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Bryan W. Ball: Academic, Administrator, Apologist

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1. Bryan W. Ball: Academic, Administrator, Apologist

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Bryan William Ball was born in July 1935 in the Devonshire village of Bere Ferrers, just across the river Tavy from the historic naval city of Plymouth. Descended from an old Devon family which has been traced back to the early 1700s, his father was an ex-naval officer who had served on several ships in the British Navy between World War I and World War II, including the new battleship H.M.S. *Rodney*, on which he visited Sydney in 1925 as part of the *Rodney's* year-long 'courtesy' cruise to distant parts of the British Empire. Bryan was the eldest of four children born to Cecil and Norah (nee Beardsell) Ball, an Adventist family which during Bryan's early years and in World War II lived in several different parts of England, a fact which influenced his education and outlook on life.

At various times in his working life, Bryan filled a number of different roles: pastor-evangelist; a historian of English Puritanism whose works have been published by prestigious publishing houses; an administrator of two tertiary educational institutions, and a church administrator at a very senior level. Each of these roles is challenging for a variety of reasons, and Bryan has made a significant contribution in all of them.

Bryan's professional life took place in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1950, two years before Bryan began his training to become a minister at Newbold College, the Adventist Church had a worldwide membership of 755,712, of which the largest single component was in North America.¹ In the British Isles, the Church reported a membership of

1 In 1950 the North American Division had 250,939 members, or 33% of the church's world membership. The next largest Division of the Church, the Southern European Division, had at that time 78,167 members (equal to about one third of the North American membership) and included "unions" in Angola, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Franco-Belgium, French-speaking West and Equatorial Africa, Hungary, Indian Ocean, Italy, North Africa, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, Portuguese East Africa and Spain. The official statistics of the Adventist Church may be found at <http://docs.adventistarchives.org//documents.asp?CatID=11&SortBy=2&ShowDateOrder=True>

6,666 distributed across 102 churches.² Within the United States, in 1950 the ratio of members of the Adventist Church to the general population was 1 to 629, while in the United Kingdom this figure was 1 to 7593.³ Thus the English branch of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in which Bryan grew up and trained to serve could only be described as small. Today, although it has grown in numbers in comparison to 1950, the Adventist Church is still rather small in England.⁴ On the other hand, the membership of the world-wide church has grown to over 18 million, and it has become truly international.⁵

Bryan describes himself as a third-generation Adventist, since his parents and three of his grandparents were Seventh-day Adventists. Until the age of 14 he lived in places where there was no easily accessible Adventist Church—Bere Ferrers in Devon, Potton in Bedfordshire, and Carlisle in Cumbria. When aged from 12 to 14 years, he was able to attend a small church having only 3 or 4 members in Bedford once every 5 to 6 weeks. Bryan accompanied his grandmother and reports that his earliest memo-

2 In 1950, the British Union Conference included the Eire Mission (34 members); the North England Conference (2,018), (the Northern Ireland Mission (161), the Scottish Mission (323), the South England Conference (3,663) and the Welsh Mission (467). The South England Conference reported 48 churches for its membership of 3,663, or one church for 76 members.

3 The population figures used in these calculations were found at <http://www.photius.com/rankings/world2050.html>.

4 According to the most recent statistical report available at the time of writing, the “2014 Annual Statistical Report: 150th Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for 2012 and 2013,” the church membership at the end of 2013 in the British Union Conference was 34,512, of whom 22,811 were in the South England Conference. Immigration has contributed significantly to this growth throughout the British Isles.

5 The official membership at the end of 2013 stood at 18,143,745. During the last quinquennial period the Secretariat of the Adventist Church at General Conference headquarters has made a concerted effort to ensure that the figures reported in the Annual Reports are representative of those actually attending church regularly. In those parts of the world where denominational affiliation is gathered as part of census data, those who identify themselves as Seventh-day Adventists in the census returns are much greater in number than the official church statistics. Furthermore, the membership of the church was no longer concentrated in North America. At the end of 2013, the largest Division of the Adventist Church was the Inter-American Division (with 3,686,255 members), followed by the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (3,167,259), the East-Central Africa Division (2,856,708), the South American Division (2,263,194), the Southern Asia Division (1,510,326), and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (1,222,546). All these Divisions of the Church now have a greater membership than that of the North American Division (1,184,395).

