

Institute for Christian Teaching
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AN HISTORICIST-PROPHETIC FRAMEWORK FOR
THE STUDY OF CHURCH HISTORY
IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

by

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AN HISTORICIST-PROPHETIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF CHURCH HISTORY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has traditionally espoused an historicist¹ position in the kind of interpretation that its scholars and theologians have given to biblical prophecy. This historicist position, in the context of the emphasis placed on an investigation and understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation, has been strongly influential in the formation of the SDA Church and its self-understanding.

The maturing process that may be seen in the historical development of the SDA Church over the past century and a half has generated a distinctive "Adventist" approach to life. Among those who have made a serious commitment of themselves as members of the SDA denomination, there has emerged what may be termed an Adventist world-view.² While this world-view agrees in many if not most respects with the generally held world-view of the major body of conservative Christians, it is certainly true that Adventism remains a sub-culture of Christianity and consequently that Adventists approach life in all its complexities with a distinctive bias.

This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the SDA approach to education. And yet, as is also true of our colleagues in other Christian denominations, our world-view seems not to have encompassed fully the centrality of God's revelation of himself to the manner in which scholars and teachers approach their academic disciplines. The emphasis on integration of faith and learning in Christian academia over the past quarter century demands that a re-evaluation of our presuppositions and the educational corollaries arising from them be undertaken.

In this paper, it is intended to reconsider the approach to the teaching of church history in the context of the integration of faith and learning, taking into particular account the historicist prophetic interpretation that has been so influential in framing the thinking of Seventh-day Adventists since their early beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

It is the purpose of this paper to introduce to church history lecturers in Adventist tertiary educational institutions an historicist-prophetic framework for the presentation of an introductory course in general church history.

The framework has been developed on the basis of the messages given to the seven churches as presented in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. Adventist lecturers and students alike will be well-acquainted with the historicist interpretation given to these chapters. It is the intent of this study to build upon these familiar concepts in order to present a framework as the basis for a simple but functional teaching strategy. By using the framework and implementing the teaching strategy, it should be possible for an improved integration of Adventist biblical perspectives to be achieved in the church history classroom, particularly at the introductory college

level. The purpose of this paper is not to suggest that there is one best way to teach church history in an Adventist institution. Rather, it is to outline some strategies for one possible approach to the integration of faith and learning in church history. These strategies may be used by those who find the ideas helpful.

Statement of the Problem

As much as any scientist, historians since the Enlightenment have sought the illusive goal of complete objectivity. The Charles Dickens character, Mr. Gradgrind, was concerned only with the presentation of "facts" in his teaching of history. Modern historians have acknowledged that their lofty goal of objectivity is unattainable and that every historian approaches his or her subject with distinctive presuppositions posited on the world-view that he or she holds.³ Yet the leading artisans of the craft of history, Christians among them, have been loathe to accept scholarship that admits of building on anything that is not based on "this-worldly" presuppositions.

This reticence is understandable. No genuine academic of whatever persuasion would have scholarship diminished by unsubstantiated theory or unresearched whim and fancy. History should not be manipulated to provide support for that which is unworthy of support. The twentieth century has seen enough of quasi-historical pronouncements that have provided a propaganda base for the Communists, the Nazis, those committing genocide in the former Yugoslavia and others of like ilk. Christianity in its two thousand year history has not always been guiltless in its use of evidence and interpretation of events. The church has sometimes distorted evidence with the intention of achieving its sometimes less than Christian ends. From this point of view, the desirability of complete objectivity, as illusive as it may be, seems particularly attractive to the secular mind.

Unfortunately, the secular attitude of the majority of historians has tended to relegate the scholarship of those who do history from a Christian perspective to a second class position simply because Christian presuppositions are based on other-worldly foundations.⁴ It is true that at times Christian historians may produce less than ideal work because they use "other-worldly" evidence and support for their theories. This is not the same as having a world-view and holding historical presuppositions that are based on the concept of a transcendent God who has revealed himself and who acts in history. The former is poor scholarship. The latter is, in the opinion of the present writer, a valid foundation from which to approach the worthy academic discipline of history.

Historians of a variety of persuasions have recognized that complete objectivity is not possible and that they approach their discipline with certain presuppositions which vary according to their world-views. The case of the Christian historian is not very different. The fact that his or her world-view admits a supernatural element should not disqualify such an individual from the ranks of those who are considered serious participants in the doing of history. Christian presuppositions based on biblical perspectives including God's transcendence and immanence are as legitimate for an historian as, for example, the presuppositions of Malthus or Marx or any of a myriad of other approaches that historians may take. Under serious scrutiny, the presuppositions of Malthus, Marx, or even the secular humanist, are seen to be based on scientifically unverifiable theories. The other-worldliness of the Christian viewpoint is therefore not as far out of line with recognized historical approaches as may at first appear to be the case.

