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Contextualising Recent Tensions in Seventh-day Adventism: "a constant process of struggle and rebirth"?

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Abstract *Between 1844 and 1863, fragments of disappointed Millerism developed the landmark ideas, the denominational name and the basic structure of what is now the Seventh-day Adventist Church with fifteen million members in 201 countries. This article contextualises the struggle of recent decades between continuity and change in Adventist teaching, suggesting that a score of doctoral theses/dissertations and other studies offer a coherence that is deeply disturbing for some believers, insufficient for some others, but satisfying for many. The demands in Western culture for faith to be aped by evidence and to offer existential meaning have elicited three stances in relation to traditional Adventist thought: reversion, alienation and transformation. While the consequent tensions may be viewed as evidence of "growth, vitality and increased understanding," they also constitute an urgent call for effective internal and external dialogue.*

Author's Note

Dated 14 April 2011: On 24 October 2006 I presented a paper entitled "Adventist Studies Since 1986: Fractious Adolescent or Maturing Adult?" to an Avondale College Faculty Colloquium (see Stephanie Arnold, "Research Fellow: Adventist studies 'maturing,'" *Connections,* 1 November 2006, 2). By 17 November 2006 the script for oral delivery had developed into the article reproduced word-for-word below, except for the addition of the Abstract. On 26 November 2006 the first draft of the article was submitted to *Journal of Religious History;* on 28 February 2008 a second draft was submitted incorporating my responses to helpful suggestions received from the referees and passed on to me by the *Journal* editors; on 28 August 2008 a third draft was submitted, responding to additional comments made by the referees. After that, with the article queued for publication in a themed issue, a number of items of information were updated in the final edition submitted on 16 February 2010. Subsequently the *Journal* editors representing the Society for the *Journal of Religious History* in Australia, and those overseas representing the publishers Wiley-Blackwell, negotiated the final form of the article printed in ***Journal of Religious History* 34, No. 3 (September 2010), 272-288.** Dr David Hilliard wrote a capable introduction for the September 2010 issue of the *Journal.* I am grateful for the policies of the Society and of Wiley-Blackwell that permit the original draft to be placed on the Avondale College of Higher Education website, and for the insights of so many people who helped develop the article from the draft below to its published form, now available in *Journal of Religious History* held by scholarly libraries worldwide.

As *The Journal of Religious History* was celebrating its first quarter century, founding editor Professor Bruce Mansfield was facilitating an article on Seventh-day Adventist historiography as "the first in a new, occasional, series" on sources for the study of religious history in Australia. The article claimed the sources were already in hand for "substantial and accurate Seventh-day Adventist history to be written" that would "expose increasingly the inadequacies of numerous viewpoints current both within the denomination and beyond its borders."[1] Two decades

1 Arthur N. Patrick, "Seventh-day Adventist History in the South Pacific: A Review of Sources," *The Journal of Religious History* 14, no. 3 (June 1987), 307-326. For a discussion of "Religious History" as defined by *JRH,* see Arthur Patrick, "Introduction," "Christianity and Culture in Colonial Australia: Selected Catholic, Anglican, Wesleyan and Adventist Perspectives, 1891-1900" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Newcastle, 1991), 1-8; cf. J.D. Bollen, A.E. Cahill, Bruce Manfield, Patrick O'Farrell, "Australian Religious History, 1960-1980," *The Journal of Religious History* 11, no. 1 (June 1980), 8-43. The 1987 article should be read in the context provided by Hilary M. Carey, Ian Breward, Nicholas Doumanis, Ruth Frappell, David Hilliard, Katherine Massan, Anne O'Brien, Roger Thompson, "Australian Religion Review, 1980-2000, Part 2: Christian Denominations," *The Journal of Religious History* 25, no. 1 (February 2001), 56-82.

later it seems appropriate to revisit the burgeoning discipline of Adventist Studies to identify trajectories and interpret their nature and significance.

