

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**TEACHING NATIONAL HISTORY
IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE BIBLICAL-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

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12501 Old Columbia Pike
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Presented for the
24th International Faith and Learning Seminar
held at
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.
June 20 - July 2, 1999

Introduction

"In the annals of human history, the growth of the nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; . . . [but] above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One [are] silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will."
E. G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 499-500.

The context of the biblical-Christian worldview is decisive for the formation of a Christian approach toward teaching and studying both national and world history. For Seventh-day Adventists the motif of the Great Controversy traditionally has constituted an important part of our biblical-Christian worldview and served as a basis for our approach toward history. There are several areas with which this concept of the Great Controversy is traditionally been connected:

A. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially since 1888, has paid a significant attention to the personal relationship of an *individual* with God.

B. Another significant contribution of Adventism has been the issue of the *family* as the first organizational unit playing an important role in God's design and in the Great Controversy.

C. The next level on which the Great Controversy has been studied is the *history of humankind* in general, the nations presented in their interrelationship.

D. Finally, the issue that traditionally has enjoyed the highest status within the Adventist community is the *cosmic* concept of the Great Controversy.

This simple diagram outlines these traditional issues:

Universe

Humanity

Family

Individual

What is missing in this logical classifying pyramid? Somehow, the study of the histories of the individual countries and nations in the context of the Great Controversy has never been properly introduced into the scope of Adventist's historical scholarship.¹ There is an unfilled gap between such organizational units as family and humanity in general. The diagram that I would suggest looks slightly different:

Individual – Family – Nation – Humanity – Universe

At least graphically, national history occupies a central place in the theme of the Great Controversy. In spite of the fact that the world is getting smaller and more universal, a national history occupies a more important role today than it did ten or fifteen years ago.² However, from

¹One of the attempts to give a historical analysis to Seventh-day Adventist movement was made by Malcolm and Keith Lockhart in their book *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989). With these Adventists authors considerable attention was paid to the history of the United States of America and its role in the fulfillment of prophecy. But even this study was always oriented toward the potential role of the USA in eschatological events, rather than toward the spiritual battle that has been going on in the USA for centuries. At the same time the evangelicals were attempting to analyze the internal spiritual processes that affected American Christianity. See, for example, David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1993).

²This interest in a national history is due to two primary factors: first, it is postmodernism with an orientation toward the local rather than the general—see Frederic B. Burnham (ed.)

conversations with students and educators from different countries, I have gotten the impression that in some areas of national history, the integration of faith and learning is very difficult to apply. Of course, most educators know the history of the SDA church in their country. But how does the SDA history help the Chinese educator who is responsible for presenting the millenniums of Chinese history to his/her students? Obviously, in order to integrate Christian faith into the teaching of national history, one needs more than a knowledge of secular, political, social, economical, cultural and religious histories of a certain nation. Suppose I know when and why the Great Chinese Wall was constructed and know that for centuries Chinese people were worshiping the spirits of the ancestors. The question remains: So what? What does it all have to do with Christian beliefs?

Purpose

Certainly, some of the principles that Christian educators apply to history in general might, after some adaptation, be applicable to national history. However, they may not be enough. In this brief essay I attempt to summarize my experience of teaching national history and, more importantly, to invite Adventist historians from different countries to join this discussion.

The approach presented in this paper is designed for those who teach national history to the students of high schools and colleges. For the younger students, this approach may not be effective if used without careful adaptation.³ The following material may be useful: both for

Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989). The second factor is the increasing role that modern society gives to different cultures.

³The research conducted by M. Anne Britt, Jean-Francois Rouet, Mara C. Georgi, and Charles A. Perfetti shows that an analytical approach toward teaching history is not equally effective among the older and younger students. "Using the model to score student's answers, we found that as early as fourth grade, students are able to use their experience with narratives to

those teaching in a secular school and for those teaching in a Christian, Seventh-day Adventist school or college. The emphasis in each case can be easily regulated by the teacher.

