

Analysis of Annual Council  
The Church and the War in Lebanon

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# SPECTRUM

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A Quarterly Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums

Volume 8, Number 2

## ELLEN WHITE AND HEALTH

Reviews of Ronald Numbers' Book  
By Schwarz, Guy, the White Estate  
And Others, Plus Numbers' Response

# SPECTRUM

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# In This Issue

SPECIAL SECTION

Volume Eight, Number Two, Published January 1977

Commentary on <i>Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White</i> , by Ronald L. Numbers	
I. The Prophet and Her Contemporaries	W. Frederick Norwood 2
II. A Biased, Disappointing Book	Ellen G. White Estate 4
III. Ellen White's Emotional Life	Fawn M. Brodie 13
IV. The State of a Church's Soul	Ernest R. Sandeen 15
V. On Writing and Reading History	Richard Schwarz 16
VI. What Should We Expect From a Prophet?	Fritz Guy 20
VII. An Author Replies to His Critics	Ronald L. Numbers 27

## ARTICLES

Ellen White's Authority as Bible Commentator	Joseph J. Battistone 37
The Church and the War in Lebanon	
I. Interview With a Union President	Malcolm Russell 41
II. Recent Political History in Lebanon	Malcolm Russell 46
III. Sociologist From Lebanon Looks at His Homeland	Anees Haddad 48
Analysis of the 1976 Annual Council	Tom Dybdahl 54
Let's Stop Arguing Over the Wedding Ring	C. G. Tuland 59

## BOOK REVIEW

<i>Perfection</i> , by Herbert E. Douglass, Edward Heppenstall, Hans K. LaRondelle, C. Mervyn Maxwell	Timothy Crosby 62
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# About This Issue

This issue's special section on Ellen White's health message bears witness not only to the church's interest in Professor Numbers' book, *Prophetess of Health*, but also to Ellen White's continuing importance as this movement's founder and mentor. It is no small tribute to her power as a leader and prophet that, six decades after her death, her influence should still be so great. What is surprising, of course, as Professor Brodie points out in her review of Numbers' book, is that her work, at least until now, has been little known outside Adventist circles.

Readers will note a wide diversity of outlook among the articles in this special section. It is a safe assumption that everyone will find here something to disagree with—and perhaps

strongly disagree with. We hope, however, that the main effect of the section will be to foster a unified commitment to increasing our understanding of this woman whose thought and leadership have so shaped us all.

Two other items in this issue concern Ellen White. One is Joseph Battistone's reflection on her authority as a Bible commentator. The other is a review of *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility*, in which the reviewer links theologians' differences to their degree of reliance upon quotations from Ellen White.

Also in the issue is a special section on the church and the conflict in Lebanon, and a Bible scholar's viewpoint concerning the wedding ring. Tom Dybdahl's analysis of the 1976 Annual Council exemplifies this journal's promised sensitivity to the rhythms of Adventist organizational life.

The cover of SPECTRUM is by Concerned Communications, Arroyo Grande, California.

The Editors

# ELLEN WHITE AND HEALTH

## I. The Prophet and Her Contemporaries

Review by W. Frederick Norwood

*Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*  
by Ronald L. Numbers  
Harper and Row, 271 pp., \$10.00

The lead article in the April 1976 number of SPECTRUM, written by Gary Land, offers some wisdom for this review. Land draws a distinction between the work of a historian and that of a theologian or theologian of history. "The historian," he declares, "interprets history at a different level than the theologian." He then quotes from Richard H. Bube, *The Human Quest: A New Look at Science and the Christian Faith*: "There are many levels at which a given situation can be described. An exhaustive description on one level does not preclude meaningful descriptions on other levels."

It should therefore be apparent, Land writes, that when a historian interprets the actions of

William Frederick Norwood, retired professor of medical history at Loma Linda University, is at work on a book about military medicine during the Civil War.

persons in terms of the documentary evidence and the critical method "he does not thereby invalidate theological statements about their action." Land concedes that the historian and the theologian can be the same person; still, he "should make clear both to himself and to his audience the role he is playing."