A Catholic journalist, in the epilogue to a widely acclaimed volume published in 1976, describes Christian history as "a constant process of struggle and rebirth–a succession of crises, often accompanied by horror, bloodshed, bigotry and unreason, but evidence too of growth, vitality and increased understanding."[2] Marilyn Westerkamp states that during the 1970s in the United States, religious history that had been "replete with apologetical positions," "a poor stepchild to historical scholarship," tending "toward anecdotal, often uncritical celebrations," was "transformed."[3] During that challenging decade and especially in the 1980s, Adventism felt a need to marginalise or dismiss some of its historians and other researchers. However, by 1979 it had also published its first history textbook written by a trained historian [4] and it was becoming aware of the professionalisation of its historians.[5] This article suggests that "a constant process of struggle and rebirth," always evident in Adventism but acutely evident during the past four decades, offers continuing evidence of "growth, vitality and increased understanding."

2 Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 515-6.

3 Marilyn Westerkamp, "Religion," in Daniel Vickers (editor), *Companion to Colonial America* (Malden, Maine: Blackwell, 2006), 366-388.

4 R.W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979). Cf. the revised and updated edition: Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000).

5 Benjamin McArthur, "Where Are the Historians Taking the Church?" *Spectrum* 10, no. 3 (November 1979), 9-14; Donald R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen White Studies in the 1970s," *Spectrum* 10, no. 4 (March 1980, 27-41; Gary Land, "From Apologetics to History: The Professionalization of Adventist Historians," *Spectrum* 10, no. 4 (March 1980), 89-100.

Adventist Studies

Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) established their first college in 1874 and now operate 101 senior colleges and universities worldwide.[6] Graduate study offered intermittently in the 1930s developed into the church's premier institution of its type, the SDA Theological Seminary, housed at the Washington (D.C.) headquarters until 1960 when it relocated to the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs (Michigan).[7] A range of accredited PhD degree programs allowing the option of a specific focus on Adventist history and thought have developed since the 1970s within such disciplines as biblical, theological and historical studies.[8] During 1993 the seminary announced a PhD program in Adventist Studies and academic offerings at other Adventist institutions have also moved to include the study of Adventism more intentionally; for instance, when in 2006 Avondale College in Australia was accredited by the Government of New South Wales to offer PhD studies in history, education, pedagogy, health and theology, the college advertised the possibility that each of these disciplines could select Adventist Studies as a thematic option.[9]

Contemporary Seventh-day Adventism cannot be understood adequately without due attention to its nineteenth-century origins and development in the United States, even though only one in every fourteen of its fourteen million members now live in North America. Further, Adventism may be interpreted as one of the many utopian communities that emerged in the United States between 1787 and 1919.[10] Even more specifically, it should be compared and contrasted with other nineteenth-century movements that developed in the United States, have a continuing presence there and like Adventism have spread to other parts of the world, especially the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Christian Science and the Jehovah's Witnesses.[11]

Sociologists and historians rightly use the word *Adventist* to describe various movements that have flourished throughout the Christian era up to and including the present.[12] However, in

6 *Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006).

7 Loma Linda University incorporates a Faculty of Religion but its principal focus is health sciences. The exploration of such matters can be commenced with the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996) that forms volumes 10 and 11 of the *Commentary Reference Series.*

8 *Andrews University Seminary Studies,* begun in 1963, is the best-known SDA refereed journal and reports dissertations completed. See, for instance, *AUSS* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 172-174. The church's "general paper," *Adventist Review,* has been published since 1849; geographically focused magazines serve the thirteen world divisions; *Ministry,* a journal for clergy, commenced in 1928. Other journals focus on such issues as education, law, health, gender, mission and ethics. There is an active independent press driven by a range of concerns. Print has been crucial throughout SDA history: see Bruce Manners, "Publish or Perish: A Study of the Role of Print in the Adventist Community" (Monash University: PhD dissertation, 2004).

9 See "Adventist Studies: An Introduction for Higher Degree Students" online at www.avondale.edu.au or the annotated edition in print (Cooranbong: Avondale College, May 2006). While hundreds of websites offer reliable data and ephemeral opinion about the SDA church, its General Conference, world divisions, institutions and ideas, those sponsored by the church's archives and universities are of prime importance for researchers.

10 This observation is contextualised by Rick Ferret, "Charisma, Sectarianism and Institutionalisation: Identity Issues in Seventh-day Adventism" (Sydney College of Divinity: PhD dissertation, 2006).