National History and the Worldview

I had both the privilege and the challenge of teaching national history—in my case it was a history of Russia—at a time when the country was in transition from one historical period to another. The ideology was also in a transitional state—the old Marxist ideology was slowly giving way to a number of rival philosophies, such as capitalism, growing nationalism, postmodernism, and, finally, Christianity as represented mostly by the Russian Orthodox church. It was a time when after about seventy years of united, centralized ideology, Russia was fractured into reds, whites, greens, browns, blacks and some transitional ideological colors. Due to this fact, every teacher had to face the difficult choice of sorting out these competing ideologies. My situation was complicated by the fact that as a Seventh-day Adventist teacher I was not comfortable with any of these fractions. However, in spite of being extremely challenging, this situation was also very illuminating. One could hardly find a better time and place for a critical re-evaluation of different approaches toward this discipline.

Although based on certain facts and in most cases verifiable dates; history, especially national history, was one of those subjects that was often manipulated to support the ideas of certain personalities, institutions, or regimes. This subject was so often abused that many

learn discrete events from a history story. However, only the older students were able to build a representation of the text's complex narrative structure that included both the events and their causal connections. Although early practice with reading narratives allows the young student to initially learn facts from the text, it is not until sixth grade that the relations between discrete events are routinely learned. Younger students appear to need more assistance in understanding the motivations and causes of the events." M. Anne Britt, Jean-Francois Rouet, Mara C. Georgi, Charles A. Perfetti, "Learning from History Text: From Causal Analysis to Argument Models", in in *Teaching and Learning History*, ed. Gaea Leingardt, Isabel L. Beck, Catherine Stainton, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1994, p.82 (art. 47-84).

present-day scholars, in their often justifiable disbelief in the superiority of one particular interpretation of history above the others, are trying to reduce the study of national history to the mere presentation of certain facts. Postmodernism went one further step, and declared that any attempts to go beyond “metanarrative” are doomed to failure.⁴ The postmodern era is a period in which everything is “delegitimized.” The postmodern outlook demands an attack on any claim to universality—it demands, in fact, a “war on totality”.⁵ Foucault, Derrida and other followers of the postmodern school of thought “increasingly describe historians as ‘inventing,’ ‘imagining,’ ‘creating,’ and ‘constructing’ the past.”⁶ In addition to being methodologically doubtful, this approach lacks most of the features that the study of history traditionally enjoys.

First, it operates rather within the scope of archeology than within the dynamic scope of history that always implies certain interpretation. And second, it lacks all the inspiring power that the study of national history traditionally provides. The fact that sometimes the “inspiration” that flows from presenting national history is more destructive than constructive doesn’t exclude its potential positive side. In fact, every scientific discipline contains both potential dangers and advantages. The very definition of history suggests an interpretation. “History is a principled and humanistic dialogue between us and our ancestors... it is the reconstruction of past events, through a dialogue between surviving evidence about the past and existing analytical, theoretical,

⁴See, for example, Hayden White, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,” in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁵Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 82.

⁶Gary Land, Paper presented at the 24th International Faith and Learning Seminar, Andrews University, June 23, 1999, 19.

and political concerns in the present”⁷. The need in a biblical-Christian worldview for the study of national is very well expressed by Gary Land who observes: “It seems clear that a Christian approach to history is both justifiable and necessary. In fact, if our Christianity is more than superficial it is probably impossible to avoid writing history from a Christian perspective.”⁸

The Role of the Worldview

A body of knowledge is built by adding separate pieces of information to one another. But such additions can have no meaning if there is no body of knowledge to give them meaning. There must be already a certain structure into which these bits of information can be assimilated.

