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The Journey to Christian Education
W. W. Prescott and the Challenges of Curricular Reform
at Battle Creek College, 1885-1894.

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The need [for a school] "is so urgent it is decided at once to enter upon the experiment."

School Committee *RH* May 7, 1872

"All were inexperienced in the management of them [school and health institute]."

George Butler, *ST* May 4, 1882.

"We Learn by Experience."

M. E. Kern, *RH*, December 31, 1936.

(Draft)

In many ways, the thirty-year old William Warren Prescott of Montpelier, Vermont, was an ideal candidate for the role of president of Battle Creek College when he arrived on campus in late summer 1885 just a few weeks before the start of the academic year. College trustees had unsuccessfully tried to persuade two others to take the job and were about to reappoint the interim blind pastor W. H. Littlejohn for another term when he abruptly withdrew his name. Prescott's availability depended on the sale of his substantial publishing business in Vermont's state capital. Trustee minutes convey a sense of desperation. The securing of Prescott's services in early July, just after the sale of his business went through, seemed like a godsend. The local Battle Creek newspaper noted half-way through his first term that the college was "flourishing" and that "the professor evidently understands his business."[1] With his experience in school principalship and in private business he was indeed a highly competent appointment. Historian Emmet K. Vande Vere refers to Prescott's nine-year tenure of leadership at the College as "the golden age" of the institution and in many ways it was.[2] As historian Meredith Jones Gray observes, however, the descriptor was "not without its difficulties."[3]

While under Prescott's leadership, the College enrolment grew and the physical plant expanded and while the institution developed a respectable reputation and served the church well in providing competent graduates to staff its ambitious and rapidly developing educational system, it nevertheless struggled to really find itself. Clarifying and establishing its ideals and objectives were not easy tasks. The educational ideals were elusive and somewhat theoretical, thus difficult to achieve. Furthermore, resolving the inherent contradictions embedded in the founders' early hopes and plans proved frustrating, particularly at the curricular and classroom level. Turning theory into sustainable practice involved trial and error and painful struggle. If Prescott's tenure was a golden age, it was also an era of frustration, disappointment and fitfully slow progress. But then, the whole American nation at this time experienced similar struggles with slow and difficult educational reform. Battle Creek and Prescott were not alone. This paper will briefly explore the complexities of the vague and somewhat contradictory educational objectives that beset early Adventist education and then investigate Prescott's role in the

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[1] Battle Creek *Daily Journal*, October 24, 1855.

[2] E. K. Vande Vere, *The Wisdom Seekers*, (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1972) 53.

[3] Meredith Jones Gray, *As We Set Forth: Battle Creek College & Emmanuel Missionary College,* Andrews Heritage Volume 1, (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 74.

frustrating task of curricular development during his nine years as president (1885-1894) with a view to better understand Prescott's role as a practitioner in search of a way to implement the ideals in what became a long journey toward Adventist Christian Education. In doing so the paper will suggest three correctives to our previous understanding of the history of Battle Creek College – a counter narrative as it were. The objectives and philosophy were not so clear and I ask whether there really was a "betrayal" on the part of early College leaders as Vande Vere suggests. And was the blame for failing to make Bible a central part of the curriculum primarily a failure of presidents and faculty as Marroquin suggests or were there other factors such as legal constraints and conflicting religious ideals that may have played a larger role in shaping the curriculum than we have previously understood.

Years of Preparation

Prescott had been well prepared for his role as college president.[4] For his foundational high school studies he had attended Maine's most prestigious school, Berwick Academy, where he studied a classical curriculum. He shifted to Pennacook Academy for his final year where, during his last term, he spent half of his time teaching the younger students ten hours of Latin and five hours of Greek per week. At the end of academy, he was already well acquainted with Cicero, Anabasis, Virgil and Plato. He had then gone on to Dartmouth College, the expensive colonial era school across the state border in New Hampshire, and there he again took the classical course.[5] Fifteen of the 31 classes on the academic record of his four-year BA program at Dartmouth focused on Latin, Greek and higher mathematics. The last two years of his studies included a few other classes in science (5), English literature (2), rhetoric (2), and one each in logic and political economy. Only in his last year did he study religion with one required class in Christian Evidences and another in morals.[6] By the time he had finished his coursework, he had also accumulated a further year of teaching experience in Latin and Greek at local high schools.

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[4] Biographical data summarized here is drawn from my work on Prescott, *W. W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism's Second Generation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005) 25-46.

[5] Dartmouth, founded in 1769 was one of the original nine chartered colonial colleges of America established before the American Revolution. Its expensive fees meant its enrolment was generally from elite families.

[6] Considered to be a religious college, all students were expected to attend a religious service each day and the academic week began with a mandatory lecture on the Greek New Testament during Prescott's time there. It began to secularize in the later 1870s. L. B. Richardson, *History of Dartmouth College* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932) 540.

Prescott was clearly a scholar; a natural academic. His final grades fell in the top ten percent of his fifty-six member graduating class. He was also ambitious. In his first year after graduation at the age of 21, he landed the principalship of a 300-student grade school where he had to also teach some of the senior high school classes. Two years later he secured an appointment as principal of the prestigious Washington County Grammar School two city blocks away from the state house in the heart of Montpelier, the Vermont state capital. Then for the next five years with his brother he ventured into a publishing enterprise and took over the editing of a prominent state newspaper. After two years, the brothers acquired further newspapers as William bought out his brother's interests and set out on his own running a prosperous publishing business and editing the state republican newspaper.

But Prescott was not just a bright scholar, a successful administrator and businessman, he was also a faithful sabbath keeper, deeply spiritual and possessed of a keenly attuned conscience and an acute sense of duty. He had been baptized at camp meeting at the age of sixteen by John Andrews at the time Andrews was in the Northeast researching in Boston's libraries for his book on the History of the Sabbath. William's father, James Lewis Prescott, had witnessed the Leonid meteor shower that in 1833 he had interpreted as a harbinger of the end times and which helped lay a foundation for his later becoming a Millerite. His parents were among those who left their potatoes in the field in 1844, fervent in their hope of an immediate Advent and end of the world. After the Great Disappointment, James spent a decade as a self-supporting itinerant preacher among first-day Adventists. Then in 1858, when William was three years old, his parents and his grandparents all became Sabbatarian Adventists. Religious convictions mattered to the family. His father, by now, running a prosperous shoe and stove polish business continued his lay preaching now in the Sabbath-keeping community. Somehow, as two decades passed, his parents and William himself had at least temporarily resolved the inherent tension between their conviction of a sharply imminent advent and the value of investing in a high quality education that would take many years to complete and cost by way of annual tuition and room rent almost as much as what James White, or a John Loughborough might earn in a whole year in the 1870s.

