

JONATHAN EDWARDS' NEWTONIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ESCHATOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) trace their unique interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to a tradition going back to Irenaeus, the Reformers, Isaac Newton, and William Miller. The most exhaustive study of this subject has been undertaken by Le Roy Edwin Froom's four-volume publication *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. The purpose of this paper has been to show the shared historicist roots between Jonathan Edwards, Sir Isaac Newton, and Seventh-day Adventists. Despite the geographical, temporal, and religious barriers between these three different representatives of Christian theology, they share a common theological root. This paper has shown that the similarities between Jonathan Edwards and SDA eschatology were partially a result of their mutual dependence on Isaac Newton's historicist interpretation of Revelation 11-13.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventists. Eschatology. Newton.

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INTRODUCTION

Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) trace their unique interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to a tradition going back to Irenaeus, the Reformers, Isaac Newton, and William Miller. The most exhaustive study of this subject has been undertaken by Le Roy Edwin Froom's four-volume publication *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, dealing with the background and historical development of the SDA's understanding of Daniel and Revelation (FROOM, 1950).

However, the literature dealing with the development of SDA eschatology has hardly noticed if not neglected the important contribution of Jonathan Edwards. In the few pages dedicated to Edwards, Froom critiqued Edward's "extreme predestination," presentation of God as "a being of wrath," and most importantly, as a "prey to the new Whitbyan view" (FROOM, 1950, p. 183). This so-called Whitbyan view was postmillennialism, which was the belief that Christ would come at the end of the millennium after a period of human prosperity. Froom credits Edwards with introducing this view into American eschatology and, thereby, leading to the "encroachments on the clear premillennial advent teaching of the seventeenth century" (FROOM, 1950, p. 254).

The critique that Edward's eschatology heavily focused on the millennium and on the establishment of some sort of Christian utopia has been reiterated outside Adventist denominational party lines. The works of Richard Niebuhr and later Allen Heimert have incidentally led to the public perception of Edwards' eschatology as a mere precursor to civil republicanism (NIEBUHR, 1959, p. 171, 172; HEIMERT, 1966, p. 60, 61)².

Stephen J. Stein has aptly summarized the prevailing attitude towards Edwards' eschatology during the second half of the twentieth century saying, "[f]or the past two decades, most of those who have addressed the question of the significance of eschatology in Edwards have focused attention upon the idea of the millennium" (STEIN, 1978, p. 150-167)³. As a result of this, the emphasis on Edwards as a postmillennial thinker has led many scholars to credit him "with fostering such diverse developments in America as radical utopianism, evangelical voluntarism, Jacksonian democracy, Emersonian Americanism, and civil religion" (STEIN, 1978, p. 262). Another issue in studies on Edwards' eschatology has been the tendency to see his over-dependence on the works of Moses Lowman (GOEN, 1959, p. 25-40)⁴.

In contrast to these views, this paper argues that Edwards shares more in common with Seventh-day Adventist eschatology than has been previously recognized. This study

² See also MCDERMOTT, Gerald R. "Jonathan Edwards and the National Covenant," in EDWARDS, Jonathan. *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition.*, D.G et al (ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003. P. 49; GOEN, C. C. "A New Departure in Eschatology". *Church History* 28, no. 1, March 1959: 25-40 at 38.

³ See also STEIN, Stephen J. "Eschatology". In *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*. Sang Hyun Lee (ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. P. 229.

⁴ See STEIN, 1978, p. 232

argues that both Jonathan Edwards' and SDA's eschatology derive from a shared Newtonian historicist interpretation of the time prophecies of Revelation 11-13⁵. Four key aspects that link both eschatologies with Newton's historicism are worth noting: (1) The beginning and end date of the 1260-year-day prophecy, (2) the events described in the prophecy, (3) the causes of the end of the 1260 days, and (4) the usage of gematria to interpret the number of the beast. Moreover, the similarities between some unique material in Edwards's interpretation of the 1260 year-day prophecy and early SDA eschatology (as reflected in the writings of Ellen G. White and the SDA pioneers) suggest that SDA's read, appropriated, and approved of some aspects of Edwardian eschatology. This paper hopes to show that despite their temporal, geographical, and theological differences, Newton, Edwards, and the early Adventist pioneers shared a common theological root.