The important thing is that both the teacher and the student must have a general idea about the subject matter of the instruction that can provide a framework for interpreting the information presented. The history of the same nation taught from the position of materialistic atheism, nationalism, capitalism and other “isms” is not the same. The difference will be both in the selection of data and in its interpretation. In most cases the teacher is conscious of his/her worldview. The challenge for the Adventist teacher is to make his/her worldview open for a students and to integrate it into the process of teaching. As a teacher enters into a dialog with his/her students, this dialog must be “stimulated both at the level of data information and at the level of the conceptual framework.”⁹

⁷Leinhardt, G., Stainton, C., Virji, S. M., & Odoroff, E. Learning to reason in history: Mindlessness to mindfulness. In J. Voss (Ed.), *Cognitive and instructional process in history and the social sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. p. 14.

⁸G. Land, A Biblical-Christian Approach to the Study of History. Paper presented at the 24th International Faith and Learning Seminar, Andrews University, June 28, 1999, 15.

⁹Ola Hallden, On the Paradox of Understanding History in an Educational Setting (article), in *Teaching and Learning History*, ed. Gaea Leingardt, Isabel L. Beck, Catherine Stainton, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1994, p. 44 (art. 27-46).

The Foundations of a Christian Worldview of a National History

A helpful outline of the main worldviews is found in the paper presented by Humberto M. Rasi for the Seminar on Faith and Learning, Summer 1999.¹⁰

Christian understanding of God

“A personal (triune), creatively active, morally perfect, omniscient and sovereign Being.”

Understandably, a historian holding such a view of God would construct his/her view on national history in a different way than those with atheistic or neopanthestic approaches. There is a dramatic difference, for example, between Eusebius’s “Church History”¹¹ and the accounts of the pagan historians of that time. Thus, theistic views strongly affect one’s perception of history, although it will not predetermine entirely our views on history, since the historical facts always control historian.

Christian understanding of man

“Physical-spiritual beings with personality, created in God’s image, capable of free moral decisions, now in a fallen condition.”

Certainly, a scholar accepting this presupposition will never fall to those historical constructions that are based on a view of the human being as an economical being (Marxism), machine (capitalism) or animal (naturalism). Accepting the biblical image of man helps the Christian historian see a history of his/her country without the perversive glasses of doubtful humanistic hypotheses.

One example of this view of men and women as God’s children is the Christian exclusion of the unhealthy delight drawn by some nationalists from the bloody defeat of the enemy—even if the victory is appraised as a progressive step in the history of the nation. King David was

¹⁰Humberto M. Rasi, *Worldviews, Contemporary Culture, and Adventist Education*, 7-9.

¹¹This book deals not only with the events of Church history, as the title suggests, but it also gives an account of the secular history of Rome.

deprived the privilege of building the Temple for the Lord as a result of his bloody wars.

This Christian anthropology in the field of history is also demonstrated by those teachers who are able to separate genuine patriotism from nationalism or chauvinism. The Christian anthropology, that approaches every human being as a child of God, forbids a national pride which exalts one race or tribe in expense of the others.

Christian understanding of the ethics

“Unchanging character of God (just and merciful), revealed in Christ and in the Bible.”

The understanding that humans are responsible beings, beings that were given some specific moral laws, provides the historian with a tool for measuring the events of history as having intrinsic moral value. Historians usually argue about the validity of certain historical events from the perspective of their outcomes, or success. But how do we describe “success”? If Hitler won World War II, could his actions be called positive or successful? What is the time boundaries for the evaluation of events? Should they give an immediate result? When one of the Chinese governmental officials was asked about his evaluation of the French Revolution, he said that it is too early to judge. It is true: without the moral dimensions provided by the Bible, it is always “too early to judge” any historical event. The voice must be given to the morality of the events and the threads to connect them to principles, motivations, and consequences.

Christian view on the meaning of history

“A meaningful sequence of events, guided by free human decisions, but also supervised by God; moving toward the fulfillment of God’s overall plan.”

