the meaning of our history and its implications for our beliefs and practice.’³⁰ Land has taken to heart his own advice. His more recent book *Teaching History: A Seventh-day Adventist Approach*³¹ is a fascinating study of the philosophical issues arising out of the engagement of Adventism and history, and in it he addresses the nature and shape of what a specifically Adventist philosophy of history might be. It is not the methodology that is different so much as the philosophical emphasis and focus.

Another historian reaching out to a broader audience has been Professor George R. Knight, who moved into historical research via Education, when his studies into Ellen White’s educational philosophy led to research into her sources, methodology and authority. As a historian, he has written extensively on White, as well as on broader Adventist history, using this as a springboard for some works on theology as well, showing a continuing intimate connection between Adventist belief and an engagement with history. A prolific writer, many of his books have targeted a more general Adventist readership while still being grounded on sound scholarly principles, achieving a wider level of popular influence than just about any other Adventist historian. He demonstrates that a more nuanced understanding is compatible with strengthening trust in the church, especially for the growing numbers of highly educated Adventists, and hopes that a better historical understanding can help heal some of the divisions within the church.³²

The late Dr Arthur N. Patrick, who began his academic career as a theologian, has had a significant influence on the shaping of Adventist historical thought. Like others, he found a deeper respect for White through a clearer and more academically rigorous investigation of her life and work. He was particularly noted for the moderation with which he propounded his ideas, thus becoming the embodiment of the phrase, ‘a gentleman and a scholar.’ What Patrick brought to the debate was the capacity to lovingly and respectfully work alongside those who at times violently disagreed with him – a capacity that was evident in the founders of Adventism but that seems too often to have been lost along the way. ‘There is a need,’ he wrote:

to hear actively the voices that derive from differing convictions, including the enthusiastic participants and affirmative supporters in Fundamentalist/Evangelical and (in particular) Adventist circles. Others voices are also crucial, especially those of the ardent cautioners within each of these communions who express concerns, formulate critiques, and lay charges. However, the quest to understand will be helped most of all by the analysts who offer historical, biblical, theological, sociological, and other

³⁰ Land, 98-99.

³¹ (Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 2001).

³² George Knight, ‘Questions on Doctrine: Symbol of Adventist theological tension,’ paper presented at the Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary Conference, Andrews University, 24-27 October 2007.

interpretations that point beyond the partisanship of apologetics and the rhetoric of controversy toward comprehensive understanding and constructive action.³³

An example of the growing confidence and sophistication of Adventist historiography is 'The Ellen White Project'. Commenced at a conference in Portland, Maine on 22-25 October 2009, it has the potential to point the way forward. As a working conference, it followed a long series of initiatives taken in various parts of the world. Bringing together sixty-six world-class specialists from both the Adventist world and from the wider academic community in Adventist and American religious history, it has drawn more deeply on primary sources than ever before as well as a richer dialogue between a genuine diversity of scholarship. The conference revealed a wide consensus that has developed regarding the historical Ellen White, and has aimed at producing a scholarly volume addressing the findings made.

The organisers of the 2009 conference have given Adventists and the scholarly world a fresh opportunity to foster a mature, sustainable understanding of Ellen White amongst believers and the wider community, especially that of North America. From a handful of disappointed Millerites, the Second Advent Movement is now a world religion of sixteen million baptised members. It now has a new opportunity to transcend the unnecessary conflicts and the false assumptions about its 'mother' that have been both pervasive and destructive in the past.³⁴ Naturally, this has not come without challenge. Adventism's origins have fostered two competing and conflicting cultural characteristics: a huge respect for learning and a deep suspicion of the sophistry of higher education. There are those who push for a return to more simplistic, fundamentalist interpretations of Ellen White as the only safe way of ensuring true spiritual integrity. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has demonstrated that sound historical methodology and a firm commitment to Adventism's historical aims and beliefs are highly compatible.

Conclusion

It is apparent that Adventism has had changing views on history. Its founders considered history to be relatively simple and definitive, an apologetic tool for proving their interpretation of biblical prophecy. Early Adventist writers did not see themselves as writing history, but subordinating history to religion. They considered this to be the appropriate relationship between the two. However, one hundred years later, Adventist historians had adopted a more diverse range of views. While some saw themselves as maintaining the traditions of apologetics, others tackled the difficult issues that arose when modern historical methodology was applied to sensitive areas of Adventist faith and tradition. The result is a growing body of history that identifies and recognises the complexities of the component issues. The newer history is open to alternate

³³ Arthur Patrick, 'The Questions on Doctrine Event: Contrasting Perceptions, Their Impact and Potential,' paper presented at the Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary Conference, Andrews University, 24-27 October 2007.

³⁴ Arthur Patrick, 'Contextualising Recent Tensions in Seventh-day Adventism: "A Constant Process of Struggle and Rebirth"?' *Journal of Religious History* 34:3 (September 2010), 271-287; Daniel Reynaud and Arthur Patrick, 'Idealisation, Conflict and Maturation: The development of Seventh-day Adventist Historiography.' In *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 2:3, June 2011, 5-18.

explanations and different perspectives, and is more aware of the problem of trying to link human events to the actions of God.

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With sincere appreciation to the late Dr Arthur Patrick, doyen of (Australian)
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