ries of the Adventist Church were of “a very small and somewhat peculiar church composed mostly of old ladies who met at the Oddfellows Hall in Bedford and usually had a lay preacher.”⁶ When Bryan was 14 years old, his family moved back to the Plymouth area and they, with him, began regularly attending Plymouth Church, which then had about 100 members, making it one of the larger churches by the standards of the Adventist Church in England at the time. It was there that the teenaged Bryan became active in his local church. When the local members heard his speaking ability at MV meetings,⁷ he was urged by them to consider a career as a Gospel minister. He was able to attend a “meet Newbold” weekend in the spring of 1952, and recalls that he “... felt that Newbold was for me rather than a secular university. After much deliberation, and discussion with a rather disappointed father,” he went to Newbold in the September of that year to study in preparation to become an Adventist minister. Early in his time at Newbold the structure and content of the ministerial training course underwent significant change through an affiliation with Columbia Union College in Washington, which enabled Bryan and his fellow classmates to graduate with a BA in Theology.

In 1956 Bryan was in the first group of Newbold students to graduate with this new qualification, and was appointed as a ministerial intern at the New Gallery Centre in London.⁸ While there, he worked with such church luminaries as the Australian Roy Allan Anderson and the Americans H. M. S. Richards and Elman Folkenberg.⁹ Bryan claims that the preaching of An-

6 Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Bryan Ball are from an email interview between Robert K. McIver and Bryan W. Ball, 13–15 July, 2015. The full text of this interview may be found at the Adventist Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW 2265.

7 MV meetings, or “Missionary Volunteer” meetings, were afternoon meetings, usually designed to interest youth aged in the late teens and young adults and to involve them in the life of the church.

8 The New Gallery Centre at 123 Regent St in London’s West End was established first as an art gallery in 1888. It is a Grade II listed building, and has been used as a restaurant (1910–1913), a cinema (1925–1953), a Seventh-day Adventist Centre (1953–1990s), a Habitat Furniture Store (2006–2010), and a flagship store for Burberry (from 2011).

9 Roy Allan Anderson (1895–1985), an Australian Adventist Evangelist, worked in Australia, England and the United States, and published a number of books, including “The Shepherd Evangelist” which influenced Bryan’s type of ministry for several years. Anderson was later editor of *Ministry Magazine* (1950–66), one of the most influential publications of the Adventist Church throughout the world. One interesting source for Anderson is <http://www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/1826.php>. H. M. S. Richards (1894–1985) was a prominent American Adventist Evangelist, who established “The Voice of Prophecy” a radio program that in its heyday

derson and Richards in particular convinced him of the necessity and efficacy of biblical preaching, both in pastoral and evangelistic ministry. It was while working at the New Gallery that he met his future wife, Dawn, and they were married in 1959 by Russell Kranz, who was then musical director at the New Gallery. From 1958 to 1967 Bryan worked as a successful pastor/evangelist, first in North London and later in the West Midlands, which was part of the North England Conference.

When he was a student at Newbold, Bryan already had the conviction that the Church “needed people with advanced degrees if it was to make an impression on the growing secular culture of the day,” a conviction that was only strengthened by his work as an evangelist. He was one of the first to take advantage of the Andrews University summer extension schools offered at Newbold (with a final quarter spent at Andrews University) and gained an MA in Religion, *summa cum laude*, from that institution in 1966. He was soon able to use this award to gain entry into a PhD program at the University of London.

Bryan says it was rather a “struggle” at the time to get authorization, especially from some senior administrators, to enrol in a PhD program. Given the circumstances and prevailing attitudes of the Church, this should not be considered surprising, as he was unique in his generation in seeking a PhD qualification from an English university. When asked whether he was aware of any other Adventist students studying for a doctoral degree at the time he was doing so, Bryan answered, “Not in England,” although he was aware that other European Adventists had completed PhDs in the recent past.¹⁰

was aired on stations across the United States. Elman J. Folkenberg (1920–1986) developed the so called “Five-day Plan” to help stop smoking, a pioneer public health program associated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The importance of the program no doubt was instrumental in the decision by the Washington Post to publish his obituary. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1986/01/22/elman-j-folkenberg-dies/aec711bb-0d89-4a02-ae98-1020a34aebad/>