Ronald Numbers, who took a doctorate in the history of science at the University of California at Berkeley, has done precisely this in his study of Ellen White. His first intention, he writes, was "to look at Mrs. White's major writings within the context of nineteenth-century health reform." He states that he has refrained from using "the concept of divine inspiration as an historical explanation," thereby clearly distinguishing his work from that of the apologist. But this does not preclude description of Ellen White at another level, that of inspiration. As Numbers himself recently said before a large audience at the San Bernardino County Museum:

I do not think that Ellen White was a pious fraud. I make no judgment regarding her inspiration, but I am not saying that Ellen

White was not inspired. This is a decision that each person must make on the basis of faith.

Numbers had two main objectives in his research: one, to discover whatever relationship, if any, existed between Ellen White's writings on health and the publications of her contemporary writers in the field of health reform. Two, to find out to what extent, if any, Ellen White modified or changed her health reform views between 1863 and her late years.

Although Mrs. White had some visions prior to 1863 that touched on limited aspects of health reform, the theme of this book revolves around the comprehensive revelation of health reform given her on Friday evening, June 5, 1863, in the home of Aaron Hilliard, near Otsego, Michigan. She had subsequent visions touching on health reform but the June 5, 1863 vision brought her the information on which she based her health writings. First published as "Health," a 32-page chapter in Volume 4 of *Spiritual Gifts* in 1864, it became the central core of the health reform message, though it was not as comprehensive as the very busy writer would have liked to make it.

In his book, Numbers notes similarities between her chapter on health and the writings of several reformers. Yet, when Adventists to whom she lectured on health in 1863 inquired if she had read *Laws of Life*, the *Water-Cure Journal* or the writings of Doctors James C. Jackson and R. T. Trall, she replied that she had not and would not until she had fully written out her views and attributed all her knowledge to her visions. She had, however, read Jackson's essay on the treatment of diphtheria, which opened with a very brief general presentation of the principles of healthful living. Also, she must have had access to the series of health reform papers which her editor husband reprinted in the *Review* prior to June 1863.

Perhaps Ellen White's denial only meant that she had not yet made any real study of the subject. Or possibly in her effort to rule out any and all influences apart from the vision as she wrote her account, her memory played a trick on her as memories are prone to do. It seems very probable that James White, who edited his wife's manuscripts in their earlier years, became very familiar with health reform literature and the language of the writers. He familiarized himself with the literature before she did and

naturally adopted some of the vocabulary and physiological expressions which he found more clearly descriptive than his and Ellen's ordinary lay language. From Numbers' own language, I conclude that he does not and has never believed Ellen White guilty of deliberate misrepresentation. How much James modified Ellen's prose without distorting her meaning in the six essays in *How to Live* (1865) can be contemplated but not fully known.

There is no doubt that Ellen herself in time became well acquainted with the principal writings of leading health reformers. She did not live in a vacuum. She must have habitually compared what she read with what she had been shown to keep her message clear and free from spurious concepts.

That Mrs. White was in many respects a very practical reformer was demonstrated in the decades of the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s during which some of her ideas were modified. Because of extensive traveling, she found it wise to depart from rigid dietary restrictions in order to maintain herself on the less than ideal food that was available. At any rate, as Numbers probably discovered, one who has difficulty living up to a regimen is not so likely to emphasize it as much as when happily living by it.

Another variation in her views had to do with dress reform. When Ellen White endorsed and recommended such a reform, the sisters of the church were divided, some dutifully adopting it while others rebelled against it. She had suggested at one time a skirt two or three inches above the heel; at another two inches below the boot-top. Some concerned sisters could not accept both instructions as inspired, failing to appreciate the few inches of latitude as an opportunity to express one's taste. Rather than let her testimony be dragged through a degrading turmoil, Ellen White urged that the entire subject be abandoned, and it was.