When Prescott accepted the call to the presidency of Battle Creek College in 1855 it was not ambition that motivated him but a deep desire to serve. He took an almost fifty per cent drop in

earnings.[7] But he wanted to be of use in the Advent cause. Whether he had heard of the difficulties the college had fallen into is not clear, but college leadership in Battle Creek would not, it seems, have been an attractive career option given the state of affairs at the college. In fact, the college was at best really only half a college and Prescott had a distaste for institutions that pretended to be what they were not. Such places were dishonest and guilty of inflating their claims. A brief review of the first decade of the College will help frame our understanding of the circumstances Prescott found himself needing to address on his arrival in Battle Creek.

Battle Creek College

Founded in 1874, the Adventist School in Battle Creek had been beset from its beginnings by an inherent tension or incongruity in the objectives held out for it by its founders. Medardo Marroquin, in his detailed study of developments in the curriculum of the institution, identifies the problem as a tension between "shortness" of time and "thoroughness" in education and describes the tension as "dangerous."[8] He suggests that it would take more than thirty years to resolve it in the eventual striking of an appropriate balance in its objectives. In the meantime, the incongruity caused much stress and pain for college administrators. Thirty years is perhaps an optimistic assessment.

In James White's major address at the 1873 General Conference session when he argued at some length for the strategic need of an educational institution, the ailing church leader had stressed repeatedly that time was very short, the advent was imminent and all that was needed were short, three-month courses of training for workers for to serve "the cause." A year earlier when the school had been started in the fall of 1872 the planning committee had also argued for only short courses – "to make up for educational deficiencies." Students looking for more regular schooling could go to 'good schools nearer their own homes."[9] In the short courses at Battle Creek the students could be "instructed thoroughly in the common branches," and "during that time," they could "at least, learn how to study."[10] He reiterated this. The pattern he had in

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[7] His college salary in 1885 was $700 per year. His principal's salary in Vermont six years earlier had been $1200 per year. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*, 47.

[8] Medardo Esau Marroquin, "The Historical Development of the Religion Curriculum at Battle Creek College, 1874-1901," Ph D dissertation, Andrews University, (2001), 45, 46.

[9] School Committee, "The Proposed School," *RH*, May 7, 1872, 168.

[10] James White, "Conference Address," *RH*, May 20, 1973 181. George Butler held the same views about short courses and the need for urgency in preparation. G. I. Butler, "What Use Shall We Make of Our School?" *RH,* July

mind was that students should become autodidacts like John Andrews who had not gone to school after the age of 13 but who had subsequently taught himself well. During the three months in an appropriate training course, "our young men should be taught to speak and write the English language correctly." But then, "the living languages especially" should also be taught – he was thinking of French, German and Danish. Six months was the maximum length he would concede - if necessary - "if close application and thorough instruction and discipline" characterized the teaching so that "our men may learn how to study." He noted that he was "not prepared to speak lightly, in any sense of the word, of a thorough education, or to regard it as a matter of small importance." But "we have not time to make plans which it will take a long time to carry out." Our time to work "is short" he reiterated again several times. Yet in the same impassioned appeal for support for a school, White spoke confidently of its financial viability because it could be assured of a "patronage" of at least 200 and perhaps 300 students whose parents would send to Battle Creek for an academy education. That inherently implied a four-year curriculum, at least – not a few months. Three months of high school would be thin preparation for any of the emerging professions attracting Adventists such as teaching, or nursing or even ministry. Thus were laid the "seeds of division," suggests Marroquin.[11] Was the institution a college or an academy? Was the name significant in any way?

Uriah Smith, had explained that the institution had been titled "Battle Creek College" more for the sake of convenience than any specific academic description. The choice of the name simply helped distinguish the institution from other schools already in Battle Creek. The state charter obtained by the church, he explained, made "provision for all grades of instruction from the primary to the highest." They could use the name even though they did not yet have "the full course of instruction that pertain to a college proper."[12] It seems that right from the beginning, founders anticipated the eventual offering of such "proper" courses provided for in the charter. This necessity of a charter even at the beginning also indicates that the state had certain expectations that had to be met. When the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society was

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21, 1874, 45. The objective for which the school was to be established was, "in the shortest, most thorough and practical way, to qualify young men and women, to act some part, more or less public, in the cause of God." See also "A School in Battle Creek," *RH,* April 16,1872, 144.

[11] Marroquin, 47.

[12] U. Smith, "Battle Creek College," *RH*, February 11, 1874, 56.

legally organized in March 1874, the officers resolved that they would circulate to each stockholder "a pamphlet giving the law of Michigan relative to the establishment of institutions of learning." The officers intended to list "all the steps taken" in the organization of the college and its ownership body.[13] Did this include the text of the charter? Did the charter specify that the institution not be "sectarian" in its curriculum? Repeatedly, the early college catalogues highlighted statements that assured parents and students that the college was not sectarian. "The managers of the College have no disposition to urge upon students, sectarian views or to give any such views prominence," (1875). "There is nothing in the required course of study or in the rules and practice of discipline that is in the least denominational or sectarian." Students attended religion classes, such as there were, "from choice."[14] The issue of non-sectarianism would later become an issue when consideration was given to making bible study a part of the required curriculum. Was this a denial of religious liberty? Did some faculty see it as a breach of the charter?

