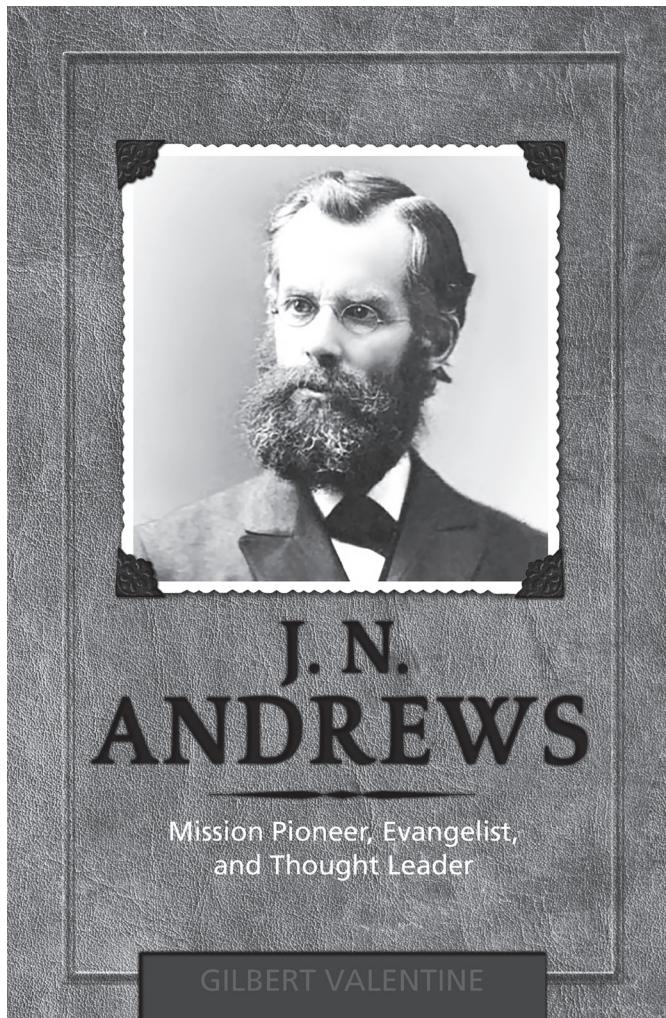


KEYWORDS: book review, J. N. Andrews, “the most influential shaper,” relational dynamics with the Whites

REVIEW



Review of Gilbert M. Valentine. *J. N. Andrews: Mission Pioneer, Evangelist, and Thought Leader*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019. 733 pages. Adventist Pioneer Series, George R. Knight, editor.

AN MA-RATED PIONEER BIOGRAPHY

BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

In this, the first scholarly biography of John N. Andrews, Gilbert Valentine provides a richly detailed, sensitive, and insightful portrayal of the most influential shaper of Seventh-day Adventism, next to Ellen and James White.¹

But to say that alone would leave at least half untold.

Yes, the biography is a magisterial account of Andrews as “mission pioneer”—the first to be sent overseas by the General Conference; as “thought leader”—a Mel-

anchthon in relation to James White as Luther, organizing, polishing, and building a deeper foundation for Adventist teachings; and as “evangelist,” remarkably combining successful proclamation of the message in public meetings with his intellectual and literary attainments. However impressive such comprehensiveness and balance, though, that is not what most distinguishes this book and makes it unprecedented in the writing of Adventist history.

Instead, Valentine’s standout achievement is fair-minded but rigorous probing of the relational dynamics of a life largely defined through interaction with the Whites, Adventism’s charismatic founding couple. Embedding Andrews’ story in that relational context, Valentine takes us on the deepest and most revealing dive into the social, psychological, and religious world of early Seventh-day Adventism that, to my knowledge, has ever been published. He has accomplished this through mastery of a mammoth and diverse array of primary sources—diaries, correspondence, newspaper and periodical articles, committee minutes, conference reports, and civic records, all in addition to Andrews’ large output of books and tracts. The variety of perspectives represented from both inside and outside Adventism adds to the exceptional quality of this body of sources. Taking full advantage of them, Valentine shows us a John Andrews driven above all by sacred duty, navigating the tensions created by a fervent, sometimes fevered, quest of a people to fulfill an impossibly vast, divine mandate in a resistant world, encumbered by their flawed humanity.