In her earlier writings she spoke of "poisonous miasmas" coming from unkempt premises producing fever, argue, sore throat, lung diseases and fevers; she also wrote of "cancerous tumors" found in flesh foods, causing various diseases including cancer. Later, she adopted the term "germ." Meanwhile, the germ theory had been confirmed in Europe and reported in America. That she chose to keep up with medical progress is highly complimentary of her

sense of duty. Her reasons for avoiding flesh foods also were modified.

In a way, it is not strange that Ellen White in 1849 condemned consultation with physicians. Faith healing was at that time her only recommendation. American medicine was in the 1850s at its lowest ebb in quality and Mrs. White seemed to know it. But, by the 1860s, she was articulating a new view, declaring that “some have carried this matter [the prayer of faith] too far, especially those who have been affected with fanaticism.”

Mrs. White’s first published book on health, *An Appeal to Mothers*, was a forceful assault on social impurity with the focus on the baleful effects of masturbation and marital sexual excesses. In it she quoted extensively from contemporary reformers who, along with her, emphasized F. J. V. Broussais’s “vital force” theory. Thereafter, she wrote less and less about sex until her *Ministry of Healing* (1905) was silent on the subject. J. H. Kellogg supplied the lack in his publications.

In *Prophetess of Health*, Numbers also describes the early history of Adventist medical

institutions, including the relationship between church leadership and Dr. J. H. Kellogg. In his discussion of the beginnings of the medical school at Loma Linda, he unfortunately fails to mention the name of Newton Evans, a distinguished pathologist who, more than anyone else, stimulated the faculty of the new school to emphasize scientific character in their work.

It is rumored that this book will be disturbing, even upsetting to many Adventist readers. I would suggest that the book need be disturbing only to those who have come to exalt Ellen White to a pedestal of inerrancy or infallibility, a position she did not claim for herself or even for the Bible writers.

I note in closing that Numbers utilized some of the most competent medical historians in his description of the state of American society and the delineation of the health reform movement in the nineteenth century, particularly Richard Shyrock and John Blake. It is hoped that he will be judged by his performance as a historian of medicine. The author’s thoughtful treatment of this delicate subject may mark the beginning of a new approach to Adventist history.

## II. A Biased, Disappointing Book

Review by the Staff of the Ellen G. White Estate

*Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, while skillfully written and profusely documented, comes far short of the promise of its broad title. Rather than presenting a full portrayal of Ellen White’s participation in the successful development of the health work of Seventh-day Adventists, the book focuses on limited and sometimes relatively insignificant experiences and episodes. By failing to cite many of the relevant facts in connection with the history which is recounted, the author has

The office of the Ellen G. White Estate is at the headquarters of the General Conference in Washington, D.C.

developed his account in such a way as to put Ellen White in an unflattering light and often portrays the views she advocated as ridiculous and having their origins in the teachings of contemporary health reformers.

Throughout its history, the Seventh-day Adventist church has accepted the proposition that Ellen G. White served as a prophetic messenger through whom God communicated His will, counseled and instructed its members, and guided its activities, and in many instances, as in the case of the health work, initiated them.

George I. Butler, longtime president of the General Conference, observed concerning the visions of Ellen White:



We have found in a long, varied, and in some instances, sad experience the value of their counsel. When we have heeded them, we have prospered. When we have slighted them, we have suffered a great loss.<sup>1</sup>

The author of *Prophetess of Health* states that he has “refrained from using divine inspiration as an historical explanation” for Mrs. White’s teachings and activities. He takes the position that Ellen G. White was merely a child of her times, and that her teachings were simply a reflection of the sentiments of contemporary health reformers; and, second, that her thought and teachings showed progression and change during the course of her life.

It is obvious that this book in its most basic argument is a challenge to the generally understood Adventist view of Ellen White and her work. Adventists have long held that she was divinely inspired. They have believed that she received insight and information from heavenly sources, while not denying that she received ideas from her contemporaries, as would any individual. Thus, the crux of the matter is, Did Ellen White receive her health message from the Lord or from earthly sources?