11 The literature is abundant; for example, Philip Barlow, "Book Review Essay: Jan Shipps and the Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 73, no. 2 (June 2004), 412-426; Andrew Holden, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Portrait of a Contemporary Religious Movement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Rennie B. Schoepflin, *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America* (Baltimore, MD: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

12 Observe, for example, the extensive writings of William Sims Bainbridge, including "The Adventist Movement," in *The*

this article the term *Adventist Studies* describes only the broader background, specific history, thought, polity and practice of *Seventh-day Adventism.*

Adventist Antecedents and Emerging Beliefs

The fact that emergent Sabbatarian Adventism may be compared usefully with other millenarian impulses throughout Christian history is well recognised.[13] Older SDA explorations of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic and prophetic thought, expressed conveniently in four volumes by LeRoy Edwin Froom,[14] have been restated in popular books as well as qualified and extended by scholars such as Bryan Ball and Charles Scriven.[15] Ball's ongoing research is already available from or is currently under consideration by reputable publishers and has been reviewed approvingly by specialists;[16] it has also been challenged by those who wish to highlight the Millerite provenance of the SDA movement and the nature of its subsequent development.[17]

Studies of SDA origins in the northeastern United States often explore the complex influences of such impulses as restorationism, revivalism, millennialism and charisma in addition to examining the specific role of William Miller and his principal ministerial and lay colleagues. Millerite historiography has moved through three phases since the Great Disappointment of 1844. Approving "memoirs by the movement's participants" were followed by a long "debate between detractors and apologists" and "an academic interest" that reached a high point in the 1980s.[18] Subsequently, Adventist and other authors are more comprehensively exploring the American fascination with the millennium and the transition from Millerism to Sabbatarian Adventism.[19]

Influential persons in the early Adventist period were mostly devoid of theological education: William Miller was a farmer, soldier, sheriff and justice of the peace in upstate New York; Hiram Edson was a farmer in the "burned-over district" of western New York. SDAs identify three individuals as their cofounders. Of these, Ellen White enjoyed little beyond three years of formal education; Joseph Bates was a retired mariner; James White received 29 weeks of formal education and training in order to become a teacher. These pioneers and others like them remain in the focus of recent study and publication. It is remarkable that a handful of landmark ideas proposed by Adventist pioneers were embodied during 1980 in the first expression of SDA fundamental beliefs voted by a General Conference in world session. It is unremarkable that SDA fundamentals have been at the centre of successive controversies, beginning in 1844 and flourishing in the twenty-first century.

Controversies Relating to SDA Landmarks

While SDA conflicts are even broader than the church's 28 fundamentals and their implications, they often surround five landmark concepts: Sabbath, Sanctuary, Second Coming, State of the Dead and Spiritual Gifts. For the church's first century, debates about the seventh day of the week being Saturday usually focused on which day of the modern week corresponded with the biblical Sabbath, established in Genesis 2, enshrined in the Ten Commandments at Sinai and observed by Christ, the apostles and the early Christian church. Then, as more Adventist authors earned doctorates in biblical studies and systematic theology, a new emphasis was added, focusing on the meaning or spiritual significance of the Sabbath. However, in recent decades, older debates between SDAs and other Christians have flared anew in the

Sociology of Religious Movements (New York: Routledge, 1997), 89-118.

13 For two examples, see Stephen Hunt (editor), *Millenarianism: From the Early Church to Waco* (London: Hurst, 2001) in the context of the writings of Kenneth Newport, author of the chapter on SDA thought; observe the review by John Kloos of *Anglo-American Millennialism from Milton to the Millerites,* in *Church History* 74, no. 4 (December 2005), 859-860.

14 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, Vol. 1, 1950; Vol. II, 1948; Vol. III, 1946; Vol. 4, 1954).

15 Note Charles Scriven's thought from the publication of his doctoral dissertation as *The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1989) to his "Being and Becoming Adventist" lectures at Avondale College, August 2006.

16 Ball emphasises continuity and complementarity between English Puritanism and Millerism; cf. his writings from the completion of his doctoral dissertation (1971) published as *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), to *The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

17 Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 84-6, and cf. their 2006 revision of the 1989 volume. The finest longitudinal study of Adventist millenarianism derives from Douglas Morgan's dissertation written at the University of Chicago under Martin Marty, published as *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

18 Gary Land, "The Historians and the Millerites: An Historiographical Essay," Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis, 1831-1844* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1994), xiii-xxviii. Eerdmans may publish a biography of William Miller by David Rowe in 2007; if so, it is likely to be a milestone event.