Without denying the reality of the acute and immediate need for skilled workers in the field, it seems that James White's expectations at the curricular level of "short" courses as adequate to impart a "thorough" basic education along with the mastery of the English language, study skills and scripture study might be seen as unrealistic. If the acquirement of foreign language skills needed for preaching, writing and editing are added in, the expectations were surely unrealistic and not sustainable. White's lack of experience in operating a school soon became plain. Confusion and the lack of clarity in focused objectives allied with the challenge of how to incorporate both manual labor and the study of religion in the curriculum generated perplexities. The policy of accommodating 350 or more adolescents in local neighborhood community boarding homes with the hope that this would ensure their moral and religious protection all contributed to more complications and conflict. The challenging first decade could be seen as an experiment that eventually failed. Is it really adequate to say that "a philosophical betrayal" had occurred as Battle Creek College moved into its future as Vande Vere suggests?[15] There were

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[13] U. Smith, "Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society," *RH,* March 24, 1874, 120. Documentation for the legal registering of the Society had been submitted to the Michigan state authorities on March 16, 1874.

[14] *BCC Catalogue*, 1875, 6, 23: 1876, 5, 6; 1879, 6.

[15] Vande Vere, *Wisdom Seekers*, 53.

hopes and aspirations for the school and a confusion of contradictory expectations but not a simple clear philosophy. Some broad ideas had been skeletally sketched out but they were still developing and being refined as the institution moved along in its experiment in radical reform education that could sustain itself financially.[16]

As Marroquinn notes, the initial intentions for the school embraced four objectives which prevailed through the first decade: (1) to make moral and religious influences prominent; (2) to provide thoroughness of instruction; (3) to promote solidity of character; and, (4) to train students for usefulness in life. These goals had been articulated in various meetings during the planning stage before the school was begun. But there was one "primary" objective which had slipped from being a priority. In the year before its closure in 1881 as the school increasingly ran into trouble and confusion over its goals and the social expectations held for its students, Ellen White wrote to church leaders reiterating the simple "primary object" the founders had in establishing the school. It was "the education of young men for the ministry." And this goal was not to be achieved through long courses. "We have not many years to work."[17] "Time is drawing to a close."[18] At the same time these young men in training for ministry "should be educated in as careful and thorough a manner as possible." This "religious interest" of the college (i.e., preparing ministers), should be "constantly guarded." Teachers should know how to achieve this objective, she asserted. But they didn't. Thus far, only a one-and-a-half-term-long series of lectures on bible doctrines by Uriah Smith had constituted the bible component of the curriculum. Registration for this class averaged about 50 during the decade because attendance was voluntary, it was timetabled outside the usual hours of school to avoid clashing with other regular classes and it was not assessed. A short more fully developed two-year "biblical" course for ministerial training had been tried which then seems to have morphed into a "special" course, but it too had not been very successful and did not draw much patronage. The

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[16] As George Knight points out, the first statement on education from Ellen White, "Proper Education" was not a balanced statement as a broad systematic philosophy of education. He estimates that after addressing some key educational ideas, almost eighty per cent of the contents concerned physical education and manual labor. "Ellen G. White," in *Early Adventist Educators*, ed George. R. Knight, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981) xxx. It might also be observed that fifty-six percent of the content is a biting critique of then current American education and only forty-four percent is involved in a positive discussion of educational ideas. There are very few specific proposals for school planners about what to do but extensive discussion of what is wrong.

[17] E. G. White, "Our College," a manuscript written to be read at the General Conference session in 1881. 5T 22.

[18] E. G. White, "Camp Meeting Address," 5T 11. This manuscript was overlooked at the time of the Michigan session and so it too was read at the General Conference session.

enrolment in this program had been "unduly small" compared to the total enrolment.[19] The absence of scripture study in the institution was a serious lack.

The December 1881 testimony from Ellen White prompted the college board to set up a committee to investigate the matter with Uriah Smith as the chair. The group came up with a proposal to "devote a certain portion of each day" to the study of the scriptures, "in all the rooms." But this was such a radical proposal that the trustees felt it necessary to call a public meeting of the parents, faculty and other interested parties to explain the proposal and solicit support before implementing it. Was there concern about the requirements of the charter? After much discussion and explanation, the meeting voted to unanimously endorse the curriculum change. The necessity of such a consultation indicates that among the constituency there also was a deep sensitivity to the issue of religious liberty, and the idea of "requiring" students to study bible, without inevitably having a sectarian interpretation imposed. The pedagogical methods of the time largely employed rote learning based on "recitation" and "drill." The issue of religious liberty generated considerable concern. The religious liberty clash with "required" bible study posed another incongruity and the issue would rear its head repeatedly in the years to come. Resistance to curricular change came then not just from teachers but also from the students, parents and the wider constituency. To assign primary blame for the failure of the College to achieve the aspirational goals at the feet of the presidents and the faculty because of their own entrenched philosophical and educational backgrounds seem quite inadequate. As it turned out, the changes planned to expand bible classes at the school which were endorsed by the December meeting had to be postponed when the college closed down. The expanding of the College's objectives was achieved only after the College reopened. See Table I.

1874-1881	1883-1891	1891-1894
1. To provide a moral and religious influence		
2. To protect from bad influence	"Solidity of character" - 1891	
3. To teach a thorough education		
4. To prepare students for usefulness in life		
		5. To teach the systematic study of the English Bible
		6. To study History from the perspective of Bible Prophecy

[19] W. C. Gage, "Bible Study in Battle Creek College," *RH*, January 3, 1882, 9.

		7. To develop trained and disciplined church workers for missionary work
		8. To foster the care and health of workers

Table 1:
Battle Creek College Objectives
(Source: Marroquin, 107, 181, 228, 246.)