An attempt has been made to set out the problem that the Christian historian faces within the context of the discipline of history. Attention will now be turned to the problems facing the Seventh-day Adventist historian because of the distinctive world-view and presuppositions that he or she holds. Any informed Adventist is consciously aware of the historicist application given to prophecy in the books of Daniel and the Revelation. Lecturers in Adventist institutions of higher

learning are also at least subconsciously aware of the influence that this historicist application has had in forming the Adventist world-view. But the integration of this aspect of the Adventist weltbild in the history classroom has hardly been seriously considered even in the most obvious of areas, the teaching of church history. It is unlikely that it would be profitable to produce an historical construct for the teaching of all history classes in Adventist institutions on the basis of Adventist prophetic interpretation. But in the field of church history, particularly at the basic level, the approach seems to hold some attractive possibilities.

If Adventism has the distinctive world-view that has been suggested and, if that world-view has been influenced by an historicist interpretation of biblical prophecy as has been proposed, then Adventist historians should consciously endeavour to allow this world-view to inform their teaching. It is understandable that these historians may be a little hesitant to embark upon such a venture. After all, they have learned to play the game of history according to a set of rules that have paid scant attention to Christian perspectives. With a heightened awareness of the legitimacy of historical scholarship based on Christian presuppositions, however, it is time to accept the implications of our Adventist perspectives and to present our scholarship in this context.

Church history as taught in Adventist Institutions has, in the experience of the author, generally been uninformed--or at most only vaguely informed--by the traditional prophetic interpretations that are accepted almost without question by the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists.⁹ The time has come to integrate the biblical faith that we hold with the learning activities that take place in the church history classrooms of our colleges and universities. Undoubtedly many lecturers have made genuine and worthwhile attempts at this integration. The present paper is offered as a stimulus to encourage further such attempts. It is done with the hope that future ministers and teachers will be exposed to a view of church history that integrates an Adventist understanding of this discipline with the "facts"--the stuff of which history is made.

As we embark upon this venture, it is well to remember that standards of scholarship should not be diminished but rather strengthened. Inferior research and mediocrity must be banished, for we can only establish our credentials if work of the highest standard is produced.

AN HISTORICIST-PROPHETIC FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Background

There are three main approaches to the interpretation of biblical prophecy, namely preterist, futurist and historicist. It is not the purpose of this paper to argue the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches. Adventist interpreters have traditionally followed the historicist line of interpretation and, in this study, historicism is a basic presupposition of the development of the teaching framework. "Historicism" may briefly be defined as an interpretation of prophetic utterances that allows for an ongoing historical unfolding of predictive prophecy rather than a fulfillment of the entire prophecy at one point in time, be it future or past.

In accepting the historicist view, it should be noted that the messages to the seven churches cannot be strictly limited to apply only to certain epochs of the ongoing history of the church. These messages unquestionably applied to the literal churches to which they were written at the close of the Apostolic Age. In this sense a preterist interpretation is acknowledged alongside the historicist view. In addition, the message to each church is also applicable in different circumstances throughout all the epochs of the history of God's people.

The implications of an acceptance of the concept of predictive prophecy include the idea that God plays an important role in the affairs of men. Adventists accept this as true but do not claim to be able to identify specific instances of God's intervention in daily life or even generally in history. Furthermore, Adventists do not accept the concept of a determined universe. God is able to predict not because he foreordains but rather because he has complete foreknowledge. It is possible that, because of the potentia absoluta of God, he could have predetermined events. But, by his potentia ordinata, God has limited himself to a universe in which free choice is a fundamental principal of his government. In interpreting history, an Adventist scholar would be inclined therefore to recognize the role of God but not to pontificate on when and how God imposes himself on the development of human affairs. In addition, the scholar would emphasize that God's foreknowledge as understood in the context of the historicist-prophetic interpretation of prophecy does not in any sense remove from men the possibility of making decisions based on the free choice given to them.

There is another conceptual matter of concern that needs to be addressed. The validity of using a prophetic construct as the basis for an historic framework may legitimately be questioned. The fact that Adventists are historicists and that, according to the SDA interpretation of the Revelation, we are living in the period of the last of the seven churches, assists in providing an answer to this question. The prophetic model is not used in this case as a predictor of the historical events but rather in a confirmatory role. As historicists, Adventists consider that the predictions of the prophet John in chapters two and three of the Revelation have already been largely fulfilled. In comparing prophecy with history, therefore, history actually serves to confirm the validity of the prophetic interpretation. With this understanding it becomes clear that an historicist-prophetic framework used within these parameters will not be an attempt at historical prediction. With the restraints imposed by rigorous scholarship there should also be no attempt at distortion in order to make history fit into the prophetic construct. The framework may therefore be seen as a helpful tool to aid students in grasping and analyzing the established "facts" of history. The benefit of the framework is that it builds on an already established construct in the mind of the student and at the same time it integrates the area of biblical understanding with the information that is being processed in the church history classroom.

