Religious History in Century 21: Reflections on the Demand for Credible Historiography

Abstract *Historiography in its secular and religious expressions is not immune from controversy; for instance, secular historians speak of "history wars" and religious historians are aware that intense conflicts can arise from their attempts to write the history of Christianity in general or that of Christian denominations in particular. The communication of religious ideas may never have been easy, even in biblical times: Isaiah asked "Who has believed what we have heard?" and Luke noted the women's testimony regarding Christ's resurrection seemed even to the apostles to be "an idle tale" that was unbelievable (see Isaiah 53:1, Luke 24:11, RSV). From its beginnings as recounted in Acts, Christianity has relied upon history as a vehicle for sharing its message. Since it is imperative for Christian historiography to be as sustainable as it is possible for it to be, this paper acknowledges there are problems of credibility in modern and post-modern religious historiography and it seeks to offer constructive reflections for consideration by historians and others who engage with religious ideas. While an exploration of this subject is relevant for Christians in general, the main focus of this presentation is limited to issues that confront Seventh-day Adventists.*

Introduction

The discipline of secular history is often fraught with controversy. Even events that occurred on a global stage like World War II still evoke contrasting interpretations, as when the Holocaust is blamed for the deaths of millions of Jews or discounted almost entirely. Likewise, the history of nations is subject to constant review and frequent debate, a reality that for the United States is aptly illustrated by the disturbing best-seller, *Don't Know Much About History.*[1] Australia's past has, in recent times, become a battleground as politicians, professional historians and the populace at large engage in "history wars."[2] It is unsurprising, therefore, that religious historiography attracts similar levels of dispute.

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[1] See Kenneth C. Davis, *Don't Know Much About History* (New York: HarperCollins, c. 2003); cf. the series of volumes that includes Larry Madaras, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History Since 1945,* Second Edition (Guilford, Conn: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2003).

[2] "The Australia 'history wars' started when Keith Windschuttle peppered revisionist historians with shot garnered from his own archival research and fired with his own convictions." See Deborah Gare and David Ritter, editors, *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the past since 1788* (Melbourne: Thompson [Nelson Australia], 2008), 181. On 12 September 2003 Paul Keating, a former Prime Minister of Australia opened an e-journal article with this comment: "The writing of *The History Wars* is very important. The book will sit on the shelves of libraries as a sort of code stone to help people understand the motivations of players in today's contemporary debate. It sheds light on the political battle which is carried on in the pubs and on the footpaths about who we are and what has become of us. For the protagonists and antagonists in academe are now surrogates in a broader political battle about Australia's future." Cf. the contents and reviews of Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

Definitions of history portray it variously as "the branch of knowledge dealing with past events," or as "the record of past events, esp[ecially] in connection with the human race," or as "a continuous, systematic written narrative, in order of time, of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc." (*The Macquarie Dictionary)*.[3] Controversy may arise for a complex set of reasons, including absence or paucity of primary sources, the conflicted nature of extant evidence, variant interpretations of data due to factors such as the ethnicity, class, gender, ideology, geography, age, era and education of the historians engaged in the writing of any particular history. Even the best-intentioned historian resides within a particular cultural context and is likely to nurture personal assumptions.[4]

Christian History

John Renard, who claims to offer "an easy-to-use comparative guide for anyone" states the followers of Jesus were first called "Christianoi" in Syrian Antioch perhaps two or three decades after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. While Renard acknowledges that "it is difficult, if not impossible to assign a precise date to the origins of Christianity" he suggests "Reasonably sound historical information, however, supports a number of general conclusions about the matter." The ensuing sentence indicates the nature of these conclusions: "Most of the earliest followers of Jesus were Jews who believed that this man from Galilee, a northern sector of the Roman province known as Palestine and administered by the Herodian dynasty of Jewish kings, fulfilled enough of the traditional criteria to be proclaimed Messiah or, to use the Greek equivalent, 'Christ'."[5] At the outset

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[3] For what claims to be "a superb guide to historiography through the ages," see Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Fifty Key Thinkers on History* (London and New York: Routledge, Second Edition, 2008). Hughes-Warrington is an associate professor of Modern History at Macquarie University. "The cross-section of debates and thinkers covered is unique in its breadth, taking in figures from ancient China, Greece and Rome, through the Middle Ages, to the contemporary world" (back cover).