In essence, however, during its first decade, the institution functioned as a mixed-age 12-grade school with a small and declining cohort of post-secondary students layered on top.[20] During the first decade the institution only produced 25 graduates – those who had completed a post-secondary course of studies, most of them with "normal certificates" qualifying them as schoolteachers. When it closed in 1882, 96% of its enrolment was in the preparatory and lower grades of the school which the General Conference Committee believed, "interferes materially with the success of the institution" in achieving its "especial purpose of fitting young men and women for usefulness either in the ministry or in fields of missionary labor."[21] An ethos that reflected the interests and needs of younger students did not attract college level students. Grade school unavoidably involved long courses. See Table 2 for an enrolment analysis.[22]

Date	**College**		**Secondary**		**Elementary**		**Total**
	%	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	
1874-75			**50**	55	**50**	55	110
1875-76	**25.6**	74	**64**	185	**10.3**	30	289
1876-77	**20.5**	55	**68.5**	183	**10.8**	29	267
1877-78	**22.5**	67	**65.9**	196	**11.4**	34	297
1878-79	**19.6**	94	**67.8**	324	**12.5**	60	478
1879-80							425
1880-81	**10.6**	52	**72.1**	353	**17.1**	84	489
1881-82	**3.9**	19	**81.2**	398	**14.8**	73	490
1882-83	**C**	**L**	**O**	**S**	**E**	**D**	

[20] General reports and appeals for students in the Review and Herald indicate that a significant proportion of students in the upper grades were perhaps late adolescents or mature age students.

[21] The General Conference Committee recommended that the "the children's department shall be either wholly separated from the College," or be conducted in such a way that it did not interfere with the task of the College. GCCMin December 2, 1881, 195. The proved too difficult to resolve for a number of years. Access to tuition wherever it came from was critical for the survival of the college.

[22] I am indebted to Marroquinn for these figures.

Table 2: Battle Creek College Enrolment 1874-1882

When the College commenced again in the fall of 1883 under the leadership of Woolcott H. Littlejohn, the pattern of enrolment clearly indicated a major change in the ethos of the institution (See Table 3). Sectoral enrolment figures are not available for the first year but in the second year under Littlejohn, 85% of the student body were taking post-secondary courses although during the next decade this dropped to 36%. The opening of new colleges in Lincoln, Nebraska and at Walla Walla, Washington provided significant competition for college level students.

Date	College		Secondary & Primary		Total
	%	#	%	#	
1883-84					284
1884-85	**85.0**	350	**15.0**	61	411
1885-86	**82.5**	333	**14.5**	71	404
1886-87					493
1887-88					388
1888-89	**62.4**	333	**37.6**	201	534
1889-90	**68.5**	386	**31.5**	177	563
1891-92	**65.7**	350	**34.3**	182	532
1892-93	**55.2**	338	**44.8**	274	612
1893-94	**56.2**	431	**43.8**	337	768
1894-95	**36.3**	260	**63.7**	456	716

Table 3: Battle Creek College Enrolment 1883-1894

In 1883 as they prepared to start anew, College trustees, anxious about losing their state charter, apparently fretted about not offering full college work through the classical course and took the trouble to obtain legal advice on the implications. The legal advice was that the curriculum could be reduced "without endangering the loss of the charter."[23] With that advice taken, two new shorter courses of specialized instruction for ministers were subsequently given priority. A very practical one-year "missionary" was offered in Littlejohn's second year but it lasted for only one year. It was offered free, generating no tuition. Smith's doctrinal classes were scheduled each morning at 7.30 am but still only fifty registered. It was agreed by the trustees that a full degree in the classics would be offered only if there was sufficient student

[23] BCC Bd Min, July 26, 1883.

demand. Such demand apparently became evident during Littlejohn's second year at the end of which the trustees asked the faculty to extend the curricular offerings to include the classics degree "so as to make our College compare favorably with other respectable institutions."[24] The ability to attract students and their all-important tuition appears to be the motivation.

In another major new initiative under Littlejohn in his second year, a manual training program was introduced with instruction being available in printing, tentmaking, carpentry and cooking. Integrating these programs into the curriculum proved challenging and they proved expensive. As much as administration wanted to nurture and feature them as a distinctive part of reform education at Battle Creek College, the students voted with their feet and five years later, under Prescott, the program was discontinued. Administering it, differentiating between day and boarding students and fitting it around the timetable became a nightmare. Finally, the inability to financially sustain the program and its lack of support from students and their parents led to its demise. The cancellation was softened by a new program that required dormitory students to undertake one or two hours of work each day in domestic duties around the college. But the lack of a student labor program then introduced the problem of the role of sports and a physical education program – a veritable pandora's box that gave Prescott headaches.

How to integrate the study of scripture into the curriculum, however, still proved *the* major challenge. Religious sensitivities about avoiding sectarianism and preserving religious liberty for the students still presented a significant barrier to achieving the aspiration of being a school where all students would study scripture. Smith's extra-curricular doctrinal lecture classes (in which learning was unassessed) were still offered for registration on a voluntary basis because of their sectarian nature. The other two more neutral classes, newly included in the curriculum - Old Testament and New Testament history - were not, according to C. W. Irwin, a college-level student during this period, of the same rigor as regular academic classes. They were only at the level of the studies in classes nine and ten of the grade school "preparatory" program. They developed the reputation held about the bible classes that they were "sissy stuff."[25] The challenge of embracing more radical curricula reform involving bible teaching at a more rigorous academic level was made exceedingly difficult on several counts. There were no prepared

[24] BCC Bd Min, May 11, 1885.

[25] W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, February 20, 1896, RG 11, Box 46, Misc Let (1893-1902), GCArch.

teaching resources such as syllabi or textbooks, and teachers themselves had no background experience in teaching bible in an academic setting. Furthermore, faculty were anchored in the pedagogical traditions of rote learning and recitations, and without inherited teaching materials applying the method to religion classes proved difficult. On top of this, both students and constituency held expectations of rigorous class content that was perceived as necessary for a recognized and respected educational program. Behind these barriers to reform lay the dark cloud of financial viability. Tuition was the only income for the institution and students and parents were to a large degree in the driver's seat in this matter. The aspirations and ideals of administration and trustees took the passenger's place.

Prescott's Reforms

Prescott was familiar with the society-wide debate on educational reform when he came to Battle Creek in August of 1885. He had participated in debates on the topic of what was an appropriate curriculum when he was at Dartmouth. In his editorial days in Montpelier he had editorialized on the theme of educational reform with a particular concern for higher standards for teacher training and practice. It would be reasonable to assume that through the pages of the *Review,* he had read Ellen White's article "Proper education," articulating aspirations and ideals for the nation's schools and her later articles on the development of a school for the church. In the *Review* he would have been able to follow the discussions about the struggles with educational expectations and ideals in Battle Creek. The new academy at South Lancaster, Massachusetts where Goodloe Harper Bell took refuge from his Battle Creek critics was only 200 miles south of where he lived.

