

Comments on Peterson Study

ELLEN G. WHITE'S ACCOUNT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

GLENN C. BOLTON, College Place, Washington:

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The first part of the article is largely devoted to discussing what [the author] is about to do. He believes Mrs. White's other books should have similar treatment. Second, he discredits, without data, Mrs. White's sources as biased relative to more recent scholars who are not so anti-Catholic and are therefore presumably more reliable. Third, he presents his study, which consists of two pages, 64 to 66, where the errors of the chapter are discussed. The errors are here reviewed.

The first error was made in the 1888 edition and has been discussed at length by Arthur White, he states. I do not have this material. At any rate, the statement in the 1888 edition says that the "ringing of the Palace Bell" was the signal to begin the massacre. In the 1911 edition this was changed to "a bell." Going to Wylie (whom Peterson considered to be her source), I found that the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerois was rung prematurely at 2:00 a.m. and precipitated an early commencement of the St. Bartholomew Massacre. The Palace of Justice bell, scheduled to ring later, did in fact ring, and most of the bells in Paris took this signal up and rang also. This official signal was given and the massacre became generalized. As this has been studied more extensively before, we have here no new contribution.

A second error is referred to where the 1888 edition mentions "brevaries of the Old and New Testament." In 1911 this was changed to "brevaries, missals, and the Old and New Testament" (p. 276). This, too, is no new contribution.

A third error was referred to where in 1888 millions are referred to as dying in connection with the French Revolution. In 1911 this was changed to multitudes. This also contributes no new insights. The ten-year period referred to was characterized by war and revolution. The number who died would indeed be difficult to calculate, and I presume for this reason Peterson has not given us new, more reliable figures.

A fourth serious error he now focuses on, which has not been corrected, he states. He places a great deal of emphasis on this important point. In the 1911 edition, page 278, [Ellen White] said, "Thousands upon thousands" of Protestants fled France in the sixteenth century. He points out that Wylie, in the paragraph preceding the one which she used as a basis for this flight information, mentioned 400 or 500. He then states that "Wylie himself is given to hyperbole in discussing Catholic persecutions; and when one compounds his exaggerations with Mrs. White's, the distance from historical reality is very great indeed" (p. 65). Even a brief reading of the statement in

The Great Controversy makes it clear that Mrs. White was referring to a period of 250 to 300 years. Wylie for this period gave a figure of hundreds of thousands.¹ Albert Hyma, a recent historian, gives a figure of 400,000.² He should qualify as a historian even for Peterson, as his book is dated 1931.

Education does not ensure that one can interpret history accurately when prejudice is present. Perhaps divine inspiration is just what is needed to read history and repeat it accurately.

A similar example follows where Monort is spoken of as a "priest of the new order." Alison, who apparently was the source of this anecdote, called him a comedian. Peterson feels that there was a "clear indication" by Mrs. White that she wished to be understood as identifying him as an apostate Roman Catholic priest. I had read this many times, and it never had occurred to me that she was attempting to describe an apostate Catholic priest. I rather think Peterson is seeing Catholic prejudice where none was intended.

At the top of page 66 [Peterson] discusses a statement on page 274 of *The Great Controversy* where the Bishop of Paris renounced Roman Catholicism as "priestcraft with no foundation in history or sacred truth." He feels she should have included Sir Walter Scott's two sentences: "It is said that the leaders of the scene had some difficulty inducing the bishop to comply with the task assigned him, which, after all, he executed, not without present tears and subsequent remorse. But he did play the part prescribed." Whether including these sentences would have increased or decreased the Roman Catholic image is difficult for me to see. I question that Catholic malice would be the motive for not including this "hearsay" information.

Peterson's criticism proving Ellen White "a very human" if "godly woman" proves again how remarkable that she was able to "escape the intellectual influences and limitations that are experienced by every man and woman" and write history so accurate that her critics stand clearly revealed as in error by their own exposé.

REFERENCES

- 1 James A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, fourth edition (London: Cassell and Company, Limited N. D.).
- 2 Albert Hyma, *Europe from the Renaissance to 1815* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company 1931), p. 222.

WILLIAM S. PETERSON'S REPLY:

The fundamental assumption of Bolton's letter is that my article was designed primarily to list and correct the factual errors in "The Bible and the French Revolution." Hence he finds the core of the article on pages 64-66 and implies that everything before and after these pages is superfluous padding. I certainly cannot accept this view of the article, which, as a matter of fact, examined a number of other questions that Bolton evidently feels are unimportant: the record of *The Great Controversy's* liter-