19 Cf. the writings of Russell Staples (Andrews University), Fred Hoyt (La Sierra University) and others on the Methodist antecedents of Adventist ideas with contextual treatments of Millerism such as Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (editors), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1993). For a cogent analysis of the transition from Millerism to Sabbatarian Adventism, see Merlin D. Burt, "The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White's Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849" (Andrews University: PhD dissertation, 2002); cf. Alberto Ronald Timm, "The Sanctuary and the Thee Angels' Messages 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Doctrines" (Andrews University: PhD dissertation, 1995) and note Hoyt's ongoing, largely unpublished research.

polemical writings of former Adventists like Wallace Slattery and Dale Ratzlaff, resulting in updated historical and exegetical treatments.

Hiram Edson's experience on the morning of 23 October 1844 is still a locus of vigorous debate, as is his application of Hebrews 8 and subsequent SDA teachings about the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. SDAs have proposed that the atonement may be best explicated as having phases, such as sacrificial, mediatorial, judicial and executive. The claim that a heavenly judgment began in 1844 has been categorised as the distinctive SDA contribution to Christian thought on the one hand, or as "the most colossal, psychological, face-saving phenomenon in religious history"[20] on the other. A huge volume of publishing has explored the linguistic, contextual, historical and theological issues;[21] the church's official position is best expressed in the consensus statement of a representative conference (1980); it is defended in multiple publications from the church's Daniel and Revelation Committee working under the auspices of its headquarters Biblical Research Institute.

Less divisive but ever crucial has been the discussion of the SDA teaching on a literal, pre-millennial Second Advent of Christ. In the doctoral dissertations by Ralph Neall[22] and Rick Ferret (2006) such themes as imminence and delay are explored. The church's understanding of the Second Coming shapes its concept of conditionalism or Christian mortalism. Froom's 1960s review of the antecedents of this doctrine (often referred to as "The State of the Dead") has, in the main, stood the test of time, although it will be refined when a section of Bryan Ball's ongoing research (under the projected title, *Resurrection and Immortality: Christian Mortalism in English Religious Thought from Wycliffe to Priestley)* is published.[23] The fifth landmark concept that has evoked enormous effort is SDA Fundamental Belief 17, expressed during 1980 under the title "The Gift of Prophecy." This fundamental, in constant focus since December 1844, entered a new phase of debate 55 years after Ellen White's death and an effervescent literature relating to it continues to expand in the present century.[24]

Ellen White Studies

The life and writings of Ellen White and the substance of Fundamental 23 ("Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary") have combined throughout Adventist history to form the movement's most-discussed issues. An inter-related cluster of ideas are at stake: historicism as a method of interpreting biblical apocalyptic literature,[25] the Old Testament prophetic office, the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts, SDA identity and mission, the doctrine of revelation/inspiration and many others. Complex debates beginning in the 1960s caused the termination of scientists and biblical scholars employed by Andrews University and the Geoscience Research Institute. When Ronald Numbers was writing his controversial volume about Ellen White (published in 1976) the church could not provide him with a doctrine of inspiration that embraced his findings adequately, but it deemed it was necessary to dismiss him for not applying its dynamic concept of inspiration in his historical enquiry.[26] Matters flagged at Consultation I and Consultation II (early in the 1980s) came into greater prominence during 1991with the publication of Alden Thompson's *Inspiration* and the spirited rejoinder published privately by the Adventist Theological Society (1992). Subsequent research by Adventist scholars including Ray Roennfeldt has

20 The words are those of Presbyterian Donald Grey Barnhouse, contextualised in two chapters of Paul Ernest McGraw, "Born in Zion?: The Margins of Fundamentalism and the Definition of Seventh-day Adventism" (The George Washington University: PhD dissertation, 2004), 176-177.

21 Raymond Cottrell offers cogent participant testimony from the 1950s onward, a matter that will be better known when the independent magazine *Adventist Today* publishes his biography. For evidence that the full range of options relating to 1844 remain under vigorous discussion, see *Adventist Today* 14, no. 6 (November/December 2006). The issues can be discerned as lying behind the text of such works as Raoul Dederen (editor), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* Vol. 12, *Commentary Reference Series* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).