A further point that needs to be discussed in this section is the matter of how broadly the term "church" is interpreted prophetically and historically within the proposed framework. Adventists

have tended to limit the messages to the seven churches rather narrowly. This is at least true in popular thinking if not always in official theological pronouncement. The instructions, reprimands and promises of chapters two and three of the Revelation are usually considered by Adventists to have been made to the faithful of Christendom, "the church in the wilderness", "the remnant". A closer reading and fairer interpretation of the seven messages seems to suggest a broader application. The messages appear to apply not just to a "holy remnant" but to the whole of Christendom. In some instances it is clear that the prophecy is directed toward a small minority of deeply committed Christians. In other instances the message applies specifically to those who have wavered in the faith. But generally it seems appropriate to consider that the instruction is for all the church across the broad spectrum of its membership. Certainly, as a construct for the teaching of church history, the framework is based on this broader understanding of what "church" means in these prophetic passages.

Finally with regard to matters of conceptual background, it should be noted that the framework has been prepared with the purpose of helping the teacher to develop a thematic approach to his or her teaching. This will be discussed below giving a more detailed explanation and rationale. Suffice it to say at this point that a thematic approach used in an introductory course in history provides an effective means for helping students to assimilate the material in a form that is easily processed. A study of intricate details and tasks of complex analysis that must take place on the higher levels may not be so easily accommodated by this type of thematic approach. But in the case of a survey course the framework should not prove a hindrance but rather an aid to learning.

Outline of the Framework⁷

EPOCHS

BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

I: AD 31-100

EPHESUS:
the
Apostolic
Church

S⁸-7 stars/7 lampstands
C-Perseverance/purity of the
faith & of doctrine
W-Lost first love
P-Overcomers eat tree of life

Ephesus represents NT Church.
Best historical source is the bibli-
cal narrative. Evangelization,
diaspora, theological & practical
foundations were important.
Heresy & persecution problems.

II: 100-313

SMYRNA:
the
Persecuted
Church

S-1st & Last/died & lives
C-Faithful in affliction
W-
P-Faithful to death receive a
crown of life

The period of the Early Fathers,
Apologists and martyrs. Issues at
stake were theological orthodoxy
& heresy, recognition & persecu-
tion, & leadership.

III: 313-600

PERGAMUM:
the
Established
Church

S-Two-edged sword
C-True disciples, even in Satan's
territory
W-Allowed rise of heresy, im-
purity & false worship
P-Hidden manna/white stone/
new name

With "establishment" of Chris-
tianity as the imperial religion,
the problem of recognition was
settled. Theology & leadership
became central issues.

IV: 600-1517⁹

THYATIRA:
the
Monolithic
Church

S-Blazing eyes & burnished feet
C-Service/perseverance/improve-
ment
W-Tolerate pagan controls &
practices/Satan's secrets &
adultery with Jezebel
P-Rule nations/morning star

Medieval Christianity contributed
both to the survival of the Chris-
tian heritage & to its corruption.
Ecclesiastical authority & the
preservation of the flowering of
learning are two major themes.

V: 1517-1740

SARDIS:
the
Reforming
Church

S-7 spirits/7 stars
C-A few who remain pure
W-Lifeless/incomplete deeds;
restore & repent/obey
P-Dressed in white/name in
book

The promise of the Reformation
soon stagnated into a Protestant
scholasticism, political strife &
the 30-Years War. There was a
great disillusionment with religion
& a turning toward human rea-
son.

VI: 1740-1844

PHILA-
DELPHIA:
the
Mission
Church

S-Key of David
C-Open door/weak but
faithful/kept commands
W-
P-Pillar in temple

The era of the rise of Protestant
Missions, the rise of Bible Societ-
ies & two widespread religious
revivals.

VII: 1844-

LAODICEA:
the
Secular
Church

S-Amen/ruler of creation
C-
W-Lukewarm/poor & naked/
buy . . ./open the door
P-Sit on throne

Influenced by the Enlightenment
and the Industrial, scientific &
technological revolutions, the
modern church has followed wes-
tern culture into the secular age.

THESIS STATEMENTS: A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING

A Thematic Approach to Teaching Using Thesis Statements

As noted earlier, a thematic approach to history, particularly in introductory survey courses, is a good method of aiding students in the assimilation of the pertinent data. The theoretical framework of a simple thematic approach is fairly painlessly transformed into a mental construct. This framework in the mind of the student then becomes an instrument on which to hang ideas and basic facts. If one of the major objectives of history is a study of the change that takes place through time, a thematic approach can help to raise to consciousness the direction in which that change is taking place. In this way, the novice who is being introduced to the complex panorama of the convoluted history of the church may be able to find some meaning in all the detail. In addition, the student who wishes to proceed to a more advanced study of church history will have assimilated in his or her mind a basic outline and frame of reference that can be filled out with new ideas of ever-increasing complexity.

In order to facilitate the use of a thematic approach of this kind, the lecturer and students need to establish clearly the central theme around which each section of the course will be organized. Of necessity, such an approach requires an almost simplistic reductionism in order to synthesize the data of history into a brief thesis statement applicable to the section or epoch in question. The thesis statements suggested below for each of the seven epochs proposed in the framework have been distilled out of a juxtaposition of the major historical events and currents of each period with the prophetic outline described by the prophet John in his exposition of the messages of Christ to the seven churches. Hence, the construct is presented as an historicist-prophetic framework.