¹⁰ Bryan specifically mentions V. Norskov Olsen and Leslie Hardinge (who both had PhDs) in comments quoted later in this chapter. It should not be forgotten that the Scot, W. G. C. Murdoch, who had been principal of Newbold College for 16 years and then president of Australian Missionary College (now Avondale College of Higher Education) for six years, before his appointment in 1953 to the Seventh-day Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Michigan, held a PhD before he arrived in Australia. Furthermore, Edward E. Heppenstall (1901–1994), was born in Rotherham, Yorkshire, UK, so should also be considered an Englishman. He moved to the USA in 1931 and completed his tertiary study there, eventually receiving a PhD in Religious Education from the University of Southern California in 1951. Both Murdoch and Heppenstall taught Bryan while he was studying for his MA through Andrews University.

Finally having received authorization to begin his PhD study, albeit initially on a part-time basis, Bryan enrolled at the University of London, which at that time had a very good church history department, working under the guidance of the Rev Dr Geoffrey Nuttall who was recognised as one of the leading authorities in the world on Puritanism and English Nonconformity and was himself a prolific writer, having published at least one book or journal article every year for 50 years until his retirement. Bryan believes he was very fortunate to have Geoffrey Nuttall to guide him through the PhD programme, despite Nuttall’s reputation as a rigorous supervisor. When asked why he chose the English Reformation to study (rather than OT, or NT, or Systematic Theology, or some other area), Bryan replied:

I soon learned after graduation that many English people generally regarded Adventism as a nineteenth-century American sect. I felt it was essential to change that perception if the church was to make any impression on the English population, both those who were already Christian as well as the growing numbers of secular people, and that it might be done through tracing the roots of Adventism in all its essentials to the Reformation. My mentor at this period was V. Norskov Olsen, first my Bible and Church history teacher, later principal of Newbold, and then president of Loma Linda University. Olsen’s book, *John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church*, was like a beacon of light to me. It was one of the first books by an Adventist scholar published by a secular university press (University of California Press, 1973), and it was widely acclaimed in England. Much the same could be said of Leslie Hardinge’s book, *The Celtic Church in Britain*, published in England by SPCK only a year before Olsen’s book. Both these books confirmed my conviction that good, scholarly studies by Adventist scholars could, and should, be published by recognised non-denominational publishers. Otherwise, it seemed to me, as it still does, that we are largely talking to ourselves. So it seems that my *A Great Expectation* was the second work to be published in English by an Adventist scholar in Europe. Interestingly, all three of these early studies were in the field of Church History, maybe because in those tentative years it seemed less likely to be confrontational and would therefore help to bring Adventist scholarship to the attention of the scholarly world.

These comments reveal that the younger Bryan Ball felt uncomfortable with the perception of the Adventist Church as a North American sect to such an extent that countering that impression became a significant aspect of his future vision. However, given the counter-cultural nature of Seventh-day Adventism in the 1950s and 1960s, its emphasis on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, its view of itself as the proclaimer of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, its small numbers, and the dominance of the denomination by North Americans at the time, to characterise the English Seventh-day Adventist Church of the time as a North American sect

could be defended. The Adventist Church of that era could even be said to have felt a certain level of tension with its social environment, a characteristic sometimes used to identify a sect as distinct from a church.¹¹ Yet by the 1950s the Adventists had already been on the journey described by sociologists as the progression from sect to denomination to church for at least 50 years.

There are many factors that have led the Adventist Church in this direction. Prominent amongst these causes are the vigorous development of schools and colleges and the establishment and maintenance of a large and high-profile hospital system. In doing so, the Church has inevitably embraced the changes that flow from running and staffing institutions that become leaders in their field by meeting the most stringent accreditation standards set by society as a whole.¹² There have been and still are many communities where the influence of Adventist educational and health institutions contribute markedly to the general good of society. Evidence of this came in 2001 when, at the centenary of Australian Federation in that year, Bryan received the Centennial Medal from the Australian Government “for services to Australian society through the Seventh-day Adventist Church”. Today, 60 years or so after the time described by Bryan, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global church, and in many parts of the world would more likely be classified as a denomination rather than as a sect.¹³ In other words, it should no longer be considered a North American sect. Bryan Ball has himself contributed to that change in perception, both within the Adventist Church itself and by many of the cultures in which it functions.