22 Ralph E. Neall, "The Nearness and Delay of the Parousia in the Writings of Ellen G. White" (Andrews University: PhD dissertation, 1982).

23 LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, Vol. 1, 1966; Vol 2, 1965).

24 Arthur Patrick, "Prophets Are Human! Are Humans Prophets?" *Spectrum: The Journal of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Forums* 33, issue 2 (Spring 2005), 71-2, reviews five books about Ellen White; since the article was published three other volumes have appeared and others are under preparation. *Spectrum* initiated the new phase of the debate with its Fall 1970 issue and has published more than ninety articles on the theme. Several positions taken that seemed experimental or even radical at the time have since become SDA orthodoxy whereas some SDAs have prided themselves on destroying, unopened, copies of the journal mailed to them. *Spectrum* presents itself as "a journal established to encourage Seventh-day Adventist participation in the discussion of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint, to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject, to evaluate the merits of diverse views, and to foster Christian intellectual and cultural growth."

25 Note the 1989 doctoral dissertation by Kai Arasola, published as *The End of Historicism: Millerite hermeneutic of time prophecies in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Arasola, c. 1990).

26 Jonathan M. Butler, "Introduction: The Historian as Heretic," Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: Ellen G. White and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Health Reform* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), xxv-lxviii; cf. Numbers, "Preface," *Prophetess of Health,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, in press). The accounts by Butler and Numbers illustrate how events played out in the United States, especially during the 1970s, whereas the doctoral dissertation by Peter H. Ballis (Monash University) documents the far greater fallout in Australasia during the 1980s. The published form of the Ballis study is available as *Leaving the Adventist Ministry: A Study of the Process of Exiting* (Westport, Conn.: Praegar, 1999). A doctoral dissertation by Smuts van Rooyen (1995) offers the perspectives of a South African, long resident in North America, on issues treated by Ballis. Forthcoming volumes will embrace recent Australian research (such as that by Trevor Lloyd and Milton Hook) as well as additional North American studies.

the potential to resolve most of the tensions, were it applied effectively to the Adventist discussion.[27] Conflict is ongoing: for instance, during 2006 the White Estate again made public its negative categorisation of Graeme Bradford's attempt to recount the Ellen White story in popular language.[28]

As early as 1980, a comprehensive agenda was developed for the study of Ellen White's life and writings.[29] Groundwork for such objectives was creatively started by Arthur White's papers on inspiration developed during the 1970s, Ronald Graybill's and Robert Olson's investigations that flowered at the 1982 International Prophetic Guidance Workshop, Fred Veltman's research on *The Desire of Ages* and related initiatives.[30] A coherent overview from the White Estate was needed urgently and was promised in the publication by Herbert Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (1998). This tome took a constructive step in the right direction despite its profound limitation: an effective study typically begins with an inclusive literature review. As of the White Estate and the Biblical Research Institute; the Adventist Theological Society is only haltingly supporting the church's efforts to embrace and proclaim a viable doctrine of inspiration;[31] independent organisations channel millions of Adventist dollars into alternative programs driven by their analysis of "the ills of God's church" or a doctrine of inspiration that claims "inerrancy in the autographs" for both the writings of Ellen White and the Scriptures.[32] Meanwhile the church, especially in some geographical areas of the world, is still losing adherents who experience unbearable cognitive dissonance with reference to the issues.[33] Even so, the church is still tempted to be hesitant in fostering research, to the point that on occasion dedicated members working individually are the ones that seem to break fresh ground most effectively.

This observation might be illustrated by the research of medico Donald McMahon and historian Fred Hoyt. McMahon, in the view of some believers, may have contributed to the Adventist jigsaw puzzle the single most important piece relating to Ellen White's inspiration of any that have been submitted since 1970; however, T. Joe Willey has produced a substantive critique of McMahon's claims.[34] The world church knows little about the illuminating research that historian Fred Hoyt commenced in the 1970s. Bulging filing cabinets and boxes of data in Hoyt's crowded office offer potential for a fuller understanding of early Adventist charismatic experiences, the education of Ellen White, the influence of Wesley on Ellen White's life and ideas, the relationship between Ellen White's literary indebtedness and the doctrine of inspiration and a cluster of related matters. Neither McMahon nor Hoyt claim any expertise outside their respective fields of medicine and history. Their findings and those of others (not least, Fred Veltman) need to be understood by the church's biblical scholars, systematic theologians and pastors whose responsibility it is to interpret their significance for the church at large.[35]

Pieces of a Jigsaw?