In keeping with the theses of the book, the author has turned from what to Adventists appear as strong and convincing evidences and has frequently based his conclusions on unsupported assumptions and has ignored the positive exhibits. Of this the casual reader is not made aware and thus may stumble into a pitfall which will result in distorted conclusions. If the White Estate, which hosted the author of *Prophetess of Health* when he came to Takoma Park as an accredited member of the faculty of the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University, and which assisted him in his research, could express one earnest desire it is that every reader of *Prophetess of Health* would examine carefully and take into account the whole record before reaching conclusions. As an aid to this, a carefully documented D. E. Robinson book, *The Story of Our Health Message*, published in 1943, but currently available in a paperback printing, will be valuable.

In this review, we will attempt to present a few illustrations giving support to these introductory remarks.

As one approaches the specific historical events which the book discusses, it is important

to keep the major arguments clearly in mind. The book does not stand or fall on one or two errors of fact or interpretation; it stands or falls on whether its major theses are sustained by the overall weight of evidence.

Historical evidence can rarely be tested and proven with the certainty of a scientific experiment in a laboratory. To deal with historical records is to deal with material that is often incomplete and frequently even ambiguous. Nevertheless, the *weight* of evidence can satisfy the open and candid mind on essential issues. Thus, the truth can be approached only by a conscientious and thoughtful investigation of *all* the available evidence on all sides of a question.

Speaking of the relationship between evidence and doubt, Ellen White observed regarding the inspired messages of Scripture that, “While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them.”<sup>2</sup> “God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. . . . All should decide from the weight of evidence.”<sup>3</sup> When there appears to be a conflict, the evidence on both sides must be carefully weighed. The reader might well ask himself the following questions: What were the circumstances surrounding each experience? How credible are the witnesses to these events, and were they in a position to observe all that took place? Have I separated assumptions from documentable facts? Finally, because we are here dealing with the work of a professed prophet, one must ask an important theological question as well: Do I have a correct and adequate concept of inspiration?<sup>4</sup>

Ellen White declares that it was on June 6, 1863, at the home of Aaron Hilliard of Otsego, Michigan, that “the great subject of Health Reform was opened before me in vision.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, *Prophetess of Health*, consistent with its thesis that she was a mere child of her times, claims that “by June of 1863 Seventh-day Adventists were already in possession of the main outlines of the health reform message. What they now needed . . . was not additional information, but a sign from God indicating his pleasure.”<sup>6</sup> We need to look quite carefully at the relationship between Seventh-day Adventists

and health reform prior to June of 1863, and particularly to those persons named as examples—Joseph Bates, J. N. Loughborough, J. N. Andrews and the Kellogg family. What are the facts?

In the fall of 1848, Mrs. White had her first vision touching on health. Tobacco, tea and coffee were to be discarded. Early in 1854, she received another vision pointing to the dangers of rich and greasy foods and to the need for simple cleanliness. Step by step, Adventists were being led toward a more healthful way of living.

Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s, a few scattered Adventists began to adopt bits and pieces of the health regimens advocated by various health reformers of the day. However, there was insufficient interest among Adventist believers to lead to any general acceptance.

Joseph Bates, of course, was the most thorough of Adventist health reformers prior to 1863. However, Bates “did not mention his

**“It is important to note that in her statement Ellen White makes a clear distinction between ‘works,’ by which she obviously means ‘books,’ and ‘papers,’ meaning, of course, periodicals or magazines.”**

views of proper diet in public at that time nor in private unless interrogated upon the subject.”<sup>7</sup>

The health ideas Loughborough adopted in 1848 were “vague,” and when he developed “slight hemorrhages of the lungs,” he was “advised” to “smoke a pipe” for relief. He couldn’t tolerate a pipe, so adopted cigars instead!<sup>8</sup>

Loughborough did not consider himself to be a strict health reformer until after the vision given Mrs. White in 1863 and the publication of her first writings on health.