NEWTON ON THE 1260-DAYS PROPHECY

This section argues that Newton influenced Edwards' interpretation of the 1260-year-day prophecy of Revelation 11-13 in four keyways. First, Newton influenced Edwards interpretation of the 1260-year days of Revelation 11-13 through the dates which he set for the beginning and end date of the 1260-year day prophecy. Secondly, Newton influenced him through the content of the events described in the prophecy. Thirdly, both Newton and Edward seemed to agree on the cause(s) of the end of the 1260 days envisioning a general depletion of the power of the Roman Catholic church by the end of this period. Finally, Edwards depended on Newton's usage of gematria to draw some connection between the number of the beast in Revelation 13 and the Roman Catholic Church, which both believed began its reign at the start of the 1260-day prophecy.

Considering this, in order to understand the shared roots of Jonathan Edwards and Seventh-day Adventist eschatology, as well as Edwards' unique contribution to SDA eschatology, one must first understand Sir Isaac Newton's historicist approach to Bible prophecy and how he applied such an approach to the study of the 1260 days of Revelation 11-13 (BROOKE, 1988, p. 181). Newton applied the year-day principle adopted by a significant number of 17th-century English Protestant interpreters of Daniel and Revelation (BALL, 1981, p. 202). On the basis of Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:34, advocates of the year-day principle argued that the usage of the term "day" in prophetic language

⁵ According to SHEA, William H. "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13". In Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies. Book 1. Frank B. Holbrook (ed.). Daniel and Revelation Committee Series. Silver Spring, MD. 6:327, the term "historicist" refers to the school of prophetic interpretation that accepts the time periods in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation "as symbolic of longer spans of years according to the year-day principle and locates them in the flow of human history at the point indicated by the prophecy."

stood for a literal year (BALL, 1981, p. 202)⁶. In light of this, Newton interpreted the prophecies of the 1260 days (Rev 11:3) and the 42 months (Rev 11:2; 13:5) as covering the same period of 1260 literal years. According to this system a month counted as 30 days, hence $30 \times 32 = 1260$ literal years⁷.

Thus, according to Newton, the 1260 years stood for a historical period “when the reign of the papal Antichrist had been initiated” and when it would end (MANUEL, 1973, p. 99; HALL, 1992, p. 372). Although the vast majority of interpreters agreed that the beginning of the 1260 years was marked by the rise of the “Antichrist” (i.e the papal power), the vast majority of them disagreed as to when this would begin. Although Newton had set several dates throughout the course of his lifelong study of the book of Revelation, he seems to have been more comfortable with the date of 607 A.D⁸. That was the date, he claimed, when Pope Boniface III would have accepted the supremacy of the Western church, thereby placing the beginning millennium around roughly the 1860s⁹.

When it came to the content of the 1260 days, Newton’s interpretation of this time prophecy was deeply influenced by his understanding of the role of Christianity in Bible prophecy. Newton believed that Christianity had gone into a period of apostasy with the establishment of the Roman Catholic church ushering in a period of 1260 years of Babylonian captivity (MANUEL, 1973, p. 74; NEWTON, 1999, p. 7, 15, 20-22, 28, 29). He blamed the “unholy trinity” of the Cabbalists, Platonists, and Gnostics who introduced false metaphysical notions in order to corrupt the pure gospel of Jesus Christ (MANUEL, 1973, p. 69).

The remnant of the “true” Christianity had gone into a period of hiding represented by the woman being carried away from the reaches of the dragon and into the desert for a time, times, and half a time (Rev 12:14). As Newton himself pointed out, this period of hiding and preservation of truth was first represented “by the Waldenses and Albigenses and then by the Protestants.” Thus, he argued that “we have reason to believe that God foreseeing how much the Church would want a guide in these latter ages designed this prophecy for this end and by consequence we may expect that he hath some further counsel to be brought about by the further manifestation of it” (YAHUDA apud MANUEL, 1973, p. 111).