Three months after Prescott's arrival on campus, he attended the first of the annual meetings of the SDA Educational Society to which he would regularly need to formally report. (The association was the legal body of stockholders that formally owned the college.) At this first meeting, Prescott strongly affirmed his "determination to do all in his power to carry the design of the founders of the institution to fit up workers for the cause of God."[26] He also spoke of the urgent need for increased teaching facilities and student accommodation. The stockholders wrestled that day with the problems that bedeviled the new manual labor program. Clearly they

[26] "Seventh-day Adventist Educational Society," *RH*, December 22, 1885, 796.

were apprehensive about its viability. They affirmed the value of the "short-term of special instruction" for students heading directly into ministerial work. These classes could be scheduled "at the close of the winter term" and the stockholders suggested the names of adjunct teachers to staff the classes, clearly affirming their extra-curricular role outside the regular class schedule. They also hoped that "all those in attendance at the college who intend to labor in the cause of God in any capacity" take the practical classes offered in the "Missionary Department." These were also non-academic studies and apparently did not generate tuition income. The stockholders were also very encouraged at the "religious influence" Prescott was nurturing and they voted to raise up to $50,000 to cover the accrued debt from the previous years and erect a new student residence.[27] More than fifty percent of the student body was having to find accommodation in homes and boarding houses in the city and that was counter-productive to preserving the religious influence of the College. Merging such disparate curricular ideas together in a coherent integrated way within the regular curriculum and somehow incorporating them in a regular class schedule would prove challenging to the new president. How successful would he be in carrying out "the design of the founders" given that these objectives were rather nebulous and fraught with inner contradictions?

Religious Influence Reforms

Prescott focused his early endeavors particularly on strengthening the religious ethos of his new charge. Aware of the previous conflict between school and community over the issue of student social relationships, he immediately tightened up regulations and oversight in this area. After the completion of the additional dormitory capacity, he persuaded his trustees to invest in yet a larger student residence even investing substantial amounts of his own funds to ensure the project would happen. Regulating student social relationships was easier when most were living on campus under the oversight of a preceptor. Prescott stressed the idea of the dormitory being a "school home," a place for rigorous application of the idea of religious education. He researched the concept extensively and visited places where it was being implemented. He lived with the students in the residence building and dined with the students in the dining hall in order to model refined Christian living. He recruited model preceptor staff and created a regular pattern of

[27] Ibid

evening worships, a daily 45-minute chapel period, Friday evening prayer meetings, Sabbath afternoon testimony meetings and other regular religious activities absent required bible study in the curriculum. Later he would challenge the local Battle Creek church parents to maintain similar expectations for their students as he had for those on campus. The dissonance in expectations and control complicated what he was trying to achieve in his dormitories. In this aspect of educational reform, he achieved marked success. The "school home" idea with its intensive spiritual program and tight system of discipline in regard to student behavior and social relationships not only changed the ethos of Battle Creek College but it set a pattern for other Adventist colleges as they were developed around the world. Graduates of Battle Creek took the model with them and planted it wherever a college was established.

Academic Rigor

Believing firmly that "the cause" needed "a more thoroughly trained class of workers," Prescott had to grapple with the dilemma of balancing the request for "short courses" for mature age short-term students while still meeting the need for graduates with "thoroughness" of training.[28] Many student were ill-prepared for school work in either stream. One of his early strategies was to embark on a rigorous recruiting campaign around the churches and the camp meetings enthusiastically promoting the value of education in a religious context and the need of the cause for bright and talented workers. Over time, this worked and drew in quality students. An entrance examination was introduced to be able to properly place students and maintain appropriate standards in the college.

As we have already noticed, Prescott had difficulty with an institution claiming to be a college when it was not a "proper" college. Even before his arrival on campus, after two years experimenting under Littlejohn with short and rather light-weight, "diploma" programs, the trustees had asked the faculty to expand the curriculums.[29] Low enrolments were financially damaging. One of the motivations was to enable the college to "compare favorably with other respectable institutions" in order to build enrolment back up at least to the previous 1881 levels. It was important to reduce the level of debt the college was incurring.

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[28] "Educational Work," SDA Yearbook, 1890, 76.

[29] BCC Bd Min, May 11, 1885. The programs appear to have been inadequate and poorly respected by students and the board of trustees.

Under Prescott's leadership, the three-year programs were expanded to four years but still with only diplomas being awarded. This included the "Biblical Course" for ministerial training which when it was first introduced in 1883 was designed for "practical results, rather than astute scholarship." When it was extended to a four-year program it was only offered over two terms per year (20 weeks) to accommodate the needs of workers from the field.[30] When in 1886 after the programs were extended and the trustees considered what awards to offer for them, Prescott reported that "animated" discussion engaged them and the board declined to approve the offering of degrees. Were they perhaps constrained by an awareness of the charter or of other state norms? Over a period of four-years the curriculum was strengthened further and Prescott successfully attracted more qualified staff. He reported that by 1889, six years after the college re-opened, the "regular courses" had been "remodeled and the work brought to a higher standard."[31] At that time the trustees agreed to again award degrees for the programs. At this time the "Biblical" course was discontinued because the biblical content had ostensibly been incorporated into the other regular academic programs, i.e the Science, English and Normal degree programs. They had not yet found their place in the Classical program. The short, non-credit, "Special Course" and the tuition-free "Missionary" studies were phased out at this time because, at Prescott's initiative, the course of studies for ministerial training had been refocused and the General Conference rather than the college assumed responsibility for its expense. He would, however, seek to continue the path of reform within the College.

Curricular Reform and Prescott's Quest for a Workable Philosophy

While Prescott's leadership of Battle Creek College and the policies he adopted there had undoubtedly been shaped by his own educational background, his convictions and his practices were also shaped by other important influences. He read widely, and kept in touch with societal developments in education. Much more significant in the development of his and the church's educational philosophy, however, were two other influences. These were his encounter with Ellen White and his post 1888 personal theological development. In 1886, Prescott gathered together into a pamphlet publication a selection of articles Ellen White had written on

[30] See Marroquin, 145-158 for a detailed discussion of the content of Biblical, Special and Missionary curricula.