[4] Koot van Wyk observes: "Ontology or the way a person lives, has an influence on his/her epistemology or the way a person thinks, and epistemology has an influence on a person's methodology, or the way one goes about doing what should be done, and methodology has an influence on deontology or the final product: sermon, comments, opinion, lecture, article, book, dissertation" (e-mail, van Wyk to Patrick, 22 December 2008). Van Wyk has long reflected upon remarks by Hendrik G. Stoker in *Oorsprong en Rigting,* ET *Origin and Destiny,* Vol. 1 (Cape Town: Tablemountain Publishers, 1967), but states he does not "favor the ontological approach as key to unlock preunderstandings for meaning in historiography as did Edward Schillebeeckx (1974) and Bernard Lonergan (1972) with their concept of 'living experience' as this key." Van Wyk adds: "The SDA concept of the triune interaction of Scripture, Spirit and man's regenerated Faith (Reason moving forward on its knees), is a better option as key to unlock preunderstanding towards meaning in historiography."

[5] John Renard, *The Handy Religion Answer Book* (Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 2002), 125. For useful intimations of typical problems in writing Christian history see Euan Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History: The Challenge of the Churches' Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), and note Rosemary Dunn's review of Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History,* in *Journal of Religious History* 32:4 (December 2008), 477-478.

of his discussion of Christianity, therefore, Renard alerts his readers to the reality that belief is likely to be of great importance within the interpretive process.

In order to understand this particular intersection of history and faith, it is important to observe the significance of the Old Testament's narration of Jewish history, the accounts of the life of Jesus given in the four Gospels, and the narratives of early Christianity conveyed in the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles. Contrasting perceptions of history are fundamental in the conflict between the Apostles and their Jewish contemporaries as recorded throughout the Acts. The reality of an interpretive chasm is signalled in Peter's sermon reported in Acts 2; it is expressed clearly in Acts 3; it assumes lethal importance when Stephen bears his witness before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7); it is reiterated frequently by Paul (for instance, see Acts 13:13-52; 21:37-23:22; 24:1-26:32). Luke, writing at a later time in the third synoptic Gospel, indicates that he approached his writing with an eye to historical method (Luke 1:1-3). A debate about the interface of history and theology in the canonical Gospels became inevitable with the Enlightenment (circa 1750) and is far from settled in Century 21.

Renard's "general conclusions" cited above hardly convey the aura of certainty that pervades the New Testament documents, nor do they report Jewish hostility or Roman scorn. Christianity began as a sect of Judaism that was a profound threat to the established body; therefore, Stephen's alternative view of his nation's history evoked a tumultuous scene in which Sanhedrin dignitaries become so "enraged" that they "ground their teeth against him, … cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him" before stoning him to death (Acts 7:54-60). Mainstream Judaism could agree that Jewish history was accessible, significant and focused the promise of a Messiah; it anathematised the Christian conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Christ. The Romans who opposed Christianity did so for complex and inter-related philosophic, religious and cultural reasons.[6] The Jews, the Romans and the Christians all had space for supernatural intrusions into the human sphere but only the Christians saw the extant evidence as pointing to divine action in the person and work of Jesus Christ.[7]

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[6] Note Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984). Fernand Fisel (e-mail, Fisel to Patrick, 6 December 2008) drew my attention to the relevance for this discussion of Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1997).

[7] Relating to this observation, Frederick D. Mazzaferri (e-mail, Mazzaferri to Patrick, 14 December 2008) suggests that denial may masquerade as disbelief, as in John 9:1-34. I thank Mazzaferri for critiquing drafts of this paper and sharing with me an e-book and papers about Adventism that illustrate how biblical and theological data may interrogate and enrich historical research and writing. Mazzaferri's doctoral dissertation (on the literary genre of the Book of Revelation, 1989) is available on Google Scholar and he can be contacted at sdarealitycheck@optusnet.com.au. Julius Nam intimates how former Adventists are contributing constructively to the developing discipline of Adventist Studies in "Thoughts on the Future of Adventism," *Spectrum* 35:4 (Fall 2007), 18-20. The potential of non-Adventist scholarship in this arena is illustrated by Hilary M. Carey, "Ellen G. White and Female Prophetic Authority in the Adventist Tradition in Australia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 5:1 (June 2000), 3-19.