Intuitive observation of history as a meaningful process has always been a challenge for a prick mind. William Miller, founder of the Adventist movement, wrote in his “Apology and Defense”:

In 1813, I received a Captain’s commission in the U.C. Service, and

continued in the army until peace was declared. While there, many occurrences served to weaken my confidence in the correctness of Deistical principles. I was led frequently to compare this country to that of the children of Israel, before whom God drove out the inhabitants of their land. It seemed to me that the Supreme Being must have watched over the interests of this country in an especial manner, and delivered us from the hands of our enemies.¹²

However, under other circumstances, some historical events may produce bitter disappointment and even unbelief—the cases of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre are good examples of this situation. Gary Land notices: “The problem for the historian is that once we move beyond New Testament times, the Bible gives little specific information regarding God’s intervention in history. Even the prophecies do not necessarily refer to God’s activity in human affairs, for what they foretell may simply be the result of human actions.”¹³

At the same time, although it is impossible for a historian to see “God’s hand” in every particular event of history, he or she still can be guided and guarded by the light of revelation. After a detailed description of certain future events (Matt 24), Jesus Himself says: “See, I have told you ahead of time” (v. 25). Those Christians who lived in Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction were able to save their lives only because they took the words of Jesus Christ (v. 15-20) seriously and fled to the mountains. The Seventh-day Adventist approach toward history is based on the historicist approach toward the interpretation of the books of Daniel and Revelation, and can be best characterized by the categories of the Great Controversy.¹⁴ This approach undermines any speculations concerning the future of the humanity: both extremely pessimistic and unduly optimistic ones.

¹²W. Miller, “Apology and Defense”, Low Hampton, N.Y., August 1, 1845, 4.

¹³Gary Land, 17.

¹⁴Jonathan Kuntaraf, “Teaching history from an Adventist perspective: Some philosophical and methodological concepts” (No. 025-88; 2CC: 109-128).

The Bible on the History of Nations

The Bible pays significant attention to the histories of the nations. In one sense, the entire Old Testament is the historical account of the development of the Israelite nation in its relationship to the other nations. The book of Genesis describes both the natural tendency of the formation of separate nations, or tribes (ch. 4), and also the divine intervention that caused the division of humankind into separate nations (ch. 11). Thus, God Himself is the initiator of such a phenomenon as a nation. And although the circumstances under which this separation is pictured in the Bible are quite sad, this division was as necessary for humankind as the healing curse of working “in the sweat of the face” (Gen 3:19).

By fragmenting a once-united humanity into nations, God creates a better environment for working with His children.

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)

The Bible presents God as both creator and sustainer of every nation. No nation can survive without God’s grace. Further, God Himself initiated the birth of the Israelite nation (Gen. 12) that was called to play a special role in the Great Controversy. The emergence of Israel as a nation should be seen not as one that was done at the expense of other nations, but rather as one that was made for the sake of other nations: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). In the Old Testament the individual nation is a prime object of God’s activity.

God’s special care for individual nations is demonstrated in the Bible abundantly. God is the one who can really see the “little Great Controversy” that is going on within the boundaries

of every nation. It was not a secret for the biblical authors that the spiritual war is not limited by the boundaries of Israel:

In that day five cities in Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord Almighty. One of them will be called the City of Destruction. In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings: they will make vows to the Lord and keep them. ... In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.

In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handwork, and Israel my inheritance." (Is 19:18-25)

Isn't it surprising that Israel is mentioned last in the triad of nations worshiping God? It is not the task of this essay to discuss whether this prophecy was ever fulfilled in history or not.

What is important for this study is a situation when the spiritual confrontation is depicted within the boundaries of some individual nations. God sees this confrontation—this "little Great Controversy." The prophet Isaiah recognizes it. What is it that is keeping us from a systematic study of national histories from the perspective of the Christian worldview? Probably the answer is the lack of principles that would allow us to undertake serious research.