“Are we not Protestants?” This four-word question quoted from an 1860 entry in the diary kept by John’s wife, Angeline Stevens Andrews, nails the most pervasive tension running through Valentine’s narrative.² For John and Angeline Andrews and for others prominent in these formative years of Seventh-day Adventism, the Protestant principle that vests authority in the individual believer’s convictions formed by Scripture clashed with the duty of

deference to the gifts of leadership necessary to unify the body of believers.

Their perplexity was not about the authenticity of Ellen White’s visionary gift but rather the nature and scope of the prophetic authority thereby conferred upon her. Nor was conflict primarily about the subordination of her testimonies to the Bible in matters of faith and doctrine. James White affirmed that with forceful clarity more than once in the 1850s. But while John Andrews could readily see in Ellen White’s ministry a manifestation of the New Testament gift of prophecy, he could not so readily see that gift as endowment with singular, preeminent authority in leading the church. What most made attributing such authority to her gift problematic was its link with the authority of what Valentine identifies as “the entrepreneurial skill and fund-raising charisma”³ possessed by her hard-charging, often domineering and unstable husband, James.

Angeline Andrews’ diary reflections on the possibility of an overreach in claims for prophetic authority in 1860 came amidst a furor precipitated by a nineteen-page missive of severe rebuke from Ellen White to Angeline’s sister, and wife of Uriah Smith, Harriet Stevens Smith, and an overlapping letter to John Andrews. The prophet’s concern centered on their mainly covert and passive resistance to James White in his struggle to overcome opposition to the organizational steps he saw as essential to the movement’s very survival. But Ellen White developed the case for her reproof, which included a devastating critique of Harriet’s Christian character in particular, by drawing upon instances of interpersonal conflicts involving the White, Andrews, and Stevens families in Maine during the half-dozen exhilarating but chaotic years (1845–1851) during which the sabbatarian Adventist movement was born.

That birth took place within the “shut-door” or “bridegroom” wing of post-1844 Adventism character-

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ized by an insistence that, appearances to the contrary, Christ's kingdom had begun in a new and decisive way on October 22, 1844.⁴ Various unusual behaviors became associated with this belief, such as the no-work communitarianism instituted by John Andrews' father, Edward, and others in Paris, Maine, out of the conviction that the eternal Sabbath had commenced in 1844. The transgression of sexual mores involved in such practices as "promiscuous" foot-washing and holy kissing in disorderly meetings placed "shut door" Adventists in Maine more generally, including Ellen Harmon, in jeopardy with law enforcement.

We tend to want the story of our pioneers to move quickly beyond all of this. But Valentine keeps us here for a stay that proves more than worthwhile, in part for the detail and brilliance of his depiction of the societal context. Neither sensationalizing nor sanitizing the story, he shows us how John's deep bond with Ellen and James began as they experienced and sorted through the radical spiritual enthusiasms that put them on the margins of civil society.

Sixteen-year-old John Andrews was among the gathering in Paris in March 1845 encouraged by Ellen Harmon's testimony about her visions, but her experience was one in a profusion of visionary and ecstatic spiritual manifestations. Surprising as it may seem, given that he would become best-known for intellectual achievements, John Andrews' own call to ministry came through a charismatic phenomenon—an outbreak of *glossolalia*, with the requisite interpreter per 1 Corinthians 14, at a meeting in 1849.

