

Foreword to the Second Edition

It is thirty-three years since *The English Connection* first appeared in print, and I am pleased that after so long a time the publishers have decided to make it available again. I am also grateful for the opportunity to make a few comments about the book and its continuing relevance.

Since the early 1980s, the religious landscape in the Protestant world has changed dramatically. Anyone in doubt of that should read David Wells' articulate study of the changes that have transformed many Evangelical Churches in recent times, aptly entitled *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* In that context, Seventh-day Adventism in some parts of the world is also struggling to maintain its original identity. Indeed, one could substitute the words 'Adventist' and 'Adventism' for 'Evangelical' and 'Evangelicalism' at many points in Professor Wells' book, and conclude that there are many uncomfortable parallels.

My own experience in several pastoral and administrative roles over the past half century tells me that many younger and newer Adventists, particularly in the Western world, do not fully understand what authentic Adventist identity really is, or why the historical context is in any way important. *The English Connection* was written in part to help clarify that identity, and to show the importance of understanding the past. It could therefore be argued that the book is even more relevant now than it was thirty plus years ago.

Of course, there are others beyond the ranks of the Adventist community who will be interested in this new edition, just as there were in the early 1980s. The prominent display mounted by Blackwell's bookshop in Oxford, England, to coincide with the publication of the first edition, is evidence of that wider interest. For two weeks or so it drew attention to *The English Connection* for all, academics and the general public alike, who might have been interested in the religious history and/or theology of seventeenth-century England. Thanks to the open-mindedness engendered by today's ecumenical spirit, something similar can be hoped for in this second edition.

All newcomers to *The English Connection* are therefore encouraged to read carefully the introduction to the original edition. There, both the purpose of the book and the desirability of seeing Adventism in the context of history are explained and emphasised. From an historical perspective, Adventism correctly claims to be directly descended from the Reformation, but there is more to it than that. The more immediate historical background that gave rise

to Adventism were the events of the English Reformation, Puritanism — an essentially English phenomenon — and the rise of English Nonconformity. From this rich tapestry of religious thought the Pilgrim Fathers emerged, taking with them to the New World much of what was later to coalesce into the nascent Adventist movement.

From time to time since then it has been asserted that Seventh-day Adventism is a nineteenth-century American sect, an offshoot from mainstream Christianity, or even a pseudo-Christian cult. These are seriously misleading charges, striking at the very heart of true Adventist identity and making a thorough understanding of Adventism's roots a matter of some significance. *The English Connection* argues the necessity of seeing Adventism as a thoroughly Protestant movement, with roots deep in the biblical Protestantism of seventeenth-century England, rather than a later by-product of radical millenarianism.

The purpose of this new edition, then, is identical with that of the original — to show that major beliefs of Adventism were widely understood and practised in England during the seventeenth century, specifically within the Puritan movement and among the theological descendants of Puritanism in English Nonconformity. That being the case, perhaps the original subtitle was a little too narrow — 'The Puritan and Nonconformist Roots of Adventism' might have been more accurate. The text, however, remains largely the same.

In the original introduction it was also noted that in 1981 the membership of the Adventist Church had passed the 3.5 million mark, with adherents in 189 countries. Rather boldly, perhaps, it was suggested then that Adventism was 'poised for a phenomenal expansion'. In retrospect, that suggestion looks to have been essentially accurate, or perhaps even an understatement. By mid-2013, world membership stood at 18 million plus, with an Adventist presence in more than 200 countries. This makes the Adventist Church the twelfth largest religious organisation in the world.

There are at least two important outcomes of such remarkable growth. In the first place, there are more potential readers for this second edition of *The English Connection* than there were in 1981, though many of them do not have English as a first language. More importantly, there are now millions more who need to understand the historical/theological roots from which Adventism arose, particularly those roots which in this book have been traced back to seventeenth-century England. Without such understanding, contemporary Adventists as well as others interested in the Church's origins will be seriously at risk of having only a superficial or distorted view of Adventist backgrounds.

The original edition contained twelve chapters, each tracing the historical and biblical backgrounds of one major Adventist belief. The content of these chapters remains essentially the same in this edition. One perceptive reviewer of the first edition noted the absence of any reference to a pre-advent

‘investigative judgement’, although there is a full chapter on the high priestly ministry of Christ. However, we should not expect to find reference to an ‘investigative judgement’ in Puritan and Nonconformist prophetic exegesis, since that particular interpretation did not arise until the mid-nineteenth century. That it is missing in this analysis of seventeenth-century biblical interpretation does not in the least invalidate the fact that the major essentials of Adventism were known and practised in England between 1600 and 1750, as this second edition of *The English Connection* continues to demonstrate. It will be seen once again that the links between contemporary Adventism and its historical and theological ancestors in English Puritanism and Nonconformity are as clear as ever.

Finally, a word is in order about the essentially unchanged original text. While the book has been reset and comes with a modern appearance, readers will notice the continuing use throughout of terms such as ‘man’ and ‘mankind’ in the way they were used generically in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is evident in several of the quotations cited. To replace this terminology with the gender inclusive language expected today would be to inject an unwarranted way of thinking and writing onto both the men and women of the time. They found this language in the King James Version, from which they drew their beliefs and which is the cited version throughout the book for that reason.

This second edition of *The English Connection* is available, then, to a new generation of Adventists, to a new generation of all who understand the significance of the seventeenth century to Protestant Nonconformity, and to a new generation of those who are interested specifically in Adventist origins and development. It comes with the hope that it will bring greater understanding and appreciation of Adventism’s rich biblical and historical ancestry to all who did not have access to the original edition in the early 1980s.

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