⁶ For a thorough definition of the year-day principle and how it has been applied in the history of prophetic interpretation see SHEA, William H. “The Year Day Principle-Part 1”. In *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*. Frank B. Holbrook (ed.). Revised Edition., vol. 1, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992. P. 67-104; FROOM, 2:457.

⁷ Commenting on the scene of the women being delivered from the dragon in Revelation 12, being nourished for a time, times, and half a time and on the 42 months of the beasts reign in Revelation 13 comments saying, “in these Prophecies days are put for years.” In NEWTON, Isaac. *Isaac Newton’s Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: A Critical Edition*. Stephen J. Barnett (trans.). Mellen Critical Edition 2. Lewiston, ME: E. Mellen Press, 1999. 2:160, 277.

⁸ Newton set the date for the beginning of the 1260 years from as early as 420 A.D to as late as roughly 800 A.D. See Newton, 28:277; Westphal, p. 132.

⁹ For a full treatment, see Newton, 39. WESTFALL, Richard S. *The Life of Isaac Newton*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993. P. 129; MANUEL, Frank Edward. *The Religion of Isaac Newton: The Fremantle Lectures 1973*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1974. P. 99.

If the beginning of the 1260 years symbolized the beginning of the establishment of papal Rome, the end of this time period necessarily meant the end of this religious-political power for Newton. Newton viewed the end of the 1260 days as marked not only by the ushering in of the millennium but also by a secular reaction to the Roman papal system. William Whiston, Newton's successor at Cambridge, reported Newton's belief that before "primitive" or "true" Christianity could be restored, "the power of infidelity in a 'main revolution' would be used to put a stop or block the popedom that had so long corrupted the church" (FROOM, 1950, 669).

Aside from his nuanced perspective on the meaning of the 1260 days of Revelation, Newton also viewed the 42 months of Revelation 13 as a direct parallel to the 1260 days of Revelation 11-12 (NEWTON, 1999, p. 39; WESTFALL, p. 277). In light of this, Newton attempted to give a precise definition for all of the symbolic imagery in this vision. He was particularly fascinated with the meaning of the number of the beast. He viewed the number as a direct pointer to the role of the Roman Catholic Church saying "[h]is mark is XXX, and his name LATEINOS, and the number of his name 666" (NEWTON, 1999, p. 278).

JONATHAN EDWARDS ON THE 1260-DAYS PROPHECY

Jonathan Edwards subscribed to the historicist method of Biblical prophecy of applying the year-day principle to the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation (MURRAY, 1987, p. 299). Although scholarly research on Edwards has tended to emphasize his dependence on the works of Moses Lowman, *Paraphrases on the Apocalypse*, a more in-depth look shows a greater similarity to the works of Newton, particularly, in the interpretation of the 1260-day prophecy and the meaning of the mark of the beast of Revelation 11-13¹⁰. This section shows how Edwards' interpretation of these questions reflected a greater dependence on Newton than previously conceived.

There are a number of features in Edwards' writings that indicate that he relied not only on Lowman but also on Newton for his interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation¹¹. Indeed, the respect which Edwards gives to Lowman cannot be underestimated as seen through his annotations No. 94. *Extracts from Mr. Lowman and Remarks on Lowman*¹². However, a look into his catalogue of books reveals that Isaac Newton is the most heavily cited author as well as the most cited expositor of Apocalyptic

¹⁰ For the connection between Lowman and Edwards see Editors Introduction in STEIN, Stephen J. "Eschatology". In: *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*. Sang Hyun Lee (ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. P. 232.

¹¹ See EDWARDS, Jonathan. *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 26. THUESEN, Peter J. (Ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

¹² Edwards constantly quotes Lowman in his works and alludes to his writings on the Apocalypse. See *Extracts from Mr. Lowman*. In EDWARDS, Jonathan. *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 5. STEIN, Stephen J (Ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957. P. 219-52; EDWARDS, Jonathan. *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 9. WILSON, John (Ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970. P. 422-3.

interpretation. Of the eleven references to the writings of Isaac Newton three references are to his *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (EDWARDS, 1970, p. 357, 372, 470).