[31] W. W. Prescott, "Educational Work," *SDA Yearbook* 1890, 76.

educational themes since 1872.[32] The materials emphasized the spiritual dimensions of education. During the late 1880s at times when Ellen White was in Battle Creek and later, after he had left the College presidency and was able to spend time at her home in Australia, Prescott had numerous extended conversations with Ellen White discussing the concept of combining the study of religion with the study of secular subjects on some kind of equal basis. These were genuine two-way conversations about what the idea really meant, what was involved and what it might look like in practice. Ellen White valued the input from Prescott. He helped clarify her thinking and she helped shape and clarify his. "We could see some matters in a clearer light," she remarked after one such conversation.[33] Only later did experience and the practical implications of failed earlier reforms lead to convictions about the place of study of the classics in the College. Ideals and principles were enunciated but weaving them into a practical workable philosophy in the classroom and on the campus was a slow process of trial and error. In 1892 Prescott collected further letters that she had sent him and others and published them as the 251-page book *Christian Education* (1893). In 1897 he published a third compilation of her materials in *Special Testimonies on Education*. He was thus more familiar with the ideals and the problems than anyone else in the denomination.

Prescott came through the theological upheavals of the 1888 period with a radically new experience of grace and a conviction of the centrality of the person of Christ in Christian belief and experience. He reports that for the first time at a personal level, he experienced what it was to be really forgiven. Over time, his whole theological framework became centered around the person and the teachings of Jesus. His theological awakening and his exposure to the turmoil and the partisan and personal dimensions of the conflict had profound consequences. He became aware of the need of the Adventist ministry for a broader and even more thorough education in scripture. This led to his promotion of a series of annual 20-week Ministers' Bible Institutes under the direct sponsorship of the General Conference, although offered on the campus of Battle Creek College. The specially designed curriculum offered a range of basic courses including the "systematic" study of scripture with a Christocentric focus rather than a strictly doctrinal focus.[34]

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[32] E. G. White, *Selections from the Testimonies Concerning the Subject of Education* (Battle Creek, MI: College Printing Department, 1886).

[33] E. G. White to J. E and E. L. White, February 16, 1896. Also E. G. White "Diary" February 1896.

[34] The institute included a "systematic" meaning an exegetical study of the book of Galatians.

This refocus led him to explore how to present Adventist doctrines evangelistically from a gospel perspective and he developed the concepts into a series of evangelistic meetings he conducted in Battle Creek in 1892.[35] This growing and clarifying conviction also provided for Prescott, in a profound way, a new foundation and a new rationale for dealing with the problem of introducing biblical study into the College curriculum in a way that avoided the problem of sectarian doctrinal study and which also addressed the sensitivities about religious liberty arising from "requiring" students to study Adventist doctrine and whether such courses went beyond the limits of the charter under which they operated.[36] Such doctrine, Prescott would now argue, was simply the gospel of Christ "rightly understood." Bible study was no longer sectarian indoctrination but became, rather, a Christocentric study of scripture and Adventist doctrines arose logically and naturally out of that larger pursuit. It would take some time for his argument about not undermining religious liberty to be accepted by his faculty, and some apparently were never persuaded, but for Prescott the new conviction paved the way for a more radical overhaul of the curriculum.

Following the success of the 1889 winter bible institute, Prescott, in November 1890 sought to cultivate the ground for reform by requesting his deputy, principal and bible teacher Eli Miller, to present a colloquium paper for his faculty on the topic of the Bible in the College curriculum. Miller scoped out the problem and possible solutions.[37] Prescott himself provided the response to the paper. Miller had highlighted the difficulty of simply adding classes to the existing course requirements. Faculty and students were already complaining of an unreasonable overload. Prescott dared to suggest that perhaps the College should drop some classes in the classics to make space for the new studies. He next took his suggestion to the wider College constituency and at the March 1891 General Conference session, expounded at length on the importance of

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[35] W. W. Prescott to E. G. White, December 28, 1892; W. A. Spicer to W. C. White, January 4, 1893.

[36] Marroquin, 67, cites several early catalogues which included statements on the topic of sectarianism. "The 1887 Bulletin stated, "It is true that this school was brought into existence by the Seventh-day Adventists"; yet, "there is nothing in the regular courses of study, or in the rules and practice of discipline, that is in the least denominational or sectarian. The biblical lectures are before a class of only those who attend them from choice." *BCC Catalogue* 1887, 10. In 1888 at the first teacher's convention organized by Prescott two of the principal topics considered concerned the role of scripture study in the curriculum. "What provision should be made, if any, for a more special theological training, for the benefit of those who desire to labor publicly?" "To what extent can religious instruction be given consistently and profitably in connection with the school work?" See GCC Min December 9, 1888, 399-402.

[37] I draw on my dissertation for the details and sequence of developments in this section. See Gilbert M Valentine "William Warren Prescott: Seventh-day Adventist Educator," Ph D Dissertation, Andrews University 1982, Vol 1. 163-194.

scripture in the curriculum and how it might be achieved by dropping some of the existing classes in the curriculum. Then he had faculty committees work through the practicalities apparently in the face of some resistance. As a compromise, the new classes were simply added to the curriculum as options.[38]

To foster the reform measures at Battle Creek and in the new Union College in Nebraska and the one being mooted for Washington State in the northwest (it was in the planning stage at the time), Prescott convened a teacher's convention at Harbor Springs in northern Michigan during the summer of 1891. The Christocentric theological motif that had captured Prescott's heart and mind infused the whole program in worship and preaching services and Ellen White read again some of her early articles and talked on their themes. Professional workshops gave attention to topics such as Bible teaching, redemptive discipline, the elimination of the pagan classics and the teaching of physiology and health. Percy Magan famously attributed the birth of Adventism's particular concept of "Christian Education" to this convention.[39] In practical terms the convention produced the syllabus for a new four-year course for ministerial training, syllabus outlines for a series of college-level bible classes and a sequence of history courses that it was hoped would be as rigorous as the study of Latin. In the new curriculum, Prescott explained to the church, "The Bible as a whole" was going to be studied "as the gospel of Christ from first to last. This was a major curricular reform initiative setting out a credible academic alternative for the increasingly outmoded Latin and Greek classical program. The merit of the classics program was being debated widely across American colleges at this time.