True to his goal of tracing the “roots of Adventism in all its essentials to the Reformation,” Bryan has had the results of his research published by

11 Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, for example, use the degree of tension between a religious group and its sociological environment as the key to defining whether or not a religious group is a sect: “Definition 26. Churches are religious bodies in relatively lower tension with their surroundings. Definition 27. Sects are religious bodies in relatively higher tension with their surroundings.” Rodney Stark & Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 143–44.

12 The Adventists’ establishment and expansion of school and hospital systems is traced in Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 100–129, 191–206, 293–312, 478–498. See also Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (2^d ed.; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 302–332.

13 “A nineteenth-century religious sect that observes a seventh-day Sabbath, proclaims the imminent end of the world, and practices health reform, Seventh-day Adventism is now on the way to becoming a major world religion.” So Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, xiii.

recognized academic publishers rather than by the publishing houses operated by the Adventist Church.¹⁴ Over the span of his writing career Bryan has published the following books, with, it should be noted, prestigious academic publishers:

A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975; Vol. XII in ‘Studies in the History of Christian Thought’, ed. Heiko A. Oberman.

The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1981; 2^d ed., revised, Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2014

The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600–1800, Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1994; 2^d ed., revised and expanded, Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co, 2009.

The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley, Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2008.

All of that of course was in the future for Bryan when he graduated with his PhD from the University of London in 1971, having written a dissertation on the topic, “Eschatological Thought in English Protestant Theology, 1640–1660: With Special Reference to the Second Coming of Christ and the End of the Age”, four years later published by Brill as *A Great Expectation*.

Fifteen years after graduating from Newbold, and having served in pastoral and evangelistic roles in both English conferences, Bryan was elected as President of the North England Conference, and served the Church in that role between 1971 and 1975. Soon after this he was invited to move to Newbold College as Chair of the Religion Department, a role he filled between 1976 and 1983. In the early 1980s Bryan also took on the role of Co-ordinator of Theology and Church History in the newly established European Seminary. He was subsequently invited to become the Principal of Avondale College in Cooranbong NSW, in Australia, where he served from 1984 until 1990.

14 It is interesting to compare Bryan’s choice of publishers with that used by Le Roy Froom (1890–1974). Froom wrote several works, including a major work tracing the history of prophetic interpretation, and another tracing those espousing conditional immortality, topics which Bryan Ball has explored in two of his books. Froom published his through the Review and Herald, a publishing house owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 volumes [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946–54]; and *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 volumes [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965–66]. Bryan published his books through the publishing houses of Brill of Leiden; Oxford University Press, and James Clarke of Cambridge.

During his time as Principal of Avondale, a new girls' dormitory was built (Ella Boyd Hall), an extension to the gymnasium was added (including squash courts) and re-accreditations were negotiated in many disciplines.¹⁵ Towards the end of his presidency much time was taken up with a legal case which was taken to the Industrial Tribunal Court in Sydney, over the matter of whether the wages paid to Avondale lecturers should be tied to the salary system of other tertiary institutions rather than to the Church's own salary system. The case was eventually decided in the Church's favour, but the judgement of the court was not passed down until Bryan had moved on to be President of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Bryan's professional career is remarkable in many ways, not least because of his move from College Principal or President to Division President. Given that the presidents of Conferences, Unions and Divisions are appointed by an elective process, usually at a "session" of delegates, career paths within the Adventist Church are not always predictable. But one pattern emerges – it is highly unusual for an existing College President to be appointed as a Division President.¹⁶ No doubt Bryan's work with the General Conference on his research into the Reformation backgrounds of Adventist belief, his previous experience as a conference president, his undoubted abilities as a preacher when representing Avondale at camp meetings and other large venues, together with his sensible approach to administrative tasks, all played a part in his appointment. Bryan served as Division President between 1990 and 1997. During that time significant changes took place at all of the institutions of which Bryan was chair of the governing board: the Sydney Adventist Hospital (e.g. opening a 24-bed Emergency Care Department and an intensive care unit),¹⁷ the Sanitarium Health Food Company (restructuring),¹⁸ and Pacific Adventist College (which became

¹⁵ See further on developments at Avondale College during this time period, Milton Hook, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 1998), 312–316.