In using this framework, the ingenuity and creativity of the lecturer must come into play. In the preparation of materials for each classroom presentation or discussion, the teacher must consider how the material can be woven around the framework so that it holds on firmly but without grotesque distortion of the fabric from which it is woven. As each epoch is completed, student and lecturer should be able to stand back and see a product that does justice to the warp and woof of church history. The fabric is history, the framework is constructed from the materials of an Adventist world-view and understanding of prophecy, and the finished product is a tapestry in the minds of the students that has melded together elements of the data of faith with the discipline of historical scholarship.

The students who participate in these classes will, in the main, be the future pastors and teachers of the SDA denomination. They should, through this academic experience in the church history classroom, begin to gain a feeling of the guiding hand of God in history as epoch follows epoch. The content of the class remains the historical data that a full-blown atheist might use in teaching the same course. But the framework, the setting, the direction established as the lecturer and students apply the data will awaken in the mind of the student an awareness that, if the curtain could be lifted, a guiding hand would be seen behind the providences of history. The history class may not be the place in which an attempt is made to lift the curtain or remove the veil. But, when the students have left the classroom, their Christian faith should be more firmly established because they have sensed that there is a God behind the veil and that the shadow of his movement can be seen, not only in the Bible, but also in the history of the institution that God has called his "bride".

In terms of practical application of the proposed framework in the classroom, an introductory course in church history will generally allow for about two periods per week over a timespan of thirty weeks (two semesters) or three periods per week for twenty weeks (two quarters). This is total of sixty one-hour classes. With a department head and academic dean enlightened about the excellencies

of history, the subject of church history may be given a little more leeway, but this would be an added bonus. This means that, on average, there will be eight or nine hours of class for each epoch. Naturally, some may be extended and others reduced according to need.¹⁰

The following basic outline is suggested for the classes in each epoch, to be adapted as necessary:

Lesson 1: An introductory setting of the scene, presenting in broad strokes the implications of the historicist-prophetic framework for the particular epoch and explaining the underlying validity of the thesis statement and the emphasis and direction in which the thesis statement leads. A brief overview of the historical data will be an important part of this introduction. This is the setting of the scene.

Lessons 2-6: A total of approximately five lecture and discussion periods with topics chosen by the teacher keeping the thesis statement in mind. The topics chosen and the presentations made should give the student a feel for the epoch, illustrate the thesis statement and theme, and identify the major historic landmarks. Throughout the whole gamut of the history in this proposed framework, when choices are being made as to what will be presented and what left out, the lecturer should look as a guide to his or her own experience, expertise and interests. What will be the best choice to illustrate the thesis and develop the theme is an individual matter.

Lesson 6: Students may be required to submit a piece of written work, a reading report, or some other assignment. Written work and reading should be thoughtfully assigned in order to undergird and emphasize the thesis.

Lesson 7: On the basis of assigned reading, at least one period should be spent analyzing a topic or problem within each epoch. The students should be drawn out in this discussion to ascertain the degree to which they have assimilated the theme of the epoch.

Lesson 8: Interaction regarding written work and a concluding classroom activity designed to draw together the ideas that have been presented, relating them to the thesis statement and theme of the epoch.

Lesson 9: Period test.

An Outline of the Major Thesis Statements

The thesis statements that follow are extrapolated from the framework outlined above, bearing in mind the biblical description given by John the Revelator, the tasks the seven churches were admonished to take up, and the significant historical events and directions for each period.

I. THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

EPHESUS: A.D. 31-100

The Apostolic Church was established in the social, political and religious context of the Judaic tradition in a Greco-Roman world. This world was a hostile one, but also a world that presented many opportunities and challenges.

Thesis Statement: The major task of the Apostolic Church was to establish its identity and maintain its fervour.

In order to accomplish this, it had to clarify its raison d'être and authenticate itself (the writing of the books of the New Testament). The church also had to lay the foundation of its base in the world in the context of its eschatological expectations (diaspora and evangelization). The practical problems of leadership and purity of doctrine had to be faced (as manifested through internal biblical evidence and early historical data relative to administration and to heresies). And the early believers had to determine their position with regard to accommodation of themselves to the world (the acceptance of persecution rather than compromise).

II. THE PERSECUTED CHURCH: WEATHERING THE STORM

SMYRNA: 100-313

The Post-Apostolic Church had to accommodate its thinking with regard to the non-return of Jesus. Questions of leadership and theological orthodoxy remained important. Confrontation with the world was an all-too-familiar reality.

Thesis Statement: The major task of the Persecuted Church was to adapt itself to a longer view of history with all of the consequences that this held for its relationship with the world dominated by the hostile Roman Empire.

Confrontation with the world remained a constant throughout this period (the martyrdoms and persecutions). There was an undeniable shift in theological emphasis. The early theologians continued the work of self-identification, but they added an aspect of self-examination (the works of the Early Church Fathers). In addition, some of the writings exhibit a distinct desire for self-preservation (the works of the Apologists and the evidence of a desire for recognition). In a climate of intellectual assault and physical attack, the Post-Apostolic Church began to explain itself to the world and set up structures of administration and leadership that were indicative of its desire to set up a permanent stake in society.

III. THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH: COUNSELS, CREEDS & COMPROMISES

PERGAMUM: 313-600

The conversion of Constantine resolved one of the major issues in early church history. Christianity was now recognized and established as the official religion of the Roman Empire. With this matter resolved, the theological pot that had been simmering on the back burner was now brought to the fore. In addition, the new status of the church within the state required a redefinition of its relationship with the world, which was no longer an overtly hostile enemy.

Thesis Statement: The task of the Established Church was to subject its maturing theology to severe scrutiny to ensure its biblical authenticity and, secondly, to define itself in its role of spiritual leadership in society.

The historical records--affirmed by the biblical warnings and reprimands--suggest that the task was not fully accomplished. Theological controversy was faced squarely and many of the basic foundations of Christian orthodoxy were established on firmly biblical ground (the Counsels and creeds, and the work of the "Doctors" of the church). However, the inroads made by paganism were also plainly evident (compromise with Greek and Roman classical philosophy and Neoplatonism). In addition, in areas of controversial theological issues, the interference of secular leadership was tolerated (compromise to accommodate Caesaro-papism). And, with regard to spiritual authority, the tendency was toward an hierarchical power structure rather than servant leadership (the rise of the papacy). The serious problems alluded to in the prophetic utterance to the church of the Pergamum epoch are clearly reflected in the historical data of the period.

IV. THE MONOLITHIC CHURCH:
DARKNESS AND LIGHT

THYATIRA: 600-1517

There is a harsh severity to the warning given by the prophet to the church of the Thyatiran epoch. From the historical viewpoint, after the consolidation of the church under Pope Gregory the Great, and with the onset of the Middle Ages, a certain sense of awesome and overpowering dread seems to creep into the saga. This dread is, in part, infused by our own notion of "Dark Ages." Certainly there were dark sides to church history and the history of Europe in general during this epoch. Norsemen and Muslims created a societal sense of fear and foreboding that found expression in feudalism. The struggles and successes of the church in seeking to establish its authority over the peoples of Europe, and the sad and shameful chronicle of the crusading era are all a part of the aura of gloom and despair. But within this "darkness" was also a lot of light. The preservation of the Christian heritage, periods of renaissance and reform from the time of Charlemagne to the stirrings that heralded the beginnings of the sixteenth-century Reformation, and social and economic resurgence that signalled the birth of the modern world--all were a part of the epoch of the Monolithic Church and its dominating influence in Europe. The dichotomy evident in the prophetic message to Thyatira is mirrored in the history of the period and makes it difficult to draw up a concise thesis statement. But we shall make the attempt! The period is extended and diverse, and the statement is, of necessity, more complex than some of the others. It must also be admitted that the statement is couched in the language and understanding of a distinctly Protestant world-view and interpretation of history.

Thesis Statement: The task of the Medieval Church was to maintain its identity and purity in the context of a world and a church (part of its own body) that was sometimes hostile to its existence. The activity of that other part of the church body, the Monolithic Church, was a struggle for supremacy and authority, seeking to establish the "City of God" but oftentimes using the strategies of the "City of Cain".

In approaching this period of history, the "remnant theology" of Adventism will have some influence on the emphasis that is made (Celtic, Coptic and Waldensian influences--"the church in the wilderness"). But an equally important emphasis will be an identification of the "light" in the main thrust of church history under the domination of medieval Catholicism (preservation of the Christian heritage in the "Dark Ages", Carolingian theological issues, aspects of the Cluniac Reformation, some aspects of the Crusades, the rise of some of the new monastic orders and the works that they did, distinguishing features of the scholastic debates, the rise of universities, positive aspects of the Renaissance and pre-Reformation movements, etc.). In accordance with the historicist- prophetic framework informing this approach to church history, and in deference to the historical data, some of the "darkness" must also be surveyed (papal subterfuge in the ninth century, the Nordic invasions, papal struggles for dominance in the Investiture Controversy and on into the Golden Age of the Papacy, the Crusades, the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy and its consequences, etc.).

The time spent on this epoch should probably be extended at the expense of one of the shorter and less diverse periods. The urge to include everything should be resisted. Pick out topics that will give an overall picture and will illustrate the theme of light and darkness in the church in the Middle Ages. Pay careful attention to ensuring that the presentations are guided by the double emphasis of the thesis statement.

V. THE REFORMING CHURCH:
BEGUN, BUT NOT YET DONE

SARDIS: 1517-1740

The Sardis epoch presents the most difficult application of the historicist-prophetic framework to the data of history. Along with all Protestants, Adventists look to the Reformation as an era in which the light of the gospel shone brightly and the truth of Christianity triumphed. The prophetic pronouncements directed by the Revelator to the church of this period hardly support this optimistic view. Even if the Sardis period is considered to have begun later and the Thyatira period extended to 1550 or 1565, there is hardly cause for triumphant rejoicing at the end of the message to Thyatira that could be applied to the early period of the Reformation. The closing words to the church in Thyatira giving a promise of the "morning star" (Rev 2:28) may be a hint about the triumph of the Reformation. But these words were actually part of the promise of future heavenly joy for those who would be overcomers. The promise can hardly be applied to the Reformation period.