Immediately following the convention, the Battle Creek College trustees adopted the new four-year Biblical Course with its syllabi and formally noted their intention to discontinue the classics degree after two years. Did they expect that there would be no further intake of students to the classics program? They were not clear and that oversight stored up embarrassing difficulties. Faculty were apprehensive about the new classes and the potential for lowering standards but they set up an oversight sub-committee to implement the new classes and

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[38] A visit by a panel of educational inspectors from the State of Michigan Board of Visitors at the time, observed the unusual plan that some suspected was an attempt "to bring the Theological School down into the college and preparatory grades." Had complaints reached the state authorities? The inspectors were prepared to consider the change as an "experiment" in "moral education." See "Fifty-sixth Report of the Superintendent," 335.

[39] P. T. Magan, "The Educational Conference and Educational Reform," RH August 6, 1901, 10. The "definite beginnings of the work of an educational reformatory movement owe their birth to this gathering," he recalled in 1901. *RH*, August 6, 1901, 10.

instructed them to ensure "uniformity" of rigor between classes.[40] As it turned out, the new classes were permitted as "electives" or substitutes that might be approved for individual students only after formal petition to the faculty. Allowing students to "select" their own classes "cafeteria style" was also a reform also being tried elsewhere in America. At Battle Creek College such reform was considered by the faculty as too permissive. It cheapened the quality of education.

The next year, 1892, the college dropped the public issuing of grades because it was fostering too competitive a culture at the college. Teachers kept their own records and simply issued a pass/fail notice. But was there was little progress on the curricular front. The faculty at Battle Creek College were resistant to change and moved slowly. The new bible classes remained as electives or petitionable substitutes – which appeared to maintain academic rigor and also still avoid offending against the religious liberty taboo of required classes.

For Prescott, 1893 proved to be his most difficult year. Because of his responsibilities at Union and Walla Walla he was away from campus for long spells and the impetus for curricular reform lagged. At the end of 1892, he had begun to detect some faculty dissent to some of his reform policies and this had infected student attitudes. He had not been able to reintroduce the manual training program and to compensate for the lack he had allowed some gymnastic exercises and team sports which for a time included football matches. He personally played tennis with other faculty and some senior students for his own recreation but was also rather skilled in athletics and calisthenics as well.[41] Student dissatisfaction had also arisen over the menu in the cafeteria and debates began to swirl about vegetarianism. He had been unable to secure a competent sanitarium trained cook. Adding to his stress were articles on the ideals of education that he had read to the faculty. Then in December, 1892 another letter from Ellen White arrived that protested against the recent extension of the classroom building. In June, Prescott resolved that if he could not turn things around during the next academic year, he would resign the presidency. He had just completed compiling the more recent articles by Ellen White

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[40] BCC Faculty Minutes, August 26, 1891.

[41] Newton reports that "lawn tennis was a game much played at the college in those days" and that he played both singles and doubles with Prescott. The president asked Newton to help set up the gymnastic equipment which included "horizontal and parallel bars, traveling rings and springboards." Kellogg helped them with material for making the mats for the gymnastic exercises. According to Newton, Prescott "was our best performer on these appliances." M. Wallace Newton to E. K. Vande Vere, July 26, 1957. Vande Vere Collection, CAR.

on education into a book entitled *Christian Education* and felt frustrated that it was so difficult to distill her diffuse ideals into practice.

Shortly after the start of the 1893-1894 academic year Prescott received more letters from Ellen White, this time complaining about the sports program, particularly the football matches and the inadequacies of the cafeteria menu. She protested what to her seemed to be "the excess of amusements" which surely must lead to a misunderstanding of "the religion of Jesus." She had been confronted with embarrassing complaints from a parent while she was travelling in New Zealand. "It pains my heart to read letters" from students to their parents, she stated, with such expressions as "Oh, we had so much fun." How could she defend Battle Creek College as a serious school "in the light of the coming conflict" when it was "educating the youth in fun and games"?[42] Prescott read these letters as containing "nothing but the severest rebuke" and although he was puzzled by some of the content, he read them to the faculty and students anyway. Responding to what he sensed was the urgency and threatening tone in Ellen White's letters, he convened a series of faculty meetings and pushed hard for the need to move forward on curricular reform. This produced a reaction from some of his classics faculty who alleged that he was trying to kill "liberal education" and that he was cheapening the college.[43] Under the pressure of the Ellen White letters, Prescott felt that it was his duty to push the reform even if his faculty resisted. She seemed to be now pressing urgently for more bible and a definite end to the teaching of the pagan authors. Prescott represented the plan that had been adopted by the trustees two years previously and reviewed it with them. He also read the Ellen White letters to them. They agreed that the new program structure needed to be implemented. The program featured study of the English Bible, history and the English language as the major focus of study with science, math, Latin and Greek and other classes being offered as what we today call cognate studies. The program would be introduced straight away so students could transfer into it and the old course would be discontinued at the end of the year enabling students to complete that course if they were able. Making such changes in the midst of a school year was disruptive and risky but somehow Prescott sensed from the tone of Ellen White's letters that it was not wise

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[42] The troubled parent was dentist, Margaret Caro in Napier, New Zealand. E. G. White to W. W. Prescott, Ltr 46, 1893.

[43] Prescott identified the faculty to Board Chairman O. A. Olsen as professors Kirby, Hartwell and Sanderson. He dared not dictate this confidential letter to his stenographer but wrote it up himself. W. W. Prescott to O. A. Olsen, November 8, 1893, RG 9, O. A. Olsen Fld 3, GCArch.

to delay. He did not want to receive further rebukes. And all he was trying to accomplish anyway was the implementation of the Harbor Springs program already approved.