As one examines the individual pieces of information derived from the efforts of the many who have engaged in Adventist Studies during recent

27 Ray C.W. Roennfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1993); cf. Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univesity Press, 1987. These publications are, respectively, Volume xvi in the *Andrews University Dissertation Series* and Volume xiii in the *Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series.*

28 See www.whiteestate.org.

29 The topics (literary, historical, scientific, theological, hermeneutical, methodological) were agreed upon jointly by White Estate and the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. For analysis of the need for a mature hermeneutic for Ellen White's writings, see Michael Leigh Chamberlain, "The Changing Role of Ellen G. White in Seventh-day Adventism With Reference to Sociocultural Standards at Avondale College" (University of Newcastle: PhD dissertation, 2001). Chamberlain's study is currently being edited for publication.

30 All such historical references can be verified in the Document Files of Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centres such as that serving the church's South Pacific Division, located at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

31 Note, however, recent initiatives: the cycle of religion and science conferences, Faith and Learning events, Bible conferences held in Jerusalem and Istanbul, the input of regional Biblical Research committees and related attempts to foster understanding and unity. Of importance for the South Pacific Division have been biblical and theological conferences (2003, 2006) and an Ellen White Summit (2004).

32 See Russel R. and Colin D. Standish, *The Greatest of All the Prophets* (Rapidan, Va.: Hartland, 2004); cf. the emphases in volumes written or edited by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim and the more irenic tone of other independent publications such as *Adventists Affirm.*

33 A strategy document relating to the life and writings of Ellen White, developed by the South Pacific Division late in the 1990s (the decade in which effective consensus started to develop) and recently updated, is the most constructive document of its type produced by an Adventist entity on this subject. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the chairperson of the Biblical Research Committee of the South Pacific Division (who is also general secretary of the Division) earned a doctorate in the historical study of Adventism at Andrews University (Barry David Oliver, 1989).

34 T. Joe Willey to Arthur Patrick, e-mail with attached copies of several unpublished articles, 16 November 2006. Ronald Numbers kindly referred me to research by Willey and others. More than any other person, Numbers has brought Ellen White into the discussion of American religion.

35 Gilbert Valentine has recently published an illuminating account of efforts by White Estate to fulfil its mission respecting Ellen White's writings: *The Struggle for the Prophetic Heritage: Issues in the conflict for control of the Ellen G. White publications 1930-1939* (Muak Lek, Thailand: Institute Press, 2006). In a volume now being researched and written, Valentine offers perceptive analyses of Ellen White's relationships with General Conference presidents during her lifetime of ministry. Early drafts of the forthcoming Ellen White encyclopedia indicate that the projected volume (number13 in the *Commentary Reference Series* that commenced in 1954) will meet a real need. Another long-term enterprise by a Newbold College scholar will describe the people to whom Ellen White addressed letters.

decades, it is apparent that these can be considered to be fragments of a larger whole. In other words, they may be characterised as jigsaw pieces that indicate a relationship to each other; consideration of them suggests it may be possible to assemble them into a coherent picture. Selected pieces may be identified in terms of the following observations.

The church has invested enormously since 1972 to implement its decision to enable research by enhancing access to primary and other sources that relate to Seventh-day Adventism. By establishing a worldwide chain of Ellen G. White/ Seventh-day Adventist Research Centres (or equivalent heritage entities) to serve the various geographical sections of the world, effective research by believers and others relating to Adventist *history* and *thought* as well as the *life* and *writings* of Ellen White has been facilitated.

It is evident that during the past two decades, trans-disciplinary research has flourished as individuals have crossed boundaries between component modes of inquiry that focus on Scripture, history, theology, pedagogy, education and an array of sciences (including the physical, biological, social, health and other sciences). Such processes are enhancing the comparative study of Adventism, not least with their trans-denominational qualities. It is, for instance, unlikely that the Adventist struggles over soteriology can be solved without reference to the Christological controversies of the early Christian centuries, the writings of magisterial reformers and Puritans, as well as the specific input of Adventists who have engaged in the discussion since 1844.[36] This principle can be extrapolated to every aspect of Adventist thinking and doing. It is best illumined by studies that investigate Adventism as an organic entity in terms of its antecedents, founding and development from 1844 to the present.