A choice must be made. Intellectual honesty would be brought into question if either the facts of history or the prophetic word are distorted. It must be acknowledged that, to some extent, the construct breaks down at this point. In the framework for teaching church history, the present writer has chosen to accept the earlier date (1517) as the beginning date of the Sardis epoch and, despite the distinct lack of affirmation in the message to Sardis, to treat this period as significant and positive in the history of the Christian church and the rise of Protestantism. This choice is made recognizing that the concerns of prophecy are not always the concerns of history and that, in this case, the demands of the "facts" of history override the desirability of attempting to stay within the strict confines of the framework. If it is recognized that the framework is a teaching tool and not a credal statement, this choice will not cause a crisis of faith for either the Christian historian, the Adventist theologian or the student in the classroom.

The Reforming Church arose as the response of a segment of Christendom to the Monolithic Church of the Middle Ages. But what was so gloriously begun in 1517 soon deteriorated into Protestant scholasticism, internal strife among the Protestants, and war with the Catholics. The depressing message to the church in Sardis is, in this respect, accurately reflected in the history of the period. The dismal record of Catholicism and Protestantism through these years, and the influence of the Renaissance in elevating the position of man, led many of the leaders of thought during this period toward a more rational and less faith-oriented approach to life. This was the beginning of the Enlightenment.

Thesis Statement: The task of the Reforming Church was to purify itself in doctrine and practice and to maintain this purity in a world in which the inroads of secular thinking were beginning to make a distinct impression.

The task of "purifying" should be considered (in terms of the major Protestant reform movements, the Catholic and Counter-Reformations, and the radicals of the Reformation). The "lifelessness" of much of the body of Christendom during the epoch of the church of Sardis should be documented (Thirty-Years War, Protestant scholasticism, and the partisan politics of the religious movements). The rise of the cult of human reason should be explored. The achievements of this cult in raising respect for human life and liberty--a task in which the church had profoundly failed--should be noted (Deism and the Enlightenment).

VI. THE MISSION CHURCH:
A VISION OF HOPE & SERVICE

PHILADELPHIA: 1740-1844

Concurrent with the Enlightenment, and arising from movements within Christendom such as Pietism and the Catholic emphasis on mission to distant lands, Protestant denominations began to turn their

attentions and energies toward world evangelization. Concern for humanity and a desire to meet the spiritual, social, mental and physical needs of the peoples of the world characterized the activities of the church of this epoch.

Thesis Statement: The task of the Mission Church was to pass through the open door set before it in order to reach out to humankind in brotherly love.

There were major movements within Christendom that were awakened to the gospel commission (missions to foreign lands). In addition, in the home countries there were strong religious revivals (the Wesleyan revival and the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). This was also a period of intense effort in the fields of humanitarian concern (social reforms) and of Bible translation and distribution (the work of the Bible Societies). These movements contrasted with the lifelessness that continued in other parts of the body of the church.

VII. THE SECULAR CHURCH:
RAGS AND RICHES

LAODICEA: 1844-

The period of church history covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is also extremely complex and difficult to encapsulate, except perhaps in terms of its secular drift. While there is much that the church has accomplished, there can be no doubt that the institutional church now finds itself ensconced in a secular, post-Christian world. That the church itself has been secularized is also an undoubted fact.

Thesis Statement: The reality of the modern church is that it must be characterized as secular. The task of the Secular Church is self-renewal and renewal of the secular world in which it finds itself.

The difficulty in this period is not to find material to illustrate the thesis. It is to eliminate enough so that the presentations will fit into the limited time-period available and yet at the same time do justice to the subject. The first concern of the thesis statement is the secularity of the church (Enlightenment trends, philosophers and philosophies, the French Revolution, the liberal theology of the nineteenth century, the catastrophes of war and violence in the twentieth century, the effects of the industrial, scientific and technological revolutions, the God is dead movement, the failure of the church to meet the spiritual needs of modern man, etc.). The second important emphasis is a consideration of the attempts of the church to renew itself. Some of these attempts have achieved a modicum of success, while others have failed or been misdirected so as to be of negative rather than positive value (the Oxford Movement, the proliferation of denominations and the rise of sects, Catholic theological movements of the 1870s and 1960s, the challenges of men like Hans Kung to Catholic orthodoxy, Neo-orthodoxy, the social gospel, the charismatic movement, ecumenism in terms of both its emphasis on renewal and its secularizing effect, etc.). Only some of these topics can be presented, but a concluding discussion should attempt to overview the broad picture of the "secular church" and its attempts at self-renewal.

PITFALLS TO BE AVOIDED: SOME GUIDELINES

It is assumed that the scholar using this historicist-prophetic framework will be somebody who is trained to some extent in the craft of history. As a reminder to such persons and a guide to those who may not be so trained, some elementary principles of historical scholarship are outlined below. These are basic standards of that which is technically acceptable in the doing of history so that we, as conservative religious enthusiasts, will avoid some of the pitfalls into which we might otherwise be tempted to fall.

