An Introduction to Adventist Resources

In an expanding church with more than a million students and new educational institutions opening every year, it is all too easy to focus on the past few years and lose track of where the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been and how it got to where it is today. Therefore, most denominational schools and colleges offer classes on Adventist history. But those who teach the topic, or just want to research the church’s past and present, can find the volume of material overwhelming. Major Adventist history collections, such as those in the General Conference archives and various Adventist universities, include tens of thousands of volumes. The teacher assigned to create a syllabus for a new class, the student writing a paper or a dissertation, or the administrator or scholar trying to understand how his or her church functions and why it acts and believes as it does, can quickly get lost—or worse, settle for a quick skim through a recent handbook, missing out on a great deal of detail and context.

This article is intended to guide Journal of Adventist Education readers through the labyrinth of sources and materials available. It provides a solid introductory list of books and Websites on Seventh-day Adventism, drawn from the writer’s experience of 15 years as an Adventist special-collections librarian. It includes both a reading list for those interested in the whole of Seventh-day Adventism and an acquisition list for librarians building a basic collection to support the teaching and study of Adventist thought and history.

I have included works that I have found useful over the years: ones I regularly checked out to students or recommended to researchers, or (in some cases) often replaced because borrowers failed to return them. I have also been guided by the fre-
quency of reprints, by consultation with other Adventist faculty and librarians, and by the use and opinion of scholars in the field. The list has been reviewed by several experts in the field, including the director of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

Librarians have an 80-20 rule—20 percent of the sources in any collection do 80 percent of the work.* Since this is a recursive relationship, this means that a collection 1/25 the size of a major library (4 percent, or 20 percent of 20 percent) can do almost two-thirds of the work (64 percent, or 80 percent of 80 percent). Librarians supporting classes in Adventist history should take note.

It will be immediately obvious to specialists in every field that their own area has been sadly shortchanged. Due to space limitations, I have ruthlessly omitted articles, dissertations, and a great number of books about one particular topic, or country, or institution in favor of those that cover Adventism as a whole. I have completely neglected the specialized (and fascinating) field of Adventist hymnology. I have also restricted myself to works in English. This list does not provide a complete library, but rather an introduction to a century and a half of Adventist thought and practice throughout the world, as well as books about Adventism. At the end are suggestions for those wishing to explore further.

**General Reference Works**

The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (2 vols., Review & Herald [henceforth R&H], 1996) is a basic, necessary resource, listing most of the church’s ideas, institutions, and people. It does not include people living as of its publication date, however. You will also want to obtain Gary Land’s *Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventism* (Scarecrow, 2005; reprinted as *The A to Z of the Seventh-day Adventists* in 2009) for its excellent bibliography and more recent articles. The *Church Manual*, the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook*, the *Annual Statistical Report*, and the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* will be useful for current church operation and contacts. Older volumes of all these, valuable for historical data, are available online at [http://www.adventistarchives.org](http://www.adventistarchives.org). Genealogists will treasure back issues of the *Yearbook* and the online *Seventh-day Adventist Obituary Index*.

**Ellen G. White**

The complete works of the church’s co-founder are available in many languages at the White Estate Website ([http://egwwritings.org/](http://egwwritings.org/)). The two major biographies are Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White* (6 vol., R&H, 1981) and Ron Numbers’ *Prophetess of Health* (3rd ed., Eerdmans, 2008), the latter focusing on her role in health reform. Although regarded as controversial when it first came out, this book still must be regarded as indispensable.


Walter Rea’s *The White Lie* (M & R Publications, 1982) is controversial and overwrought but needs to be read to understand the crisis in Adventist understandings of Ellen White in the 1970s and 1980s. D. M. Canright’s *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (Revell, 1889) is probably the most important early criticism of Ellen White and Adventism, which continues to influence outside views of Adventism even today.

**1844 and the Millerite Movement**

There is a large body of literature on the Millerite movement and the Great Disappointment. George Knight’s *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (PPPA, 2010) is the best history. Also valuable are David K. Rowe’s *God’s Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Eerdmans, 2008) and the essays in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (eds.), *The Disappointed* (Indiana University Press, 1987). Much useful background is provided by Jerome Clark’s *1844* (3 vol., Southern Publishing Association [henceforth SPA], 1968) and Edwin Gaustad’s *The Rise of Adventism* (Harper & Row, 1974). F. D.
Nichol’s *The Midnight Cry* (R&H, 1944) is somewhat dated but still useful.


**Adventist History**

George Knight’s *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (R&H, 1999) and Mervyn Maxwell’s *Tell It to the World* (PPPA, 1976) are good introductions, but should be backed up by Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf’s *Light Bearers* (PPPA, revised and updated, 2000). The earliest comprehensive histories of Seventh-day Adventism are still worth reading. J. N. Loughborough’s *The Great Second Advent Movement* (reprinted by Adventist Pioneer Library, 1992) and *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (reprinted by Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1988) contain much that is available nowhere else, as do W. A. Spicer’s *Pioneer Days of the Advent Movement* (R&H, 1941) and A. W. Spalding’s *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (4 vol., R&H, 1961). A.V. Olson’s *Thirteen Crisis Years, 1888-1901* (R&H, 1981) covers the theological and organizational crises, and the resulting major transformations in Adventist thought and structure at the end of the 19th century.


There are too many good books on Adventism in individual countries to list, but the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* has an article for each country with an Adventist presence, and Ciro Sepulveda’s *On the Margins of Empires* (Oakwood College Press, 2007) is an interesting presentation about Adventism in developing countries.