In the catalogue, he mentions Lowman only three times. Of those three, only two are a reference to his paraphrases, which constitute his apocalyptic writings. The other Revelation commentators that he mentions occasionally in the catalogue are Joseph Mede, Simon Ockley, and Philip Doddridge (EDWARDS, 1970, p. 470, 665). Ockley and Doddridge rely heavily on Newton's work citing it extensively (EDWARDS, 1970, p. 470, 665). It seems plausible to suggest that whenever Edwards did not refer to Lowman, he most likely referred either to Newton or another commentary such as Mede's which reflected a familiar line of reasoning.

When one looks at Edwards interpretation of Revelations 11-13 this seems to be the case. Newton's influence on Jonathan Edwards' can be seen in three main areas. First, Newton impacted Edwards interpretation of the 1260-day prophecy with regard to setting the beginning and ending dates of the prophecy. Secondly, Newton also influenced Edwards on his interpretation of the events described in the prophecy and on the cause(s) for the end of the 1260 years. Finally, Newton influenced Edwards interpretation of the number of the beast in Revelation 13.

Edwards showed a greater affinity to Newton than Lowman in setting of the date for the beginning and ending of the 1260-year-day prophecy. Edwards took issue with Lowman's setting the beginning of the prophecy in 756 A.D. with Pepin's donation of the papal states. Edwards' interpretation of the 1260-day prophecy mirrored more closely Newton's historicist attitude of seeing the 1260 within the context of his own historical moment as opposed to a prophecy that would be fulfilled in the very distant future. Criticizing Lowman, Edwards said: "I humbly conceive that we have no reason to suppose the event principally intended in the prophecies of Antichrist's destruction to be at so great a *distance*, as Mr. Lowman places it; but have reason to think it to be much nearer" (EDWARDS, 1957a, p. 368, 369, 406).

Edwards believed that "the Pope first obtained his supremacy and universal episcopacy "in the year 606" when "the pope was first seated in his chair, and was made universal bishop" (EDWARDS, 1957a, p. 128, 129). For this reason, he believed that the 1260 days would "end about 1866" (EDWARDS, 1957b, p. 129). Although one cannot ignore that Edwards' criticism of Lowman derived from his belief that the events he witnessed in the Northampton revivals were leading to the arrival of the millennium, they also reveal his historicist understanding of apocalyptic prophecy (STEIN, p. 236; MARSDEN, 2003, p. 198-200). For Edwards, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation could not solely be fulfilled in the past nor solely fulfilled in the future. Rather, he viewed prophecy in a historical linear fashion. The revivals he had witnessed at Northampton proved to be signs of the approaching end of God's work of Redemption, the end of the

1260 days.

In addition to adopting the same dates for the beginning and end of the 1260 days, Edwards followed Newton in the interpretation of the events contained in this period of historical time. Edwards viewed the beginning of the “1260 days” as “the proper time of the church’s trouble and bondage” during “the appointed time of the reign of Antichrist.”³³ Like Newton, Edwards viewed the experience of the Waldenses and Albigensis in the Piedmont valley as reflecting the desert place which God had prepared “for the woman, that they should feed her there during the reign of Antichrist” by *Revelation 12:6*.” (EDWARDS, 1970, p. 173, 174; 1957c, p. 110)¹³. However, Edwards went beyond Newton to a certain extent in that he believed that God had “shortened” the days of persecution through the Protestant Reformation (EDWARDS, 1970, p. 173, 174).