The Christian Approach Toward the Teaching of National History in Relationship with Other Approaches

A Christian scholar finds useful and respects positions that differ from him or her. While dealing with different approaches toward the history of an individual nation, a Christian historian should emphasize the values found in each of these approaches. Thus, a textbook written from a Marxist's position might be very helpful to the Christian historian as he/she deals with such

issues as equity of all people, social justice, exploitation, etc. At the same time, a Marxist's approach obviously lacks other historical dimensions, such as the role of the individual and the uniqueness of every person—the features emphasized by some historians sharing the existentialist's position. In its turn, the existentialist in his evaluations lacks such objective historical factors as the external values. This list of incompleteness found in every secular approach toward national history could be continued. It is the task of a Christian historian to present both the values and the shortcoming of these approaches.¹⁵

A naive view of history texts assumes that they present objective, trustworthy accounts of past events. Several studies report that such a concept is frequent among high-school and even college students.¹⁶ By comparing different approaches toward a study of national history, the teacher develops in his/her students the facility to discern between historical facts and presuppositions of certain historical schools.

The Moral Dimension in the Teaching of National History

Objectiveness, however, excludes neither comments nor interpretation. Imagine a situation—unfortunately quite real—in one of the Serbian schools when a history teacher describes with strong colors the massacre done by their neighboring Slavic nation to some of the Serbian villages in the last century. What is going to be the natural reaction of his/her students? A growing nationalism and a cultivation of hostility against their neighboring nation. And what is happening today is a direct result of this kind of teaching.

¹⁵While presenting these positions to the students, one should consider specifically of the cultural environment. Some of the philosophies that affect the discipline of history might not be well known or popular in certain regions. It may be a good idea to leave them aside and to deal with those tendencies that are real and palpable.

¹⁶Wineburg, S. S. On the reading of historical texts: Notes on the breach between school and academy. *American Education Research Journal*, 28, 495-519.

What is the solution? The ideologists of the Soviet period, in their honorable attempt to stop the hostility between the nations, were trying to delete from the memory and from the textbooks the very mention of such national conflicts. In addition to being nonhistorical and, despite the noble pacifistic goal, immoral, this approach has proven to be ineffective. The “oral tradition” has magnified the real accounts of the ethnic conflict and has altered them into horror tales, called to sustain and multiply racial hatred.

A Christian approach to this problem is demonstrated by those few teachers who present certain facts, but who do so not in the spirit of enmity, but in the spirit of sorrowfulness and reconciliation. The teacher who demonstrates a Christian approach to the ethnic problem will express his/her attitude toward these certain facts of the history, an attitude that communicates Christian values of forgiveness and love. The Christian teacher can not remain neutral toward the controversial points of national history. To be neutral is to be supportive of the student’s dubious reaction that arises in response to the facts of history. People look at national history as having certain practical implications for the present and for the future of their country, and that is why the Christian approach is demonstrated not only by presenting history from the specific point of view, but also by expressing a Christian attitude toward the possible implications of these data. To remain truthful to the facts of history I tell to my students that World War II took the lives of about 50 millions Russians. To remain truthful to my Christian vocation I add that although we deal here with the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century, it is only forgiveness and love that are able to heal this bleeding wound. The attitude of hatred could only deepen this wound and bring an even greater tragedy upon humankind. The moral dimension in teaching of national history gives the teacher opportunity to remain faithful to the historical facts and at the same time to affirm his/her Christian standpoint.

Dynamics in Teaching National History

Since every society is constantly undergoing the dynamic process of change and development, the teaching of national history should also be a dynamic process. In a rather peculiar way, this process can be demonstrated by the manner it was accomplished in the former Soviet Union, where the textbooks on national history were seriously revised every five years. Access to the five-year-old textbooks on national history was very restricted and limited by those few, who had special authorization from the regime and whose intentions and trustworthiness were secured by certain government structures. There was a time when one could not buy the school textbooks on national history in the bookstores and could only use the copies that were available through the library. Such a serious attempt to keep national history under the control of a certain ideology demonstrates not only the potential power inherent to the teaching of this subject, but also the constant need of revision. National history should be always tuned to the modern tendencies in the society.