By the time they came to Paris to live for a few months in 1850–1851, James and Ellen White were asserting a unique authority for her spiritual gift—something weightier than simply one among many New Testament gifts at work in the church. Conflicts developed over day-to-day matters that arose amidst close social interaction in settings both cramped for space and pressured by poverty, even as John Andrews and others in the Paris sabbatarian community were still grappling with how the preeminence claimed for Ellen's gift related to the authority of the Bible. A template of Andrews-White-Stevens interconnections formed during these months with multiple and criss-crossing lines of tension that would exacerbate recurring conflict between the central leaders of the Seventh-day

Adventist denomination throughout its three formative decades.

John Andrews never openly resisted the Whites' leadership. Yet, in part because of their recognition of his value to the cause—"the ablest man in our ranks" (Ellen) and "the brains of the movement" (James)⁵—he received periodic verbal thrashings for being insufficiently forceful or effective in support of their agenda.

Recurring complaints published by James White in the *Review* about the failure of leading brethren to express vigorous support for organization measures, seconded by exhortations from Ellen, prompted a series of confessions from John Andrews in late 1861 and early 1862. He expressed "deep regret" over the damage caused by his silence on organization and acknowledged that he had "not exerted that direct influence in behalf of the testimony of the Spirit of God, given through vision to sister White, that I ought to have done."⁶

Andrews was cultivating what Valentine calls the "spiritual gift of submission."⁷ In so doing, he was working out a rationale for it based on recognition that their spiritual gifts endowed them with capacities that made submission to their leadership appropriate. He understood Ellen White's "direct inspiration from heaven," not as supernatural dictation but the Holy Spirit bringing pertinent passages of Scripture to her "remembrance in such a manner as no other one among us can expect it." Andrews concluded that James White uniquely held an "apostolic office" for which he was equipped with "the gift of seeing at a glance."⁸ Rather than gradually building up to an understanding, James "gets correct views first." Neither required the intensive, time-consuming process of scholarship and reflection that was Andrews' forte.

Configuring the relationship in this way required virtually unquestioning acceptance of the Whites' leadership. It did work, as Valentine points out, keeping the church together through the turbulence of birth and growth during the 1860s and 1870s. Andrews' contributions to this process were indispensable. In addition to his highly regarded expositions on doctrine and prophecy, he fulfilled urgent assignments effectively. These included securing federal recognition of Adventists as non-combatants (1864) and stepping in as president of the General Conference (1867–1869) and as editor of the *Review and Herald* (1868–1869) when James White and then Uriah



(SOURCE: whiteestate.org)

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Smith, respectively, were sidelined due to varying circumstance.

Yet the functionality of the "authority and submission" model was de-stabilized by James White's erratic and at times sharply severe manner. Valentine sees patterns today associated with bi-polar disorder in White's mood swings. These symptoms were exacerbated by the strokes he began experiencing in 1865, causing him to be suspicious of colleagues, and lash out in even more harsh and extreme ways at their perceived resistance and incompetence. Periodically, when tensions increased to the crisis level, we see Andrews confessing his failings even though at times he seems uncertain as to exactly what he has done wrong or what is expected of him.

Working with James White, says Valentine, became "increasingly like working with a porcupine" who might be "sharpening his quills" unawares.⁹ In 1873, with spiraling conflicts putting White at odds not only with Andrews but virtually all of his leading colleagues, formalizing corporate submission to his leadership seemed to be the only solution. George I. Butler, then serving as General Conference president, with his later-notorious tract "Leadership," did this in terms functionally similar to Andrews' earlier designation of White as "apostle." Adventist historians would later see Butler's exposition of the need for a "quasi-monarchical" leader as evidence of a penchant for authoritarian leadership on his part. It may indeed shed light on his later handling of theological conflict with A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner in the late 1880s, but Valen-

tine emphasizes that in 1873, the entire leadership signed onto it as a pragmatic necessity.¹⁰

However, the utilitarian value was also short lived. Recognition of the dangerous implications of the leadership doctrine led to its complete repudiation just four years later at the General Conference of 1877, leaving a confused legacy on church governance for future generations. Perhaps even more deeply problematic was the damage done to Andrews' self-confidence and long-term effectiveness, as well as that of the other leaders in the repeated cycle of accusation and alienation followed by confession and submission.