¹⁶ Bryan has pointed out to me that Jan Paulsen had a career that also moved from the academic world to Church administration. "He [Paulsen] had been head of Religion at both Newbold and the Adventist Seminary of West Africa before being Newbold principal, then Division Secretary and President, and finally General Conference President [i.e. President of the World-wide Adventist Church]." While it is not unknown for talented individuals to move from academic Administration to the broader church administration in the Adventist Church, it is very unusual.

¹⁷ See Arthur N. Patrick, *The San: 100 Years of Christian Caring, 1903–2003* (Wahroonga, NSW: Sydney Adventist Hospital, 2003), 139–256.

¹⁸ See Robert Parr and Glyn Litster, *"What Hath God Wrought!": The Sanitarium Health Food Company Story* (Berkeley Vale, NSW: Sanitarium Health Food, 1996), passim.

Pacific Adventist University).¹⁹ While he was chair of Avondale's governing board negotiations were opened to take the college to university status, possibly the single most important step in the College's long history. Bryan also was heavily involved in reviewing and developing the strategic plan for the Division during this period.

Bryan retired in 1997. As he says:

I retired relatively early²⁰ in order to return to research in my specialty field, English Puritan and Nonconformist history, and also to broaden my writing base by addressing other wider theological issues. I still felt a strong conviction that the church could benefit from my writing in both areas. As the list of my publications shows, many of them, especially if second editions are included, have appeared since I retired.

Can We Still Believe the Bible? has been particularly useful in many parts of the world and continues to be so, having sold upward of 25,000 copies in two editions in English as well as being translated into Spanish, Latvian and is in preparation for translation into Russian.

I have also completed another longstanding ambition of a quite different nature — walking the South-West Coast Path in the UK, a distance of 1014 kms, and calculated to involve climbs equivalent to three times the height of Everest over its entire length! I have also been much involved in preaching on Sabbaths, most of it in the North New South Wales, South New South Wales and Greater Sydney Conferences — in more than 50 different churches, as well as presentations at Camp Meetings and Ministers' Meetings. But there is still much to do, God willing!

Retirement has allowed Bryan to return to his work as an apologist for biblical Christianity as well as for distinctive Adventist beliefs. In retirement he added to his list of academic publications relating to aspects of English Reformation thought and Puritanism with the publication in 2008 of *The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley*, published by James Clarke of Cambridge, UK. He has also produced major revisions of two of his other books. As well as this, he has written, edited or contributed to a number of volumes on issues that he considers important for the Seventh-day Adventist Church members to consider. These publications include:

As sole author:

Living in the Spirit, Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Co., 1997.

Can We Still Believe the Bible? And Does it Really Matter? Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Co., 2007; Spanish edition, Buenos Aires, Argen-

¹⁹ See S. R. Tarburton, *A Place Chosen by God: Pacific Adventist University* (np: np, 2005), passim.

²⁰ Bryan retired at age 62.

tina: Asociacion Casa Editora Sudamerica, 2010; Latvian edition, Riga, LV: Patmos, 2010; 2nd Edition, revised and enlarged, Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Co, 2011.

As [Joint] Editor and Contributor:

The Essential Jesus: The Man, His Message, His Mission, Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2002; second edition, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011, in the Adventist Heritage Library.

In The Beginning: Science and Scripture Confirm Creation, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2012; Portuguese Edition, Tatui, SP, Brazil: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2014.

The Adventist Church in which Bryan W. Ball served changed much during his years of service, and can no longer be described as a small North-American sect. Many contributed to that change, although Bryan has perhaps been more influential than many others. His career has taken him literally half-way across the globe, working in two countries with distinct histories and cultures. He sought education to doctoral level at a time when it was unusual for leaders of the Adventist Church to seek such qualifications.²¹ He began his ministry as an evangelist and has worked as an administrator. He has been tireless in pursuing his objectives to reveal the connection between the distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and their roots in English heritage and to enable his readers to see those beliefs in the context of historic Christian doctrine. The writings selected for inclusion in this book represent his many interests, ranging from biblical and theological studies, historical backgrounds, to origins and sociological observations. Many of them, naturally, come from his great interest in English religious history and the light that it throws on the development of Puritan and Adventist doctrine.

This year Bryan reaches his 80th birthday. This book is a celebration of his long and remarkable career.

21 One is conscious of a change in this as in many areas in the Adventist Church. David Trim, Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, pointed out to me in a private conversation that the General Conference president and all the vice presidents that served in 2010–2015 had earned doctorates.