George Knight’s *Organizing to Beat the Devil* (R&H, 2001) provides a useful guide to the origin and purposes of the present structure of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. P. Gerard Damsteegt’s *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Eerdmans, 1977) and Barry Oliver’s *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future* (Andrews University Press, 1989) are essential follow-ups on the same topic.

**Systematic Adventist Theology**

A great deal of Adventist theology is topical, and it can be difficult to get a sense of the movement as a whole. George Knight’s *A Search for Identity* (R&H, 2000) gives a useful sketch of how Adventist beliefs developed. More detail can be seen in Knight’s collection *Earliest Seventh-day Adventist Periodicals* (Andrews University Press, 2005) and James White and Uriah Smith’s *The Biblical Institute* (1878, reprinted by TEACH Services, 2005), along with *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* (R&H, 1917), one of the most-frequently reprinted books in the history of the denomination.

Later systematic presentations include the proceedings of the 1953 Bible conference, *Our Firm Foundation* (2 vol., R&H,
1953), the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (7 vol., R&H, 1976), Richard Rice’s *The Reign of God* (Andrews University Press, 1997), the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (R&H, 2000), and *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Ministerial Association, 2005).

For relations with evangelicals, see the revised annotated edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Andrews University Press, 2003), which corrects a number of misrepresentations in the 1957 edition. Reinder Bruinsma’s *Seventh-day Adventist Attitudes Toward Roman Catholicism, 1844-1965* (Andrews University Press, 2004) provides a good summary of this subject. Jonquil Hole and Børge Schantz’s *You Can Go Home Again* (R&H, 1982).

Important works on Adventism, the state, and civil disobe-

Michael Pearson’s *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) is a good historical intro-
duction to Adventist ethics and the realm of practical theology. Alas, there are far too many books on individual topics of the Christian life (prayer, marriage, stewardship, and other topics) to list here.

Leroy Edwin Froom’s *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* (2 vol., R&H, 1965) is still the best overall presentation of Adventist views on conditional immortality.


Important sociological studies include Roger L. Dudley’s *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* (R&H, 2000) and Barry Gane’s *Youth Ministry and the Transmission of Beliefs and Values* (Signs, 1997), along with the Valuegenesis reports, notably Roger Dudley’s *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (La Sierra University Press, 1992) and V. Bailey Gillespie’s *Valuegenesis: Ten Years Later* (Hancock Center, 2004).

Nancy Vyhmeister’s *Women in Ministry* (Andrews University Press, 1998) and V. Norskov Olsen’s *Myth and Truth About
Church, Priesthood, and Ordination (Loma Linda University Press, 1990) are both good introductions to a more recent topic of debate.

There has been little scholarship on Adventism’s offshoots since Lowell Tarling’s hard-to-find The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism (Galilee, 1981). One key recent work is Kenneth Newport’s The Branch Davidians of Waco (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Education


Emmett K. Vande Vere’s The Wisdom Seekers (SPA, 1972) and Windows (SPA, 1975) are older but still offer valuable insight into the development of Adventist education.

By far the best (albeit controversial) history of Adventist thought on geology and evolution is Ronald Numbers’ The Creationists (Harvard University Press, 2006).

Health and Medicine

The two top introductions to Adventist medical history are Richard Schaefer’s Legacy (Legacy, 2005) on Loma Linda University, and Richard Schwarz’s John Harvey Kellogg, M.D. (R&H, 2006) on the early reformer and 19th-century Adventist medicine. D. E. Robinson’s The Story of Our Health Message (SPA, 1965) is older but still valuable, as is Warren Johns and Richard Utt’s The Vision Bold (R&H, 1977).

Important Adventists


Two useful collections of short biographies are Daniel and Grace Ochs’ The Past and the Presidents (SPA, 1974) on the General Conference presidents, and Ava Covington’s They Also Served (R&H, 1940) on major women of the Adventist Church.

Going Deeper

Many sources are available for those interested in learning more, and particularly for those who wish to study Adventism in their local area. The Center for Adventist History at Andrews University (http://www.andrews.edu/library/car/) and the General Conference archives (http://www.adventistarchives.org) are the church’s premier collections of historical material, backed up by major holdings at Avondale in Australia, Loma Linda University in California, and Friedensau University and Newbold College in Europe. Consult your nearest Adventist college or university for more help—most have good library collections and experienced librarians. The White Estate has branch offices and research centers around the world (a full list can be found at http://www.whiteestate.org/about/estate.asp#branchoffices), which have a good deal of material useful to the inquirer into Adventist history, and particularly Ellen White.

Major Adventist magazines include the Review and Herald/Adventist Review, Youth’s Instructor, Signs of the Times, Ministry, Message, and The Journal of Adventist Education, but there are many, many more. These contain an immense amount of material on all sorts of issues, and are particularly valuable for a sense of Adventist life and thought at the time of publication.

I have tried, where possible, to list recent or in-print editions of books, but unfortunately, some very relevant books are no longer in print. Copies can sometimes be obtained from online book vendors such as amazon.com, abebooks.com, ebay.com, and others. TEACH Services (http://www.teachservices.com) reprints classic Adventist books from time to time. If all else fails, try Google or other Web search engines. Many older works are available on the Internet (see the accompanying article by Benjamin Baker).

A complete bibliography of the listed books will be posted online at the The Journal of Adventist Education Website: http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae201375035005.pdf. We hope to add to this list over the coming years as new classics are recognized, as well as to broaden the resources beyond the space available in this article.

Tony Zbaraschuk served as Special Collections Librarian at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, from 1996 to 2012, where he was responsible for one of the larger Adventist history collections. He has been a moderator of the sdanet mailing list since the late 1990s.