There is much to be gained from the processes that focus diverse minds on Adventist Studies, including believer-participants, researchers in Adventist and non-Adventist settings and those who do not identify with the church as adherents. In other words, the "prayer" of Robbie Burns is helpful for those Adventists who desire to see themselves as others see them, even though the process may include discomforting elements.

Apologetics is a valid enterprise but it often presents particular perils. The Adventist past is littered with casualties of credibility; it could be that these are diminishing in number as better research methods are adopted. It is encouraging to note that the church is moving increasingly to interpret data rather than seeking to control information. The advent of the mimeograph machine began to change the ethos of Adventist Studies; the ham radio and the photocopier accelerated the change; computer technology has completely democratised the process. Technology in its electronic and other forms now require the church to function in a more open manner.

This combination of realities means the church has become more aware of troubling issues, including those of poverty, justice and gender equality. The costly and demanding processes that have developed far-sighted approaches to Christian service (for example, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency), responses to the issues of sexual and domestic abuse (well illustrated in Australia by Adventist Support and its 2006 publications), also mean that the church's employment practices are more transparent. It is unlikely that control of Adventist Studies will again be exercised in the mode of the 1970s and1980s. The indicators suggest that in both the administrative and the scholarly spheres, the church will attempt to maintain a healthy marriage between academic freedom and academic responsibility. The self-correcting nature of effective scholarship, the ongoing dissemination of research through print and electronic publishing (including the checks and balances provided by the independent press on both the church's right and left) will tend to maintain balance in this regard.

Another important realisation from the past two decades is that doctrinal development in Christianity and Adventism is a reality that may be destructive or constructive. Many of the believers engaged in Adventist Studies see it as part of their responsibility to contribute toward constructive outcomes and shape their activities accordingly. Further, the church appears to be fostering more effectively "the dialogue and dialectic of a community" rather than employing disciplinary measures to control research.[37]

Trajectories

If the research of historian and sociologist Ronald Lawson is seriously considered, Seventh-day Adventism is a denominationalising sect.[38] The evidence is unmistakable that Adventism is experiencing the range of the tensions that might be expected as a nineteenth-century movement faces the exigencies of western civilisation beyond World War II and into the twenty-first century.[39] The tensions in Adventism are real, and the interpretations of them are prolific.

More than twenty volumes published by twin brothers, a medical doctor

36 This sentence is likely to be illumined usefully by a conference focused on the first fifty years of the controversial volume *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (1957). The conference will convene at Andrews University, October 2007.

37 Cf. Fritz Guy, "The Future of Adventist Theology: A Personal View" (1980) and "The Theological Task of the Church: Observations on the Role of Theology and Theologians in the Church" (1980) expanded and contextualised in *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1999). Compare the thought of Alden Thompson, best reviewed with the help of his website at Walla Walla University and explicable in terms of attitudes intimated in his article, "Conversations with the other side," *Spectrum* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2003), 54-9.

38 Lawson's many journal articles (for instance, in *Sociology of Religion, The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Review of Religious Research)* form a record of his ongoing research that is being incorporated into a major book.

39 Dramatic changes occurring in world Christianity are impacting Adventism profoundly due to its nature as a global movement; note Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) in relation to Adventist demographics.

and a psychologist, call the church to faithfulness to its pioneers and their teachings. The Standish brothers represent what is clearly an international impulse in Adventism that is driven by a determination to maintain Scripture and Ellen White as inerrant and to utilise the proof-text method as the normative way of arriving at the truth of inspired writings.

In the polar-opposite position are those former believers who have given up on Adventism and advocate their new brands of evangelicalism, separation from Christianity in general or from Adventism in particular.