Valentine also draws attention to ways John Andrews' story speaks to the tension between expectation of an imminent end to the present world and ongoing life within it, one that has driven the Adventist story right from the beginning. An early disparagement of marriage among the shut-door Maine Adventists and, in an incredible incident that must be left for book readers only, the handling of death, represented a radical attempt to collapse the tension and follow the logic of certainty about an imminent second advent as consistently as possible.

An expanding sense of mission reconfigured the tension to that between the imperatives of urgency in delivering an apocalyptic warning message, on the one hand, and effectiveness in doing so on the other. The latter required investment of time and funds needed for books to be researched, written, printed, and distributed, preachers to be supported, and, eventually, institutions to train them.

In his role as “resident theologian,” Andrews helped the church begin to negotiate an instance of this tension when the passage of time led to the question of whether Second Advent believers had a responsibility to counteract the societal evils, such as the liquor traffic and slavery, that they expected God soon to eradicate. During the 1850s, intense conviction that the final events were already beginning contributed to the sense that the only meaningful response to injustice and oppression was to call others to repentance in preparation for Christ’s return. Such individual change, to be genuine, would have to include repudiation of these socio-political sins, but not direct legislative or political activism or even voting. In 1859, with regard to intemperance on the local level of Battle Creek, Michigan, and in 1864 with regard to slavery in the national presidential election, Andrews was at the forefront of a rather rapid shift in Seventh-day Adventism toward viewing, in the words of an 1865 General Conference resolution, “the act of voting” as “highly proper” if “exercised in behalf of justice, humanity, and right.”¹¹

It was Andrews who introduced in 1851 the position followed by other Adventist writers that the institution of slavery was a key indicator that the United States was turning into the persecuting second beast of Revelation 13:11–17. The intensity of his rhetoric against slavery leads Valentine to the remarkable observation that Andrews’ “objection to the institution of slavery and his support for its abolition was almost as passionate as his belief in the seventh-day Sabbath and the nearness of the end of the world.”¹²

Andrews only partially succeeded in coming to terms with Ellen White’s admonitions against devoting excessive time to in-depth research and producing lengthy works of scholarship in view of the urgency of getting the message out. In the run-up to the publication of his 512-page

second edition of *History of the Sabbath* in 1873 (expanded from the 340-page first edition of 1862), she urged haste, declaring, “Truth presented in an easy style, backed up with a few strong proofs, is better than to search and bring forth an overwhelming array of evidence.”¹³

Valentine makes clear that the mission of delivering the apocalyptic warning message to the world was just as all-consuming to Andrews as it was to Ellen White. For Andrews, though, scholarship was about rightly representing and supporting the claims of the message, and thus the time and effort expended on doing so in a meticulous and thorough manner was well-invested in the interests of mission, even if at the cost of some diminishment in how rapidly and widely the message was disseminated.

This tension between the legacies of the two pioneers endures to the present. Yet Valentine credits Andrews with a posthumous victory, seen while Ellen White was still alive, in the 1911 revision of her book *The Great Controversy*: “One

of John Andrews’s most lasting contributions is the way in which he helped the church . . . to care about footnotes and the related specifics.”¹⁴

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The place of scholarly and literary rigor was also among the tensions surrounding the achievement for which Andrews is best known: serving as the denomination’s first formally recognized overseas missionary. But that issue was part of the broader, classic missiological tension over what constitutes the indispensable, non-negotiable core of the gospel and what can be adapted to the varying practices and traditions of local cultures.

Previous scholarship has given Andrews mixed reviews as a missionary.¹⁵ Valentine contends that the attention given to criticisms in Ellen White’s letters to Andrews, circulated among Adventist leaders at the time and later made available to researchers, has overshadowed Andrews’ achievements as a missionary and thus skewed perceptions in the negative direction.