One of the most important issues that should be taken into consideration by those who attempt to teach national history from the Christian position is the Seventh-day Adventist concept of present truth. This concept determines our critical evaluation of the morality and validity of the events of national history. One could hardly apply the notion of the Great Controversy to national history while approaching the historical events with a lack of understanding of the concept of a present truth. Both scholars and teachers have great advantage of approaching the historical episodes from a superior position: they are able to see certain consequences of the actions and to arrange the individual historical events into an organized system, which is called upon to explain history. At the same time we tend to judge both morality and validity of the events of the past from the modern perspective, using the tools of modern culture. This approach keeps us from seeing the real historical importance of the events and their places in the Great Controversy.

For example, many of today's Russian historians approach the reforms of Peter the Great negatively. Here are some of their reasons: Peter had an unpleasant character, he was a hard drinker who also forced other people to drink sometimes over two gallons of vodka a day; he had a wild temperament, and his methods often were too violent. His only son Aleksy was tortured to death as a result of a direct order from Peter, who himself was present at this inquisition. All of this certainly doesn't give this czar much credit. But at the same time, he was the one who awakened Russia from centuries of dreaming idleness. He introduced the principles of religious tolerance and created an environment favorable toward the free exchange of ideas. And although he was neither able nor willing to separate the state from the church, he significantly limited the interference of the Russian Orthodox church in the state's affairs. He was an extremely gifted and energizing child of his time. Thus, historians of the Soviet period had reasons to praise him as a great reformer, while historians from the camp of the Russian Orthodox church called him the antichrist.

Complex historical problems also include a significant amount of uncertainty and controversy that must be conveyed by text. Students may have to identify biased interpretations and distinguish them from factual accounts. Moreover, many historical problems require the integration of several sources of evidence, which are presented in many discourse forms... A student learning about a historical topic from these documents must be able to do much more than to represent the main events and causal relations of a text.¹⁷

The approach of an Adventist historian would be to present these controversial issues first of all in the context of the time of Peter—the concept of the present truth—and only after that in the context of the Great Controversy.

It is a problem for the learner to discover the meaning of presented facts because their

¹⁷M. Anne Britt, Jean-Francois Rouet, Mara C. Georgi, Charles A. Perfetti, *Learning from History Text: From Causal Analysis to Argument Models*, in *Teaching and Learning History*, ed. Gaea Leingardt, Isabel L. Beck, Catherine Stainton, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1994, p. 48 (art. 47-84).

meaning is dependent on what they lead up to. It is the aim of the classroom discussion to get at this conclusion. Of course, it is a challenge. And, of course, there can be no fixed place for the reform of Peter the Great on the visible scale of moral values. And although every teacher has a right to his/her own opinion and has a right to present this opinion to the students, the Christian approach implies humility and acceptance of the limitations of human judgment. By stimulating discussion and challenging students with controversial issues, a teacher both stimulates the development of creative and critical thinking among his/her students and causes them to examine national history as the arena of the Great Controversy between good and evil—even if the student doesn't consider himself or herself to be a Christian. Eventually, it will help many students to form their system of moral values based on the Christian principles mentioned above.

The Teacher as a Scholar

Although the modern approach toward all sciences, including history, is increasingly characterized by narrow specialization, and in spite of the fact that a high wall was erected between those who “create” and “shape” a discipline and those who are supposed to communicate it to the students, a teacher should not be deprived of his/her own research and scientific investigation. It is especially true in the case of a Christian teacher whose Christian emphases are different from traditional secular emphases on national history. One will be very surprised to find just a step aside from the familiar collection of historical events traditionally presented by secular historians a rich and almost untouched historical mine. Among Seventh-day Adventists it happened when E. G. White presented her alternative history in the book *Great Controversy*. One example of her method is the way she brought into the scope of historical investigation such forgotten phenomena as the Waldensian movement.¹⁸ For centuries this

¹⁸Today we have several books written on Waldenses.

subject remained neglected by scholars not because it was unimportant, but because it simply did not fit into the traditional course of history. It is my conviction that the historical heritage of every nation could be greatly enriched by the study of abandoned pages of their national history.