Jaroslav Pelikan offers illuminating insights into the way culture may impact human perceptions, identifying eighteen images of Jesus that have appeared between the first and the twentieth centuries and analysing them in historical rather than theological or metaphysical terms.[8] For Pelikan, "Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries." Pelikan's perspectives so embrace the disciplines of history and theology that he recognises "a curious blend" of contrasting currents such as religious faith, scholarship, scepticism and religious relativism. He notes that "as respect for the organized church has declined, reverence for Jesus has grown." The "unity and variety" of the portraits Pelikan sketches demonstrate that there is more in Jesus "than is dreamt of in the philosophy and Christology of the theologians." Indeed, Pelikan declares, Jesus now "belongs to the world."[9]

Adventist History

Elsewhere I argue that early Adventism is explicable in terms of thirteen prominent characteristics.[10] One strand of this identity was the movement's sense of inheritance from the Protestant Reformation. Centuries of acrimonious debate as to whether the climactic events of the sixteenth century were best characterised as a *reform* or a *revolt* were well settled for Adventism's pioneers, and that conflict was even more effectively relegated to the past as Ellen White developed a theology of history in a major strand of her writings on "the Great Controversy theme." Such thinking matured in six tomes by LeRoy Edwin Froom that contend Adventists continue and consummate the religious efforts of past dissentients and reformers.[11]

A sequence of issues will be listed here to both identify and illustrate some of the contested areas of Adventist historiography.

Twenty-first century interpretive conflicts in Adventism begin with the first book of Scripture. To an extent, the Adventist debate over how to understand Genesis is an historical struggle that can be illumined usefully by the disciplines of both ancient and

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[8] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-2.

[9] Pelikan, 1, 232-3. For the way religious history "mingles with the history of politics or society or culture" and in the twentieth-century sought to move beyond triumphalism, see Arthur Nelson Patrick, "Christianity and Culture in Colonial Australia: Selected Catholic, Anglican, Wesleyan and Adventist Perspectives, 1891-1900" (PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 1992), 1-8.

[10] Patrick, "Christianity and Culture," 78-94.

[11] Froom's account of the development of these ideas in England is now considerably refined in several volumes written by Bryan Ball. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart raise important considerations about the application of this historical framework, in the first edition of *Seeking a Sanctuary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 84-86.

modern history.[12] Of course this struggle is in no way unique for Adventists; the same issues are crucial for other Christians as well.[13]

An important division of opinion surrounds an aspect of what is claimed to be Hiram Edson's account of his engagement with Millerism and early Sabbatarian Adventism. Edson is credited with being the narrator of events that include his experience after breakfast on the morning of 23 October 1844 when, with an unnamed companion, he set off "to see and encourage some of our brn [brethren]."

We started, and while passing through a large field I was stopped about midway of the field. Heaven seemed open to my view, and I saw distinctly, and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth.[14]

Adventists have long interpreted what Edson "saw distinctly, and clearly" in three basic ways: as a heavenly vision, as an earthly insight, or as an embellished later reflection. Was Edson shown, supernaturally, a great truth that he then explored in Scripture and sought to confirm with biblical evidence? Or did Edson experience an insight, receive an idea, which he then explored in Scripture and sought to confirm with biblical evidence? In either case there should be little scope for controversy. Informed Adventists typically do not place visions above Scripture; there is wide agreement that the doctrine of the sanctuary ought to be developed from the Bible. However, probably beginning in the 1880s, Edson's concept began to exert a profound influence on Sabbatarian Adventism. There is no way that a contemporary believer can determine whether Edson experienced divine guidance or just received a stimulating idea. In either case, the New Testament witness in *The Letter to the Hebrews* offers the most extended commentary on the

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[12] The value of history in this context is well illustrated by the ancient civilisations of the Nile, Jordan and Euphrates valleys. Note, for instance, Trevor Lloyd's article, "Creation Accounts–Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew–a Comparison," in *Ancient History Resources for Teachers* 36:2, 97-108. It has often proved difficult for conservative Christians to interpret the books of Scripture in terms of the intention of their authors and the perception of their initial readers.