To implement the change, Prescott needed to convene a highly unusual joint meeting of his faculty together with the trustees where the trustees pressed the decision upon the faculty and defended their action. Tensions ran high and some faculty charged that the trustees and administration were out to destroy the college. "The College is dead," "Liberal education is dead" and "Religious liberty is dead" declared professor Hartwell forcefully. Faculty somehow felt they had been outmaneuvered by Prescott and his trustees and they were chagrined and resentful. When the change was announced to the students it created quite a commotion. "The Classical scholars are all broken up about the decision," reported one student to his parents.[44] Students who had invested years of study in the discipline of the classical languages were realizing that the disciplines would no longer be taught in other Adventist colleges and therefore there would be no further need for classics teachers. This was a major shift in focus.

The bitter complaints that Prescott was "cheapening" education found their way to Ellen White in New Zealand and to O. A. Olsen who was visiting her there at the time. Revealing that at the practical working level of curriculum planning and implementation, Ellen White did not fully understand the implications of what she had been advocating as an ideal, she now wrote to express the same fears that Prescott's critics had voiced. The "regular lines of study" were not to be undercut, she stressed, but at the same time the Bible was to be made paramount and "set high."[45] Was Prescott overreacting to letters that she had worded too strongly, she wondered. She would learn that he was a sensitive spiritual soul with a keen conscience and sense of duty. Olsen also chimed in cautioning, "we cannot think for a moment to lower the grade of our work in the least." He was troubled because "we have none too high a standard as it is."[46] These sentiments became known to the faculty through circulation of the letters and they tended to reinforce faculty resistance. But as Prescott knew, the reality of curriculum planning meant that when new subjects are introduced into a program some other subjects have to be discarded – unless the program is lengthened. The limits of class schedules were finite as were degree

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[44] Wilmotte Poole to his parents, December 16, 1893.

[45] O. A Olsen to W. W. Prescott, December 20, 1893, RG 11, Box 50, LB 10, GCArch. Olsen reports Ellen Whites remarks from notes he made of their conversation.

[46] O. A. Olsen to W. W. Prescott, January 11, 1894. RG 11, Box 50, LB 10, GCArch.

requirements. Furthermore, Ellen White was already complaining about lengthening of programs and the need for shorter time at college. Prescott felt squeezed between irreconcilable demands. He found himself replying to Olsen and Ellen White to explain the changes in more detail noting that he was trying to achieve the aspirations she had articulated. After he had explained his moves more clearly, she responded awkwardly, "I cannot discern that your ideas [on education] are incorrect." But the faculty did not get this message of awkward affirmation and were left with the idea instead that Prescott's reforms had somehow cheapened and weakened the College. Prescott felt a little as if he had been hung out to dry.

As a result of the upheaval of the winter of 1893-1894, only a watered-down version of the Harbor Springs reforms could be implemented. The Bible subjects did not replace the classics, they were simply added to the English and Science programs. An extra preparatory year was added, the study load of students was increased from three classes to four per week and the timetable extended to six days per week instead of five. This was unsustainable and further refinements were introduced as the year progressed. It had not been a good year at Battle Creek for the reforming president. And to some extent he felt defeated. He had been more successful establishing the new curriculums at the two new colleges under his leadership.

As the year wound to its close, Prescott followed through on his promise to himself the previous year and in June 1894 he resigned from the leadership of Battle Creek College. At the same time, he also disengaged from the presidency at Walla Walla, arranging for his principal, E. A. Sutherland to move into the role. The previous year he had already passed on the leadership of Union College to principal J. W. Loughhead. He would now give his full time to fostering the work of education in the wider church in his now rather all-consuming role as General Conference Educational Secretary. From this position, he would continue to agitate for a more complete curricular reform for the expanding network of Adventist Schools and colleges. In particular in 1895-1896 he would play a major role in helping establish the curricular pattern at Avondale in Cooranbong Australia which became known as a model institution. He remained firmly convinced that a college education needed to be practical and designed to fit a graduate for a career in the church. If a thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin were still thought to be necessary as the essence of an advanced education, for public recognition, then such languages should be taught from scripture, other ancient Christian author and classical medical literature.

Learning the classical languages from pagan authors was neither necessary nor good.[47] Vande Vere notes that "one searches Prescott's last catalogue in vain to discover any marked change in the classical curriculum."[48] To imply by this, however, that Prescott had no heart or courage for reform is to misread the man completely and the situation he faced.

Conclusion

Just what making the Bible central in the program of an Adventist College meant took some years for Prescott and others to work out. The idea advocated very strongly by Ellen White set forth the noble ideal but it was rather nebulous. What did it mean in practice? Did it mean using "the Bible only," as a textbook? And how should the other important elements of reform that Ellen White so powerfully argued and invested with the authority of her inspiration be made to work in practice? Where was the balance to be found between shortness of time (short unstructured courses) and thoroughness of instruction and preparation? Sincere, spiritually sensitive educators wrestled with what the counsels meant and during the next decade entered into a period of radical experimentation and what C. C. Lewis of Union College called "educational anarchy" in the search for an answer to these questions and tensions.[49] During this decade, as George Knight observes, educational leaders like Edward Sutherland and Percy Magan pushed reform ideas to an unsustainable extreme as much in error on one side as the rigidity of studying the classics only had been on the other when the College began.[50] And Prescott, clear thinker though he was but spiritually sensitive and possessed of a keen sense of duty and a conviction of the need to follow where they thought Ellen White was pointing, for a time helped promote such radical interpretations. While in the early twentieth Century Adventist Colleges found a reasonably stable equilibrium, as the decades passed and new challenges presented themselves as society changed, the question as to how to apply the Ellen White counsels generated during Prescott's administration at Battle Creek, continued to challenge the church. In the context of a delayed advent, where "shortness of time" has had to be rethought,

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[47] W. W. Prescott, circular letter to "Dear Brother," April 10, 1895, RG 11, Box 46, Misc Let (1893-1902), GCArch.

[48] Vande Vere, 62.

[49] Everett Dick provides a helpful discussion of this debate in *Union: College of the Golden Cords* (Lincoln,, NE: Union College press, 1967) 79-86.

[50] G. R. Knight, "Battle Creek College: Academic Development and Curriculum Struggles; Part II," 17, (Unpublished Manuscript) CAR.

contemporary college administrators still wrestle with the ideals, just as Prescott did, as they seek to find a workable and sustainable way forward.