

BOOK REVIEWS

Aamodt, Terrie Dopp, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds. *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 365 pp. Hardcover, \$105.00; Softcover, \$34.95.

Oxford University Press has recently released a book titled *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* that is edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers. Aamodt is currently professor of English at Walla Walla University and earned her PhD in American and New England Studies at Boston University. In addition to the work cited above, Aamodt is currently writing a biography of Ellen G. White. Land, who unfortunately passed away shortly after *Ellen Harmon White* was completed, worked at Andrews University in the Department of History and Political Science for forty years. He received his PhD in American history from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and wrote and edited several volumes on Millerite and Seventh-day Adventist history. These volumes include: *Adventism in America: A History* (1986), *The World of Ellen G. White* (1987), and the *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists* (2005). The final editor, Ronald L. Numbers, is currently Hildale Professor Emeritus of the History of Science and Medicine and of Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Numbers received his Ph.D. in the history of science from the University of California, Berkeley. He has written two major works on Adventist history—*Prophets of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (3rd ed., 2008) and *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (expanded ed., 2008). In addition to this editorial team, some 20 scholars contributed chapters to *Ellen Harmon White* and Grant Wacker, who is currently Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Christian History at Duke Divinity School, supplied a foreword.

Ellen Harmon White contains 18 chapters that focus on different aspects of Ellen G. White's life and ministry. The opening chapter is a brief biographical sketch that sets the tone for the entire book. The next chapter focuses on White's visions, which is followed by two closely related chapters on the "testimonies" and White's role as a prophet. Chapters 5 to 7 are dedicated to White's role as an author, speaker, and institutional builder, while the next three chapters relate to theological topics (titled: Theology, Practical Theology, and Second Coming). A discussion on White's views on science and medicine follows in the 11th chapter, which is succeeded by a discussion on various aspects of society and culture in chapters 12–15, including a discussion on race and gender. The final three chapters bring this study to a close with sections devoted to White's death and burial, her lasting legacy, and an overview of the biographical treatment she has received from her lifetime to the present.

The authors and editors of *Ellen Harmon White* should be commended for their work for a variety of reasons. First, each chapter makes good use of primary and secondary sources, which are cited at the end of each section. These scholars have each critically analyzed the available material and crafted their respective chapters in a way that they believe most accurately represents

Ellen G. White as a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female prophet in the American context.

Second, this work is masterfully edited. Unlike some other compiled volumes, *Ellen Harmon White* has a natural flow and evident continuity. The book is not botchy, boring, or banal. The chapters are all of comfortable length (usually between 15 to 20 pages each) and are pleasantly written and very readable. In short, the editors should be congratulated for accomplishing this difficult task.

Third, it is satisfying that this work was brought out by Oxford University Press. An endorsement from this prestigious publisher certainly affirms that Ellen G. White was an important figure in American religious history who possessed a worldwide influence. Undoubtedly, many scholars and students previously unfamiliar with White will be intrigued by her visionary life as introduced in this unique collection of essays.

In addition to its various strengths, *Ellen Harmon White* could have been improved in a number of ways. As Wacker indicates in his foreword, “a historiographical debate” exists regarding Ellen G. White—one that is “as spirited as any in the field of American religious studies” (Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, xiii). As with any debate, two polemical extremes exist which make it necessary for scholars to “walk the line” between each pole. Though the authors and editors attempted to present White in a fair, unbiased, and objective manner, it seems that certain chapters miss this mark.

Several examples illustrate that *Ellen Harmon White* sometimes portrays Ellen G. White in an unbalanced manner. To begin with, the treatment of James White’s supposed “five-year moratorium” of his wife’s visions is one-sided (cf. 9). While it is true that James White refused to print his wife’s visions in the *Review and Herald* during the early 1850s, the given perspective suggests that he actually controlled his wife’s visions for a period of time and was able to practically stop them because he found them to be too radical. It is also claimed in this narrative that James White acted in a quasi-misogynistic manner in relation to his wife, that Ellen White was opposed to her husband’s control, and that she grew discouraged by his oppressive censure. What is unfortunate is that the authors and editors do not provide either James or Ellen White’s perspective of this situation. Since this affair is emphasized in many places in the book (for example, see 9–10, 83–84, 280) a discussion of the Whites’ viewpoints is certainly warranted, especially if Ellen White (as well as her husband) is to be presented objectively.

It should also be mentioned that some chapters (particularly 2 and 3) are not representative of Ellen G. White’s entire life in relation to the specified topic. Though chapter 2 is titled, “Visions,” this entire section is heavily based on one event in White’s early life—the Israel Dammon trial of 1845. Unfortunately, no attempt is made to give a broad sweep of White’s visions throughout her lifetime, which raises a valid question: can such a limited perspective accurately represent White as a visionary? This issue is further complicated by the fact that the Israel Dammon trial is hotly debated among historians today. Since different interpretations do (and always will) exist, it

seems unwise to place so much emphasis on this trial—especially since it was necessary to essentially ignore about 70 years of Ellen White’s life and visions in order to do so.

Chapter 3 suffers from the same weakness. This section is dedicated to the “testimonies” of Ellen G. White—a term that relates to various writings of reproof in general and a series of publications that appeared between 1855 and 1909 specifically. Rather than provide a representative sampling, this section is limited to letters and manuscripts “from 1845 to approximately the start of the Civil War” (71). Again, one wonders if this chapter accurately portrays Ellen White and her use of testimonies throughout her entire life, especially since the Civil War is considered a major turning point in American history. Did the war (or changes brought on from a war-torn society) affect White and her use of testimonies? Since it is evident that a major shift regarding the Testimonies occurred in 1868 the question is legitimately raised. Prior to this time White published very few personal testimonies. Beginning with *Testimony for the Church, No. 14* (1868), however, she concluded that “personal testimonies should be published, as they all contain more or less reproofs and instructions which may apply to hundreds or thousands of others in [a] similar condition” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, No. 14* [Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868], 1–4). Did moral and spiritual degeneracy brought about by the war influence White to present her testimonies in a different manner? Since the latter 50 years of her use of testimonies are not discussed, this chapter is unable to provide any answers. Also, it cannot explore any other developments that undoubtedly took place in her life in relation to this topic.

In his foreword, Wacker indicates that *Ellen Harmon White* “represents the tip of the historiographical arrow in Ellen White studies” (xii). Due to several issues, however, it seems that the “tip” of this “arrow” could have been sharper. In spite of this, it remains sharp enough to leave an indelible mark on American religious studies in general and Ellen G. White studies in particular. It is a work that demands serious attention, and the authors and editors are to be commended for their diligence and effort.

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Ball, Bryan. *The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: James & Clarke & Company, 2014. 290 pp. Paperback, £22.50.

The values and ideas of Puritanism form an important part of the American theological heritage. Many of them were also important in establishing the nation. But these values and ideas have receded into the background and sub-consciousness of ordinary Americans. Years from now people may ask, “Who were the Puritans?” But the legacy of their written work will continue to bear witness to the profundity of their theological insights and the breadth of their moral understanding. Dr. Bryan Ball reminds us of this through his exploration of twelve major theological issues of Puritanism, namely: The Sufficiency of Scripture, The Incomparable Jesus, The Lord our Righteousness, The New