The Adventists closer to the middle are, even so, varied in their perceptions. Those who identify with the Adventist Theological Society find it difficult to accept as true believers at least some of the 360 members of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies. Many ASRS members are apt to feel their integrity as researchers would be compromised by signing even the updated ATS statement of faith. However, both groups agree that biblical exegesis is the core activity for those who want to define Adventism and express its identity faithfully. Both ATS and ASRS members are likely to advocate revival and reformation as a constant necessity for individual believers and their community of faith. However, the ASRS scholar is more likely to see as constructive the processes of change documented by Rolf Pöhler, whereas the ATS scholar in more likely to be nervous about change and to identify more closely with continuity.[40]

This article suggests that there is a degree of coherence in about twenty doctoral dissertations that it lists as published, completed or updated during recent years, reflecting research in Adventist and other institutions. However, the grassroots understanding of the church's faith is a continuing focus of dialogue, dialectic and sometimes schism. Many other dissertations could be cited to illumine this situation more fully. Furthermore, the field of Adventist Studies is characterised by unfinished business rather than tidily completed research; in other words, options abound for further dissertations. Within the church and beyond it, initiatives are needed and some are underway, not least in the Ellen White encyclopedia, in the Newbold study of the persons to whom Ellen White addressed letters, in the early Adventist research of Fred Hoyt at La Sierra University, in anticipated feminist and other biographies of Ellen White, and in research at universities in various parts of the world.[41]

Struggle and Rebirth?

The attempt to understand religion in a single continent is a vast undertaking. To illustrate the point: one Australian religion (Christianity) has benefited from the efforts of many historians since the middle of the twentieth century. A large number of voices must be heard if earlier imbalances are to be corrected: Manning Clark, Bruce Mansfield, Walter Phillips, Ian Gilman, Don Wright, Brian Dickey, Stuart Piggin and Ian Breward are a few of them. In is global expression, Adventism has felt misinterpreted rather than understood in older polemical writings such as those still stocked in some Christian bookstores. However, Australian Adventists are increasingly appreciative of studies that follow patterns illustrated by the writing, editing or supervision of Richard Ely, Mark Hutchinson, Robert Linder, Philip Hughes and others.

In summary, since 1970, Adventists have experienced what Johnson describes as "a constant process of struggle and rebirth" in a context so dynamic that many believers have adopted one of three competing stances. Carrying what novelist Morris West might describe as "a heavy load of unexamined certainties,"[42] some have found comfort and security in the nostalgia of reversion. Nothing short of total escape has been adequate for others; an unacceptable level of cognitive dissonance has caused them to reject their Adventist heritage, opting either for another form of Christianity or for secularism. A third response has sought the transformation of Adventism. In part, the discipline of Adventist Studies must document the various responses and analyse their strengths and weaknesses. In an Arminian movement committed to the Reformation notion of the priesthood of all believers, the role of the individual is crucial. The long-term outcomes of the struggle to define Adventist identity coherently in the twenty-first century may be, in some respects, unclear. However, at least one volume, tested as a textbook for a number of years before achieving a final form, acknowledges "controversy" but identifies "growing understanding."[43]

40 Rolf Pöhler's 1995 Andrews University doctoral dissertation has developed into articles and books, including *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

41 For instance, currently the University of Queensland has a number of research students examining matters that are important for Adventism, including Mark Pearce, David Thiele and Geoff Crocombe. Earlier, John Knight's doctoral dissertation at the University of Queensland equipped him to write journal articles and to examine a number of dissertations on Adventism. Many other important voices might be noted in the public conversation about Adventism in its Australian setting; see, as examples, the writings of educator John Godfrey (Edith Cowan University) and sociologists Robert Wolfgramm and Harry Ballis (Monash University).

42 Morris West, *A View from the Ridge: The Testimony of a Pilgrim* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999), 61.

43 Robert K. McIver and Ray C.W. Roennfeldt (editors), *Meaning for the New Millennium: The Christian Faith from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 2000). On the potentially constructive outcomes of tensions cf. Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and contemporary ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *From Christ to Constantine: The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church* (Worcester, PA: Christian History Institute, 1990), 61; the trilogy by Harry Williams in the *Contemporary Christian Insights* series published by Continuum International Publishing Group and distributed in Australia by Allen and Unwin. The 2001 volume by Williams entitled *Tensions* offers a bold agenda: "Tension is inherent in the universe, the smallest particle gets its dynamism from an internal relationship of positive and negative. This work describes some of the healthy, life-giving conflicts in which we are involved as moral and spiritual beings." Such observations are illumined within their Adventist context by Rick Ferret's recent doctoral study.