1. The data of history should not be distorted in order to fit into an Adventist world-view, theology or scheme of prophetic interpretation. Christian presuppositions are acceptable, but fudging the facts is not. If something does not fit in, admit it, try to explain it and, when necessary, be scholar enough to acknowledge your own ignorance or the lack of evidence available to support your thesis. Remember that history is not propaganda, even for a good cause.
2. History and prophecy should not be confused. History does not predict the future. Present trends may indicate possible future developments but history should not be used to speculate about prophetic scenarios or God's future interventions in this world.
3. Not only is it unwise to predict God's future interventions. It is also unscholarly to suggest specific events in the past in which God has intervened (except where there is clear evidence in the Bible to support this). Where there is no concrete "this-worldly" support for such an opinion, it is better to consider the matter as being outside the realm of historical research. Even a Christian historian who has a providential view of history would not presume to give detailed descriptions of God's precise interventions in the affairs of men.¹¹
4. The simplicity of the thesis statements should not be considered an excuse for superficiality in the classroom. The simplicity is a cognitive tool in the hands of the teacher. It is not meant to be a mindless simplification of the events of history.
5. Periodization in history has its dangers. It does provide a construct that is easy for students to grasp. But, in reality, it is artificial to demarcate eras by suggesting, for example, that in 1399 it was the Late Middle Ages and in 1401 it was the Early Modern Period. People living at the time would have noticed little or no difference.¹²
6. Use as broad a range of sources as possible, and primary sources in preference to secondary sources if these are available. Beware of using sources that all reflect the same viewpoint. Adventist historical presuppositions and an Adventist world-view should be used to scrutinize the diverse views of others. This provides stimulus to thought and an antidote to stagnation. It is also a good corrective for parochial bias.¹³

CONCLUSION

Christian education seeks to affirm the faith of students. To be sure, academic excellence should be demanded and the students' mental abilities stretched. But, above all, it is to an eternal, spiritual legacy that Christian education looks. The Christian teacher should always be striving to improve the ways in which he or she attempts to achieve this worthy goal. The historicist-prophetic framework presented in this paper is one such attempt.

This study establishes a general strategy for using a prophetic model well-known to Adventists as a mental construct to teach church history. In so doing, it is to be hoped that a closer integration of faith and academic learning will be facilitated. The strategy uses thesis statements which serve as centres around which the theme may be built. Outlines and suggested methods of approach have been drawn up, but the framework is intended to be flexible, allowing for options and adaptations according to the interests and expertise of the lecturer. In the final analysis it is the big picture that counts. The particular topics, as long as they are wisely chosen and representative, will not make or break the course. The canvas may be covered in broad strokes but, when the students step back to view the whole, they should be able to see in basic form an inclusive picture of the development of Christendom. The narrative of church history should be established in their minds, and it should be established in such a way that it is seen through the eyes of faith and within a framework that confirms them in an Adventist world-view.

The challenge to the church history teacher is an awesome one. The subject may be one of the most boring of the requirements that a student will have to endure in all of his or her tertiary studies. Or it may be one of the most challenging and faith-affirming experiences of the student's life.

ENDNOTES

1. The term "historicist" is used in this paper to refer to a methodology of prophetic interpretation prominent throughout the history of the Christian Church and, since its inception, an understanding that has been espoused by the SDA Church. The word should not be confused with "historicist" with reference to a school of interpretation in historical philosophy.

2. For a discussion of the concept of "world view", see Sire, Discipleship of the Mind, pp. 29-33; and Walsh and Middleton, The Transforming Vision, pp. 15-39. Full bibliographic information for the entries in these endnotes is found in the bibliography.

3. Marwick, Common Pitfalls, p. 59; and Shankel, God and Man in History, pp. 218-19.

4. Paul R. Waibel, "History", pp. 128-29, in Beck, Opening the American Mind.

5. I have read church history in three Adventist institutions, including undergraduate and graduate level studies. There has never been anything more than a vague lip-service given to a consideration of this history in the light of the Adventist understanding of prophetic interpretation. In my own case, I have only partially developed the historicist-prophetic framework as an approach even in the introductory church history course.

6. Maxwell, God Cares, vol. 2, pp. 90-94, considers the various options in a non-technical but informative manner. A more scholarly approach is made by Strand, Interpreting the Book of Revelation, pp. 11-14.

7. Maxwell, God Cares, vol. 2, pp. 97-139, presents an easy-to-read summary of the Adventist interpretation of the prophetic messages to the seven churches. He includes and interesting historical commentary in his exposition.

8. In the biblical descriptions given in this column, "S" is an abbreviation for salutation--the description Christ gives of himself in greeting the church. "C" is the commendation to the church. "W" outlines the warning, and "P" gives the promise.