[13] See Keith Ward, *The Big Questions in Science and Religion* (West Conshohocken, Penn.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008). Ward, an expert in the study of world religions, explores ten questions "to determine whether religious beliefs can survive in the scientific age." Davis A. Young and Ralph F. Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks and Time: Geological Evidence for the Age of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008), claim "nobody needs to abandon sound science in order to become a Bible-believing follower of Jesus Christ" (11). Cf. the content of Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, Ervin Taylor, editors, *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (Riverside, Calif.: Adventist Today Foundation, 2006). For a well-researched account of how similar issues impacted another denomination, see Maura Jane Farrelly, "'God is the Author of Both': Science, Religion, and the Intellectualization of American Methodism," *Church History* 77:3 (September 2008), 659-687.

[14] Cited from Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, editors, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 215-6.

principal concept under consideration. Many earnest Adventists now believe that Hebrews and even Ellen White (at least since the publication of *The Desire of Ages,* 1898, page 757) offer an alternative picture to the one Edson describes. While more than a century of controversy on this matter can only be settled by biblical exegesis, not historical argument, history powerfully illumines the need to carefully assess the biblical evidence.[15]

The contrasting analyses made of Edson's manuscript suggest the relevance of a wider consideration of Millerite history. Gary Land aptly observes that "Millerite historiography has basically passed through three periods": "memoirs by the movement's participants who sought to defend their beliefs and actions," "a debate between detractors and apologists," and "an academic interest" that better defines the movement in the context of American culture.[16] Frederick Hoyt, in a 2008 Forum address, contrasts the long-marginalised historiography of Everett Dick with the long-lauded historiography of Francis Nichol. It is now evident that by 1930 Dick was offering a credible account that transcends those of Nichol, Froom and other apologists.[17] Also in 2008, a new volume in a Library of Religious Biography series offers credible historiography that gives believers sound reasons to cherish Millerism as a principal precursor of Sabbatarian Adventism.[18]

The Adventist past abounds with events or processes, often remembered by reason of their association with particular dates, that have elicited extended debate before they have been understood coherently and interpreted accurately as part of a wider tapestry. If it required almost a century for the acrimonious conflict beginning at the General Conference session of 1888 to achieve comparative maturity,[19] it appears that a smaller

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[15] For a brief overview of the effervescent literature that deals with the theological issues, see Arthur Patrick, "The Investigative Judgment, 1844-2008: A Short, Documented History of an Adventist Teaching," a paper read at the meeting of the Sydney Adventist Forum, 1 November 2008. The comments made above about Edson's manuscript assume a best-case scenario; the extant evidence suggests that the manuscript was written after 1844 and that since Edson's concept was not publicised in the early period, it may be a product of later reflection more than historical experience. On 5 December 2008, Fernand Fisel e-mailed to me a paper that offers a scholarly exploration of the extant evidence re Edson's manuscript and its interpretation; Fisel has also authored research of similar quality relating to one of Edson's significant contemporaries, Owen Crozier. In an e-mail (Burt to Patrick, 17 December 2008), Merlin Burt briefly describes the opinion of a United States handwriting expert who suggests Edson wrote his manuscript during the 1850s, even though Fisel's research indicates its contents were not publicised for another three decades (e-mail, Fisel to Burt, 17 December 2008).

[16] Gary Land, 'The Historians and the Millerites: An Historiographical Essay," in Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis 1831-1844* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1994), xiii.

[17] Frederick G. Hoyt, "Can Apologists and Scholars Coexist Peaceably in Adventism? Francis D. Nichol and Everett N. Dick" (La Mesa, CA: San Diego Adventist Forum), 9 August 2008).