The similarity between both Edwards and Newton in their interpretation of the 1260 days in Revelation 11-13 is even more striking once one observes how Edwards envisioned the cause(s) for the end of the 1260 years. Edwards believed that the end of this prophetic period would be preceded by a massive reaction against the Papal system. Similarly, Newton envisioned it as being preceded by a revolution in which “the power of infidelity in a ‘main revolution’ would be used to put a stop or block the popedom that had so long corrupted the church” (FROOM, 1950, p. 669). Interestingly, Edwards viewed the increasing secularization of many French institutions during the Enlightenment and the withdrawal of financial support for many of the leading papal institutions as promising signs of the end of the 1260 year and ushering in of the millennium.

Edwards begins his argument by stating: “The kingdom of France has been the grand fountain of Popery” (EDWARDS, 1957c, p. 195-196). He says next: “If France was but reformed, and the most learned men in other parts, the rest of Antichristendom will be but a miserable, dry, parched, withered, barren wilderness whose pleasant rivers are dried up” (EDWARDS, 1957c, p. 195, 196). Then he predicted that “[s]ome of those societies shall be reformed and others destroyed, as perhaps the societies of Jesuits. Whether this vial is not begun to be poured out already upon France in the dreadful judgments that have lately fallen upon that kingdom, I will not dispute” (EDWARDS, 1957c, p. 195, 196). Although Edwards had a seemingly much more optimistic vision of the end of the 1260-day prophecy than Newton, he does seem to allow for the possibility that France, still known in his time as the first daughter of Rome, would abolish many of her religious institutions¹⁴.

¹³ It is important to mention here that Lowman did not necessarily deny the experience of the church of the Waldenses as embodying the church in the wilderness. However, the absence of this imagery and language from his *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St. John* and its presence here in both Edwards and Newton strongly suggest that Edwards was reading Newton.

¹⁴ It is also important to note here that Edwards also considered the possibility that the Roman Catholic church would be defeated by the power of Protestantism. See *Tractate on Revelation 16:12* in WJE 5:303-305. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that he viewed the “secularization” of France and its defeat in the hands of the British as signs of the end of the 1260 years.

Similar to Newton, Edwards viewed the essence of all false religion as being supported by the false trinity comprised “of the power of heathenism, the power of hypocrisy, i.e., false Judaism and false Christianity, and the power of false prophecy” (EDWARDS, 1957, p. 173-174). However, Edwards went further than Newton in that he believed that on the days shortly following the closing of the 1260 prophetic days and before the coming of the millennium he envisioned these powers colluding together to operate a general apostasy, or as he says, “[t]is probable that all these will in some respect join together, and help one another at that time, as the enemies of the true religion are wont to do when Satan’s kingdom seems to be in imminent danger” (EDWARDS, 1957, p. 173-174).

However, one of the most visible instances of Edwards’ dependence on Newton’s interpretation of Revelation 11-13 appears in the interpretation of the mark of the beast in Revelation 13. Similar to several other Protestant commentators in England and New England in the 18th century, Edwards interpreted the ten horns of the beast as representing the divisions of the Roman Empire that arose following the breakup of the Roman Empire and shortly before the rise of papal Rome. However, his list of European kingdoms corresponds exactly to the list utilized by Isaac Newton¹⁵. Moreover, Edwards also adopted Newton’s interpretation of the number 666 for the mark of the beast. He makes this clear by saying: “Of all the various interpretations given to this text, I find none that pleases me so well as that of Sir Isaac Newton....that the words *λαττεινος* and *היימור*, the man of Latium, or Rome, whose numeral letters, taken together, make 666, are here referred to” (EDWARDS, 1957, p. 1229)¹⁶.

In his *A paraphrase and notes on the Revelation of St. John*, Lowman specifically rejected this interpretation stating that although some (i.e Isaac Newton) have “been satisfied in the name he (John) proposes....which is the Greek word *Lateinos*...this number has been found out in so many other names, that this way of reckoning may seem at least very uncertain” (LOWMAN, 1737, p. 140, 141). Lowman rejected this interpretation and viewed the number 666 as marking the period between the delivery of the prophecy in 96 A.D and the beginning of the 1260 days (LOWMAN, 1737, p. 140, 141). Lowman employed this hermeneutical maneuver to attempt to reconcile the long gap between