Valentine acknowledges that the limitations of Andrews' appreciation of European culture did hamper his efforts to consolidate a strong base for his mission in Neuchatel, Switzerland, where he joined a group of believers initially won to Adventist beliefs through the earlier, independent mission of M. B. Czechowski. However, Valentine credits Andrews with quickly perceiving the unworkability of the "American model" based on small-town public evangelistic meetings. Not only was European society far less open to allowing religious innovators the use of public spaces for evangelism, he realized that he stood little chance of breaking down prejudice and suspicion without genuine fluency in both written and spoken French.

Andrews thus made publication of a French-language periodical, *Les Signes des Temps*, the centerpiece of his mission strategy. And, he would not settle for articles hastily translated from English into awkward French, or accept anything less than perfection in grammar and placement of diacritical marks. The message, he believed, needed to be presented with a quality commensurate with its supreme importance. His work and adaptation of methods to the cultural context received firm vindication from Stephen Haskell, who conducted an observational visit or "audit" in 1882, and affirmed the importance placed on the French periodical.

That is not to say that Andrews had no shortcomings or personality traits that inhibited his accomplishments in Europe. It was on these weak points that Ellen White's letters tended to dwell, and her most central concern had to do with his marital status.

Coping with the competing needs of family and "the cause" is a fourth area of tension that stands out in this biography. Andrews' sense of duty—and this testifies to its power—pulled him away from his family, with whom he enjoyed deep and warm emotional bonds, rather than

unpleasantness or frustration at home pushing him away to find fulfillment elsewhere.

Melodrama is not Gil Valentine's style, but there is a tragic element that haunts the family vs. sacred-duty tension in Andrews' experience that at times makes me want to weep. Tension, struggle, conflict, and a deep sense of inadequacy seem to overshadow his life. Brightness sometimes breaks through the generally cloudy atmosphere, most especially in the love he shared with Angeline and their children, Charles and Mary. But his extensive travels in response to the call of duty made those moments all too few and far between.

Tragedy struck suddenly when a stroke took Angeline's life in 1872, after fifteen years of marriage. In the European mission that began in 1874, the grief-stricken father and children enjoyed much more extended time working as well as living together, but then Mary contracted tuberculosis. Valentine takes us into 16-year-old Mary's room in Battle Creek Sanitarium for scenes of deep poignancy as her condition worsens. Despite Dr. Kellogg's warnings of the risk, Andrews stayed at his daughter's side for long hours, in part seeking to compensate for his extended absences in earlier years.

After Mary's death in 1878 and his subsequent return to Europe, John Andrews indeed began experiencing his own symptoms of consumption. He continued to work with incredible tenacity as the degree of debilitation ebbed and flowed but generally worsened. Then, in 1883, on his deathbed but still dedicating every hard-earned breath and ounce of energy to his signature mission achievement, *Les Signes des Temps*, his successor delivered to him an inexplicably harsh testimony from Ellen White, leading him to the tearful conclusion that he had been a failure in the cause to which he had devoted his entire life so fully.

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(SOURCE: record.adventistchurch.com)

Much of the difficulty revolved around the fact that marriage counseling was one aspect of Mrs. White's prophetic ministry to which Andrews found it impossible to submit, readily, at least. She had emphatically opposed his marriage to Angeline, though when she realized how far their relationship had gone, she conceded that it would be better to proceed rather than break the engagement. After Angeline died, John could not bring himself to accept Ellen's repeated urging that he re-marry and not enter the European mission in 1874, or return to it in 1879, without a wife. While part of me wants to applaud his refusal to enter a marriage for which he was not emotionally prepared, it seems undeniable that a pragmatic partnership could have been enormously beneficial in providing a healthier and more balanced domestic environment for his children, with multiple possibilities for enhancing the mission he was called to lead.