[18] David L. Rowe, *God's Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

[19] Taken together, studies by A.G. Daniells (1926), Robert Wieland and Donald Short (1950 and thereafter), Robert D. Brinsmead (1958 to 1970), A.V. Olson (1966), Herbert E. Douglass, Desmond Ford, Russell R. and Colin D. Standish (as well as many others) raise important questions addressed by the Church in its "Dynamics of Salvation" statement, *Adventist Review,* 31 July 1980. That historical studies

controversy that erupted in 1919 (to be further discussed shortly) may mature in only ninety years, whereas a towering debate associated with 1957 may have reached a turning point after only fifty years.[20]

On the latter point, George Knight's suggestion is probably accurate–that the 1957 book entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* is the church's most controversial publication. However, with the sterling help of such doctoral dissertations as those by Eric Webster, Leroy Moore, Paul McGraw and Julius Nam, plus the fiftieth-anniversary conference convened at Andrews University in 2007, coherent understanding is now being achieved. It is noteworthy that even conservative Adventist interpreters are suggesting increasingly that most of Milian L. Andreasen's influential polemic against the book was not well founded on factual data.[21]

As part of a present discussion, it is opportune to note that Ronald Numbers' controversial study (1976) of Ellen White as an American health reformer was republished in a third edition during 2008. Numbers' historiography, particularly in relation to medical science, is well known and widely respected in the public sphere. While his volume on Ellen White met strong opposition from the church, it is now abundantly evident that Numbers has, more than any other author, "not only contributed to a reevaluation of White within Adventism but elevated her from a virtually unknown historical actor to a minor star on the stage of American religious history."[22] As historical documents, the three editions of Numbers' tome illustrate the potential of serious historiography that is often lacking in apologetic treatments of the same subject matter.[23] At the same time, it is evident that believers need to thoroughly explore and clearly articulate the evidence they cherish as supporting Ellen White's inspiration, a matter that Numbers specifically acknowledges is outside the parameters of his historical investigation.

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are crucial for such matters, note George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A.T. Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1987), and Woodrow H. Whidden II, *E.J. Waggoner: From Physician of Good News to Agent of Division* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008). I review Whidden's biography on spectrummagazine.org and in *Record,* 7 February 2009, 10.

[20] Note my reviews of Michael Campbell's lectures at Avondale College during November 2008 in terms of the content of his dissertation: http://sdanet.org/atissue/white/patrick/campbell-review-1919.htm and *Record,* forthcoming, 24 January 2009, 7.

[21] See my paper and the online data re the 2007 *Questions on Doctrine* conference, qod.andrews.edu. Andreasen's attitudes and activities ensured he received minimal "official" information of the type that recent dissertations have thoroughly explored.

[22] Ronald L. Numbers, "Preface to the Third Edition," *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), xi, but note xi-xxv.

[23] That it was difficult for the church to recognise such realities is evident from Jonathan M. Butler's essay entitled "The Historian as Heretic," included in Numbers' second and third editions (1992, 2008), 1-41)

Since 2002 in particular, Don McMahon has made public his research on the same subject, thereby eliciting interest and evoking concern from both Ellen White protagonists and critics. McMahon has attracted criticism for his definition of the "whats" and "whys" in Ellen White's health writings, his analyses of how statements in both these categories relate to contemporary medical science, and his statistical conclusions about the way he claims Ellen White's writings transcend those of other nineteenth-century health reformers. At the same time, some Adventists (particularly those who opt for "inerrancy in the autographs" as applicable to both Scripture and the Ellen White corpus) strongly oppose McMahon's conclusions. The concerns expressed to the left and right of McMahon's position have stimulated his drive to re-evaluate the entire subject and clarify his major conclusions in relation to current recommendations proposed by the World Health Organisation. The lively debate over McMahon's engagement with Ellen White Studies is likely to persist into the foreseeable future.[24] The intensity of the conflict is, in part, fuelled by the way in which historical issues intersect with medical science and statistics, as well as biblical and theological matters.[25]