¹⁵ The list is the following: (1) The kingdom of the Vandals and Alans in Spain and Africa, (2) the kingdom of the Suevians in Spain (3) the kingdom of the Visigoths in Spain (4) the kingdom of the Alans in Gallia (5) the kingdom of the Burgundians, (6) the kingdom of the Franks (7) the kingdom of Britain (8) the kingdom of the Huns, (9) the kingdom of the Lombards, (10) the kingdom of Ravenna. NEWTON, Isaac. Isaac Newton’s Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: A Critical Edition. Stephen J. Barnett (trans.). V. 2. Mellon Critical Edition. Lewiston, ME: E. Mellen Press, 1999. P. 39. WESTFALL, Richard S. The Life of Isaac Newton. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993. P. 101; No. 94. Extracts from Mr. Lowman. In Works of Jonathan Edwards. V. 5. Apocalyptic Writings. Stephen J. Stein (ed.). New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957. P. 253.

¹⁶ See also NEWTON, Isaac. Isaac Newton’s Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: A Critical Edition. Stephen J. Barnett (trans.). Vol. 2. Mellon Critical Edition. Lewiston, ME: E. Mellen Press, 1999. P. 39. WESTFALL, Richard S. The Life of Isaac Newton. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993. P. 278; 303. Brackets mine.

the days of John and the beginning of the captivity of the Roman Church.

This brief look into Edward's interpretation of the 1260 years suggests that it mirrored more closely Newton's than it did Lowman's. Edwards' chronology of the beginning and end of the 1260 years reflected more closely Newton's timeline. Moreover, his appropriation of the list of kingdoms that followed the breakup of the Roman Empire, as well as his interpretation of the number of the mark of the beast was directly taken from Newton. The final section of this paper shows how the early Seventh-day Adventist Pioneers and, in particular, Ellen G. White appropriated certain aspects of Jonathan Edwards and Newton's interpretation of Revelation 11- 13.

ELLEN WHITE AND THE EARLY ADVENTIST PIONEERS ON THE 1260-DAY PROPHECY

The impact of Sir Isaac Newton's interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation is admittedly clear in Seventh-day Adventist history. His application of the year-day principle was adopted by the early Adventist pioneers and his influence is notably felt in the interpretation of the 2300 year-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. William Miller, Adventist preacher and precursor to the Seventh-day Adventist church held the writings of Newton in high regard naming his tenth child Isaac Newton Miller (JACOBS, 2019). In his biography of William Miller, James White also reiterated the appreciation that Miller had for Newton's prophetic interpretation. Ellen White, founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church also mentioned Newton on many occasions in her writings (WHITE, 1875, p. 77, 210, 267).

Given the prevalence of Newton's influence in SDA eschatology is so evident, this section will devote itself not to reiterating this, but rather to looking at how the SDA interpretations of the 1260-year-day prophecy mirrored Jonathan Edwards' Newtonian interpretation of the 1260 day prophecy in Revelation 11-13 and his interpretation of the rise of the papal power as stated in Revelation 13. Since SDA eschatology flowed from the Millerite movement and eventually took shape under the guidance of Ellen G. White, I will refer to her writings as necessary.

There are four points in which the SDA understanding of the 1260 days intersects with Edwards-Newtonian interpretation of this time prophecy (1) The beginning and end date of the time prophecy (2) The events described in the prophecy (3) The causes of the end of the 1260 days (4) the usage of gematria to interpret the number of the beast. Moreover, some unique aspects of Jonathan Edwards interpretation of the 1260 prophecy appear in the writings of Ellen G. White and other of the early SDA pioneers.

A look at both Edwards and SDA's understanding of the beginning and end of the 1260-day prophecy shows that both shared a close date for the beginning and ending of the 1260, thus viewing the said prophecy through a historicist prism. Of all the 17th century and 18th century most prominent American interpreters of the book of

Revelation, only Jason Winthrop and Linn Whim, who are both writing later in 1794, come closer to the SDA date for the beginning and end of the 1260 days¹⁷. According to Ellen G. White, this period “began with the establishment of the papacy, A. D. 538, and terminated in 1798. At that time, when the papacy was abolished and the pope made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, ‘He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity’” (WHITE, 1888, p. 439).