9. The traditional Adventist date for beginning the Thyatira epoch is 538. The choice of 600 is simply made because it fits in more easily with general historical convention as a possible period date for the beginning of the Middle Ages. Some Adventist expositors choose 1565 as the ending date for Thyatira. Once again, the choice of 1517 for this framework is made for practical historical reasons. There is no intent to argue one way or the other with regard to the most suitable prophetic interpretation for any of these dates.

10. A survey course in world history should be a prerequisite to the introductory class in church history. Unless this is the case, teaching the church history class at the required level and in the allotted time will be an exercise in frustration and futility.

11. See above, pp. 2, 7.

12. Marwick, Common Pitfalls, p.59.

13. Ibid.

APPENDIX APLANNING FOR THE INTRODUCTORY
LESSONS ON EACH EPOCH

A. PREPARATION FOR THE LESSON:

1. Consider the history of the period and set priorities on various topics that would be of interest and value in illustrating the thesis statement and giving an understanding of the flow of history during the epoch in question.
2. Establish learning objectives for the epoch keeping in mind the thesis statement and the historical data.
3. Gather resources needed such as maps, paintings, photographs, bibliography, and primary materials if they are available.
4. Evaluate the best method of handling the data. Be creative in seeking alternative methods of introducing the various epochs. For example, students near London in England could take a field trip to the British Museum on a Sunday after the introductory lecture for the Ephesus epoch in order to gain some background for a study of the early church and the Roman period. A trip to Wesley's house and chapel would be appropriate at the beginning of the Philadelphia epoch. Preassigned reading relating to an epoch might be another way of generating discussion in the introductory lecture, or the viewing of a documentary film relating to the period under discussion.

B. INTRODUCTION [20 minutes]:

1. Discussion of known information from biblical sources regarding the characteristics of the particular epoch to be investigated. Encourage students to express themselves in order to evaluate their level of understanding as well as to get them actively involved in grappling with new concepts about old ideas. Analyze the biblical passage.
2. On scrap paper, ask students to draw on their knowledge of world history in order to list major events of which they are aware that occurred during the period under discussion. Suggest that they include events from church history about which they know. Discuss some representative answers, looking for links with the biblical materials.

C. THESIS STATEMENT [15 minutes]:

1. Highlight the major events of church history for the epoch under discussion, emphasizing particularly those things that the students failed to mention under A.2 above.
2. Present the thesis statement to the class. Get the students to analyze the statement by making observations about its meaning and validity, evaluating its strengths and weaknesses, and by suggesting improvements to the statement. Encourage constructive critical thinking.
3. Ask the students to reconsider the events of church history in the light of the thesis statement. How are the historical events, the prophetic framework and the thesis statement related. Can the events of history be aligned with the ideas of the thesis statement without any distortion of the historical data available?

D. HISTORICAL APPLICATIONS [20 MINUTES]:

1. Make a brief presentation of two or three historical events that illustrate facets of the thesis statements.
2. Assign reading/written work for review and preparation for the next topic.

APPENDIX BSAMPLE LECTURE OUTLINE
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

A. OBJECTIVES:

After the lesson on Augustine the student will (1) outline the major events of Augustine's career, (2) explain Augustine's role in the development of the theology of the church, (3) analyze the impact of Augustine's theology in terms of its positive and negative contributions (4) relate the life and work of Augustine to the thesis statement of the Pergamum epoch and the biblical message to the church of that era.

B. INTRODUCTION [10 minutes]:

1. Brief introduction to the life and times of Augustine.
2. Pergamum thesis statement applied to Augustine (already discussed in introductory lesson).
3. Condemnation and warning of biblical message to Pergamum vis-a-vis Augustine's career.

C. AUGUSTINE'S WORK IN CLARIFYING THEOLOGY [15 minutes]:

1. Against the Manichaeans--philosophy and metaphysics (ca. 387-395).
2. Against the Donatists--doctrine of the church (ca. 395-410).
3. Against Pelagius and Pelagianism--doctrine of salvation (ca. 410-430).

D. DEFINITION OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY [10 minutes]:

1. The Donatist Controversy--Christian responsibility in the church and in the world.
2. City of God--the task of "City of God" in establishing its rule over "City of Cain".

E. A TRUE DISCIPLE . . . OR A FACILITATOR OF HERESY? [10 minutes]:

1. Augustine's theology--a blend of ideas provides the theological foundation for the medieval church:
 - a. Pauline biblical theology
 - b. Neo-platonism
 - c. Traditional beliefs of early Catholicism
 - d. Mysticism

[Note: A prearranged assignment on the facets and the progressive development of Augustine's theology would provide a good springboard for discussion on the merits and problems in his writings.]

2. The Confession's--a mystical book based on personal experiences and the struggle leading to salvation. The influence of a classic written by a "Doctor of the Church".

F. AUGUSTINE'S LEGACY [10 MINUTES]:

1. A defined theology and an attempt to delimit church-state relationships.
2. The positive and the negative--questions regarding the purity of Augustine's doctrine.
3. The impact of Augustine's doctrine in the ongoing development of the Christian Church.

G. ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Assign reading/written work for review and preparation for the next topic.
2. Essay report on why Augustine is a good example of the validity of the use of the framework and thesis statements as a teaching-learning strategy.

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