A Christian history teacher has all the opportunities—except time, and sometimes a desire—to conduct historical investigation. The historical archives in most countries are available for a researcher, and the process of research by itself may be extremely rewarding.

During my years of teaching Russian history to the Seminary students at Zaoksky, Russia, I became interested in the fifteenth-century Russian religious movement, called by its opponents “Judaizing” because of some of its teachings and especially Sabbath observance. Being blessed with an administration supportive enough to free me from my teaching responsibilities on Monday, I dedicated this day to traveling, studying the archives, collecting materials, and, finally, writing a book. In the course of my research I discovered an entire period in Russian history when what we now call Protestant ideas were not merely popular, but accepted by the Russian royal family, by many of the nobility and intellectuals and also by many lower and middle class people. The period from the late 1470s through the first five years of the sixteenth century occupies a special place in the history of social, political and religious thought in Russia. By contemporaries this is the period called the “heretical storm.” According to the writings of Fedor Kuritzin, the fifteenth-century Russian diplomat and one of the theologians of this movement, the Russian reformers held the following beliefs:

1. The Holy Scriptures are the highest authority of the believer and they are above the traditions of the church.
2. Things like monasticism, icons, holy relics, and other traditions not found in the Bible are priestly inventions. They should not be honored.
3. The Bible is also a historical and a prophetic guide that ties together the past, the present, and the future.

4. The Christian should pray to God without any kind of mediators like the priests and the saints. The Scriptures can be understood and explained, bypassing the clergy.

5. Believers should keep all of God's Law, the Decalogue, including the Sabbath.

6. Christ's death was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humankind.

7. There is a union between the spirit and the body; therefore, there is no immortality of the soul.

8. Every man is free to choose and practice what he believes: the freedom of conscience.

9. True religion and science do not antagonize each other.

The defeat of this movement constitutes another tragic and almost unknown page of Russian history. On the third day of Christmas, December 27, 1504, the population of Moscow saw the first inquisitional burning at the stakes in Russia. Ivan Kuritsyn, the brother of Feodor; Dimitrii Konopliov; Ivan Maksimov, and others were burned in wooden cages. Old Ivan III together with his son, Tzar Vasili; Metropolitan Simon with other bishops; and all the Church Council accused them of Judaizing and sentenced them to death. In the same winter Ivan Rukavov, the Archimandrite of the Yr'evskii monastery; Kassian and his brother Ivan Chiorny; Gridia Kvashnia; Dimitrii Pustoselov and obviously other less-known heretics were burned because of "judaizing." The inquisition did not spare even those "heretics" of royal blood. The Czar's daughter-in-law Helen and her son, sixteen-year-old Dimitry, a rightful prince and the first in Russian history officially crowned heir of the Russian throne, were thrown into a prison and, after the death of Ivan III in 1505, they were killed too.

The study of "parallel history" may open for a teacher an entirely new perspective on national history. The case of Robert Boyle presented in this seminar illustrates how little do we know about even the most prominent scientists, artists, politicians and entire historical movements beyond the line that was proclaimed as a "mainstream" of the historical narrative.

Conclusion

It is my deep conviction that the history of every nation to some extent reflects the motif of the Great Controversy. And although the entire picture of the great conflict between God and Satan is not limited even by the history of humankind in its totality and includes the spiritual war in heaven, it is the history of individual nations that reveals different details of that great cosmic controversy. Being small particles of the greater picture, the histories of individual nations deserve the study of their own.

The biblical-Christian worldview is an integral part of a Christian approach toward a teaching of national history. Such issues as Christian understanding of God, man, ethics, Christian view on the meaning of history lay at the very foundation of this worldview. The Bible both set an example of treating national history as a part of universal conflict, and provides researcher with certain presuppositions, moral tools and actual data needed for this approach. At the same time Scripture restrains any humanistic attempt—even those painted in religious colors—to weight individuals and events and to pronounce a judgment: “You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting” (Dan 5:27). God is the God of history, and to His is the glory to judge—both individuals and nations.