Serious studies and the popular writings of many authors discuss how Fundamentalism developed in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century and describe its impact on Adventism. At first Adventists largely ignored the new phenomenon, but by the time they convened a Bible conference during 1919, their attitudes were changing. Over against perceived threats such as those of Modernism, Fundamentalism seemed to offer Adventists potential benefits, including the possibility of effective collaboration. Instead of the difficult but necessary task of defining a third option between the extremes of Fundamentalism and Modernism, Adventists largely retreated into the camp of the Fundamentalists, forgetting much of what was known about the life and writings of Ellen White as they applied Fundamentalist concepts of inerrancy

[24] T. Joe Willey, Leonard Brand and Don McMahon exchanged salvos in a discussion entitled "Natural and Supernatural?" carried by *Adventist Today,* September-October 2008, 20-25. McMahon's and Brand's expression of issues relating to historical method have elicited strong criticism from Willey. Willey also faults McMahon from the perspective of scientific method; cf. Numbers' remarks in *Prophetess of Health,* xxiv. McMahon is currently (e-mail, McMahon to Patrick, 22 December 2008) refining his articulation of the data and argumentation; the church is anticipating a publication expressing its current stance, edited by Merlin Burt.

[25] A number of recent doctoral studies on Adventism have strong historical elements but attempt trans-disciplinary approaches. While at times such attempts open the authors to severe criticism from scholars who are expert in one of the component disciplines, they often make a fruitful contribution to the discipline of Adventist Studies. Two recent examples illustrate this observation: Michael Leigh Chamberlain, *Beyond Ellen White: Seventh-day Adventism in Transition* (Teneriffe, Qld: Post Pressed, 2008); Richard Bowen Ferret, *Charisma and Routinisation in a Millennialist Community: Seventh-day Adventist Identity* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008). Of all authors publishing articles about Adventism in scholarly journals, Ronald Lawson (Professor of Sociology, City University of New York) is the most successful. While Lawson's writing is principally sociological in emphasis, he maintains a decided historical interest that derives from his initial PhD studies at the University of Queensland and will be pursued throughout the three volumes he is writing at present.

to both Scripture and her writings. The inevitable crisis relating to Ellen White that W.W. Prescott predicted as early as 1915 became a stark reality within seven decades.[26]

In the United States and Australia, the later 1970s and the 1980s appear in hindsight as an era of crisis in Adventism, if the significant loss of ministers and members is taken into account.[27] A number of theses and doctoral dissertations now probe the data effectively and offer a range of interpretations. Many Adventists in the 1980s started using the historic initials FDR to describe the intra-denominational tensions focused by the prophetic interpretations of Desmond Ford,[28] the financial practices of Donald Davenport,[29] and the literary analyses made by Walter Rea (and many others) of Ellen White's writings. It can now be cogently argued that the church's Biblical Studies, financial structures and Ellen White Studies required close attention, to the point that the outcomes surrounding Ford, Davenport and Rea were symptomatic of needs more than root causes of conflict.

It is noteworthy that the discussion of the church's soteriology that had flared repeatedly (especially in 1888 and 1950) was becoming a very public issue by the 1970s. The report of the Righteousness by Faith consultation, published in the church's general paper on 31 July 1980, held potential to engender a more cohesive understanding of the issues. However, during August 1980 that outcome was postponed by conflict relating to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment and the authority of Ellen White's writings. Had the principal consensus statement voted on August 15 by the Sanctuary Review Committee at Glacier View been consciously read in the light of the "Dynamics of Salvation" statement published on July 31, plus the data even then available relating to Ellen White, enormous trauma may have been minimised, if not avoided.[30]

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[26] See Gilbert M. Valentine, "The Church 'Drifting toward a Crisis": Prescott's 1915 Letter to William White," *Catalyst* 2:1 (November 2007), 32-94, also on sdanet.org/atissue. Observe in this connection the content of footnote 20, above. It now appears possible (and necessary) to more objectively evaluate Graeme Bradford's three books, a matter I raised during 2007 on the spectrummagazine.org website.

[27] This discussion is both extensive and effervescent, as I indicate in "Glacier View and the Australasian Ministers, *Spectrum* 34:2 (Spring 2006), 68-71.