Strikingly, White’s date for the beginning and end of the 1260 years is only 70 years earlier than Jonathan Edwards and Isaac Newton’s (FROOM, 1950, 252). This is remarkable because White wrote *The Great Controversy* almost roughly 150 years after Edward’s death. This shows that of the English and New England interpreters of the 1260-day prophecy, White comes closest to Edwards and Newton. Although White does not mention Edwards by name it is difficult to imagine that she was not familiar with Newton given her Millerite background or with Edwards given that she was born in Gorham Maine, New England.

White viewed the end of the 1260 days in a way similar to both Newton and Edwards. Like Newton, she believed that a wave of infidelity would shake the Catholic church before the end of the 1260 days, and like Edwards, she viewed France as playing an important role in this development. As a result of this, she viewed the arrival of the French Revolution and the imprisonment of the Pope in 1798 as the conclusion of the 1260 days. White viewed the French Revolution as a secular reaction to France’s refusal to accept the message of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 which she interpreted to be the Old and New Testaments.

As she notes, “The period when the two witnesses were to prophesy clothed in sackcloth ended in 1798. As they were approaching the termination of their work in obscurity, war was to be made upon them by the power represented as “the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” (WHITE, 1888, p. 268). That historical moment for her was the French Revolution when “a little before the year 1798 some power of Satanic origin and character would rise to make war upon the Bible” (WHITE, 1888, p. 269). As a result of this, she said, “in the land where the testimony of God’s two witnesses should thus be silenced, there would be manifest the atheism of the Pharaoh, and the licentiousness of Sodom” (WHITE, 1888, p. 269).

White believed that the Catholic Church, through its rejection of the Bible and persecution of Protestants, had sown the seeds of its destruction. She makes this explicit by saying that “the same master-spirit that urged on the St. Bartholomew Massacre led also in the scenes of the Revolution” (WHITE, 1888, p. 273). She then adds that “chained

¹⁷ For the “leading views of the principal American writers on prophecy (17th and 18th centuries),” see the graph in Froom, 3:252–253.

to the bench and toiling at the oar, the Roman Catholic clergy experienced all those woes which their church had so freely inflicted on the gentle heretic” (WHITE, 1888, p. 283).

White firmly believed that France’s rejection of the gospel of peace would have terrible consequences (WHITE, 1888, p. 230, 283). According to her interpretation of Bible prophecy, this led ultimately to the imprisonment of the Pope in 1798 (WHITE, 1888, p. 266). Both White and Edwards viewed the closing of the 1260-year-day prophecy as ending in an undoing of the Papal institutions in France. Moreover, like Edwards and Newton, White appealed to the image of the Waldenses and Albigensians to describe the experience of the church in the wilderness. She makes this clear by saying, “While the Waldenses laid down their lives upon the mountains of Piedmont “for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, similar witness to the truth had been borne by their brethren, the Albigensians of France” (WHITE, 1888, p. 171).

White, however, did not comment on the question of the meaning of the mark of the beast. Nevertheless, Uriah Smith did. Uriah Smith (1832–1903) was one of the leading SDA pioneers in the early period of this movement (1863–1901). His writings on Daniel and Revelation served as the standard for SDA interpretation of Daniel and Revelation for until roughly the second half of the twentieth century and have still exerted a profound influence in SDA eschatology. In his classic work on SDA eschatology entitled *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* addresses this issue (SMITH, 2009, p. 619). White warmly endorsed Smith’s work stating that it contained “the very message the people must have, the special light God had given His people” (WHITE, 1899, p. 21). This strongly suggests that she could have possibly endorsed his interpretation of the number of the mark of the beast.