It is the intimate and richly textured character of the narrative that makes this Andrews biography stand out as a new landmark in Adventist historiography. The unflinching candor and attention to the realities of human weakness, pride, and conflict may cause some readers discomfort. This may be particularly true of the way in which Valentine brings to light the humanity, fallibility, and mixed motivations intertwined with the functioning of Ellen White's prophetic calling. It contrasts sharply with the approach of selecting only, or mainly, evidence that supports a narrative of triumphant, saintly heroism. The latter approach may more quickly evoke inspiration, but is too shallow and shifting a foundation to withstand the storms generated when suppressed truth breaks out. Valentine's work, for me at

least, contributes to a deeper and more lasting basis for admiring and respecting Ellen White's prophetic leadership as the key to keeping the movement united and dynamic.

No historical work is agenda-free, and the interpretive risks Valentine takes are part of what make this a great book. That which may provoke reaction in the damage-control mode on the part of some may be welcomed by others as part of a fascinating and deeply human drama with a trajectory that led to a world church both driven by gospel mission and invested in scrupulous scholarship. Whatever the case, the issues Valentine raises deserve extended discussion and debate from the standpoints of varied perspectives and areas of expertise. His remarkable thoroughness and even-handedness, both in setting forth and analyzing the evidence, invites and sets the tone for that kind of constructive conversation.

It takes the perspective of a larger horizon to see anything beyond tragedy in John Andrews dying with his diseased body wracked with pain and his spirit broken by perceived failure in the mission that defined and gave purpose to his life. Yet, despite his despondence, he gave clear testimony to a faith that held. Gilbert Valentine gently nudges readers toward the possibility of a providential reading of the history he presents and is all the more compelling in doing so by refusing to limit or force the evidence to fit cherished preconceptions.

I give this biography an MA rating (recommended for mature audiences) not only because appreciating it requires a grown-up awareness of life's complexities but because it is the kind of historical writing that can strengthen and energize mature faith.

Endnotes

1. “Most influential shaper” is my take, informed by the biography, but not a claim Valentine directly asserts. Thus, anything objectionable about the superlative should not be attributed to him.

I do not view the characterization as contrary to George Knight’s argument summed in the subtitle of *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Review and Herald, 2004). As I see it, Andrews’ role as “shaper” came on the heels of Bates’ role as originator.

2. Quoted in Gilbert M. Valentine, *J. N. Andrews: Mission Pioneer, Evangelist, and Thought Leader* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2019), 240.

3. Valentine, *Andrews*, 158.

4. Merlin Burt introduced “Bridegroom Adventism” as a more satisfactory descriptor in his dissertation, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White’s Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849” (Andrews University, 2002). The belief was that on October 22, 1844, Christ as “bridegroom” had entered the wedding feast as typified in the parable of Matthew 25, which also signified his reception of the kingdom from God the Father; per Daniel 7.

5. Valentine, *Andrews*, 27.

6. Ibid., 246.

7. Ibid., 250.

8. Ibid., 414. On White as “apostle” see 252.

9. Ibid., 425.

10. In his discussion of this topic, Valentine draws on recent work by Adventist historian Kevin Burton. This is one of numerous instances illustrating that Valentine is as thorough in engaging and crediting the work of other scholars as he is in working with primary sources.

11. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Third Annual Meeting, May 17, 1865, Records of the General Conference Of Seventh-Day Adventists 1863 to 1876, 12. <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCSM/GCB1863-88.pdf>.

12. Valentine, *Andrews*, 304.

13. Quoted in Ibid., 437.

14. Ibid., 717.

15. See Raymund Ladyslaw Dabrowski, “The Forerunner: M. B. Czechowski,” J. R. Zurcher, “Missionary to Europe,” Baldur Ed. Pfeiffer, “The Pioneer to Germany,” Bernard J. Sauvagnat, “The Missionary Editor,” and Daniel Augsburger, “The Adventist Colony at Basel During the Final Years,” among other essays in *J. N. Andrews: The Man and the Mission*, edited by Harry Leonard (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985).



DOUGLAS MORGAN is on leave from the Department of History and Political Studies at Washington Adventist University, serving as an assistant editor of the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.