[28] For two recent, contrasting interpretations, see Milton Hook, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation, 2008); Colin D. Standish, "Biography of Desmond Ford," *Remnant Herald* 122 (January/February 2009), 1950-1951. Cf. my review, "The Hook Book on Ford: A Thumbnail Sketch," *Good News Unlimited,* July 2008, 12. To audiences in Sydney and Melbourne, Hook has presented his historiography as a combination of the roles of detective, judge and writer.

[29] For historical context see Douglas Hackleman, *Who Watches? Who Cares?* (Morrison, CO: Members for Church Accountability, 2008), a significant book that I reviewed on spectrummagazine.org, 10 July 2008.

[30] Significant consensus on the existence of crucial evidence relating to Ellen White's life and writings would not be achieved until the first International Prophetic Guidance Workshop of 1982. However, the interpretation of the extant data is still a focus of dialectic. For a small window into selected aspects of the ongoing discussion, see my two papers entitled "The Inspired and Inspiring Ellen White," sdanet.org/atissue. It remains to be seen whether a conference planned for Maine (USA) during October 2009 will succeed in developing, for publication by Oxford University Press, the first scholarly introduction

"The way the Lord has led us"

Christianity is an historical religion, and that observation is specifically applicable to one of one of its subsets, Seventh-day Adventism. Since 1972, Adventism has developed its archival management and research facilities to the point where effective research is possible in all the major geographical sections of the world. The development of information technology means that the study and interpretation of the church's faith and history is now a democratised process that needs as never before effective leadership by professionals such as biblical scholars, theologians, historians and sociologists who demonstrate integrity and thus earn readers' trust.[31]

While historians should make no claim of ability in the arena of predictive prophecy they must attempt to responsibly juxtapose the past and the future. During 1987 I suggested that 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."[32] In the hindsight of the last two decades, and in view of the literature cited in the article entitled "Recent Tensions in Seventh-day Adventism,"[33] it appears that Adventism is making substantial progress toward more credible historiography. Clearly, a comprehensive understanding of the development of this historiography will better identify pitfalls and more adequately highlight options for the church's use of the discipline of history. It is my hope that in the future we may settle at least some of our ongoing controversies more expeditiously than we have sometimes been able to do in the past.

Arthur Patrick, *Honorary Senior Research Fellow,* Avondale College, a paper presented 16 January 2009 at the "New Perspectives on Christianity" conference, Avondale College, 15-18 January 2009.

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to the life and writings of Ellen Gould White (1827-1915). The studies by Numbers and George W. Reid *(A Sound of Trumpets: Americans, Adventists, and Health Reform,* 1982) are specific to Ellen White as a health reformer; the Maine conference will address a more comprehensive agenda.

[31] A student currently undertaking graduate study in history at the University of New England kindly wrote a critique of this paper that began with this arresting paragraph. "As in the rest of the secular and religious world, SDA historians have been guilty at times of writing biased versions of 'what really happened'. Lack of scholarly training, an inability to be introspective and discerning, personal bias and belief systems, the pressures of church employment and the need to conform to stay employed, the wish to put a positive spin on anything connected with one's cherished beliefs, a guiding motive that the end justifies the means—these can all contribute to the blurring and evasion of historical fact. Adventists are no different from other groups. History overall has been nationalistic, patriarchal and triumphalistic, with many a gloss, embellishment or ellipsis. It has often been written like an advertisement, retaining the positive and chiselling out the negative, and often written by those with little training, and few scholarly tools. This is true of the whole secular and religious world, and SDAism in its early days was no different." E-mail, Gillian Ford to Patrick, 2 January 2009.

[32] "Seventh-day Adventism in the South Pacific: A Review of Sources," *Journal of Religious History* 14:3 (June 1987), 307-326.

[33] At the time of the conference this article had been refereed by *Journal of Religious History* and accepted for publication. For its electronic form as submitted to the journal in 2008, consult the Avondale College website; for its published form, see *Journal of Religious History* 34:3 (September 2010), 272-288.