Smith made a similar argument to Newton and Edwards in attempting to draw a connection between the meaning of the number 666 and the Roman church. He said, “[t]he most plausible expression we have seen suggested as containing the number of the beast, is one of the titles applied to the pope of Rome” (SMITH, 2009, p. 619). He then added, “That title is this: *Vicarius Filii Dei*, ‘Vicegerent of the Son of God’.... we have V, 5; I, 1; C, 100; I, 1; U (formerly the same as V), 5; I, 1; L, 50; I, 1; I, 1; D, 500; I, 1. Adding these numbers together we have 666” (SMITH, 2009, p. 619).

However, Edwards’ contribution to SDA eschatology comes from some of the unique details concerning the interpretation of the 1260 days which are absent from both Newton and Lowman but present in his writings and Ellen White. White interpreted the shortening of the days of persecution like Edwards. Like Edwards, White viewed the events of the Protestant Reformation as allowing some respite from the persecution of the 1260 days. She says, “God in mercy to his people cut short the time of their fiery trial. In foretelling the “great tribulation” to befall the church, the Saviour said, ‘Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened [Matthew 24:22.]’” As a result of the Reformation, she maintains,

“the persecution was brought to an end before 1798” (WHITE, 1888, p. 267).

Another detail unique to both Edwards and White is the emergence of a false trinity after the completion of the 1260 years which would lead the world into a period of apostasy shortly before the second coming of Christ. Edwards believed that such a false trinity would be the work of heathenism, the power of hypocrisy, i.e., false Judaism and false Christianity. The absence of this detail in the writings of either Newton or Lowman suggests that White was familiar with the writings of Edwards. However, White believed that the final apostasy would be conducted by an alliance of the papal system with spiritualism and apostate Protestantism to impose a National Sunday law. She makes this clear by saying:

The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of Spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience (WHITE, 1888, p. 267).

As this statement suggests, both Ellen White and Jonathan Edwards envisioned an apostasy at the end of time after the end of the 1260 years. Although they disagreed as to who the actors in this final deception were to be, they firmly believed that it would precede the second coming.

In light of this, one can see that the similarity between Ellen White and the early SDA pioneers' with Jonathan Edwards' eschatology resulted from their shared Newtonian historicist interpretation of Revelation 11-13. This became especially visible in the interpretation of the 1260-year days as well as in the interpretation of the number of the mark of the beast. Moreover, Edwards may have also contributed to SDA eschatology because of his unique perspective on such historical events as the Protestant Reformation, the role of France in Bible prophecy, and the connection of these two events with the 1260-year prophecy. Consequently, Ellen White may have been familiar with the works of Jonathan Edwards and may have viewed them positively in her interpretation of Revelation 11-13. Although Seventh-day Adventists have rejected Edwards' postmillennialism, they adopted his historicist and Newtonian interpretation of prophetic history.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to show the shared historicist roots between Jonathan Edwards, Sir Isaac Newton, and Seventh-day Adventists. Despite the geographical, temporal, and religious barriers between these three different representatives of Christian theology, they share a common theological root. This paper

has shown that the similarities between Jonathan Edwards and SDA eschatology were partially a result of their mutual dependence on Isaac Newton's historicist interpretation of Revelation 11–13.

This becomes especially clear in the interpretation of the 1260 days and the number of the mark of the beast. There are three main aspects that Edwards and early SDA interpretations shared with Newton. These were the date setting for the 1260-year-day prophecy, the events described in the prophecy, the causes leading to the end of the 1260 days, and the usage of gematria to interpret the number of the beast. However, we have also seen that Jonathan Edwards' unique interpretation of specific details of the 1260-day prophecy strongly suggests that he could have contributed to Ellen White's understanding of this topic. This is noted in his claim that the Reformation brought about a shortening to the persecution of the 1260 years and also with his belief that after the 1260 years, a false "trinity" would emerge leading to a general apostasy shortly before the millennium.

Thus, Edwards was indeed a precursor to the post-millennialism that would shape so much of American public life a century after his death. However, Edwards was much more. As this paper has attempted to argue, Edwards may be seen as a pre-adventist thinker whose historical interpretation of the 1260-time prophecies would set the stage for the Millerite and later SDA movement.

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