The health program in the Kellogg family was also fragmentary. John Harvey Kellogg remembered how as a youngster one of his favorite foods was oxtails richly browned, and how the Kelloggs kept a keg of ale in their cellar for a “weak stomach.”<sup>9</sup>

The J. N. Andrews family offers an excellent example of the incidental Adventist progress toward health reform in those early years. Mrs. Andrews’ diary for the years 1859 through 1864 opens with the announcement that the family had just butchered a pig.<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1862, the Andrews’ little daughter, Mary, contracted whooping cough. The mother on several occasions wrapped the baby in wet sheets in an apparent attempt to reduce her fever. The local doctor was called in two or three times and administered a hodge-podge of poisons and herbal remedies. Among these were ipecac, nitre and quinine, the latter given as a “tonic.”<sup>11</sup> In her desperation, Mrs. Andrews was willing to try anything.

J. N. Andrews pinpoints the time of his family’s adoption of health reform as nine months after Mrs. White’s vision: “It was March 1864, that myself and wife decided to adopt the principles of health reform.”<sup>12</sup>

The book *Prophetess of Health* offers the reader none of the facts cited here which show that along with their first tentative groping for a more healthful way of life, early Adventists continued to use therapy and indulge in practices which most health reformers of the day would have abhorred. Can the reader gain a true picture of the state of Adventist knowledge and practice of health reform when relevant evidence concerning that knowledge and practice is omitted?

**W**hat about Ellen White herself? What can we be reasonably certain she knew about health reform prior to the vision of June 6, 1863?

She was herself the mother of four boys and could not have been oblivious to all matters bearing on health. It is probable that Mrs. White was aware of the five or six brief articles touching on health topics published in the *Review* prior to her vision. We have some evidence that the Whites themselves observed certain elementary health practices prior to the 1863 vision.

An article by James Caleb Jackson on diphtheria appeared in the February 17, 1863, issue. The Whites had found it in a rural newspaper and by following its instructions had successfully nursed two of their children through the disease. James White republished Jackson’s suggestions with an editorial note stating that he



“had a good degree of confidence in his [Jackson’s] manner of treating diseases.”<sup>13</sup>

But what could the Whites have learned from the Jackson article? Its allusions to proper diet and dress are very brief. Jackson did mention the importance of fresh air in the sickroom, at least for the diphtheria patient.

Jackson erroneously claimed in his article that diphtheria was not an infectious disease, but he devoted most of the space to water treatments for the malady. Still, the Whites’ understanding of the value of these treatments must have been quite vague. In December 1863, when their Henry contracted pneumonia, they called a local physician. There is no evidence that they were prepared to employ water treatment or indeed did so. They stood helplessly by while their boy died.<sup>14</sup> Yet, *Prophetess of Health* pictures Mrs. White almost a year before this, beginning to share her faith in hydrotherapy “with the fervor of a convert” (p. 47). Is it not strange that she failed to use her supposed “system of medicine” (*ibid.*) to save the life of her own son?

A clear indication of the tentative nature of the Whites’ early knowledge of health reform is the fact that when Willie contracted pneumonia in the early months of 1864, they confined him to a closed, heated room until Mrs. White was instructed in a vision that “he needs air.” This, in spite of the fact that a year earlier James White had written of the importance of fresh air and mentioned that he and his wife slept with their windows open summer and winter. This is also in spite of the fact that Jackson in his article on diphtheria had clearly and pointedly argued the value of “pure atmospheric air” both as a curative and a great preventive. James White at the time of the diphtheria experience had declared that he had a “good degree” of confidence in Jackson’s methods, but when it came down to the crisis with their own son’s suffering from pneumonia, they failed to generalize and apply his advice.

Why? Apparently their understanding of, or acceptance of, his ideas was anything but firm and fixed. Only when instructed in a vision to do so did Mrs. White act to ventilate the sickroom properly. This episode goes far toward supporting her claim that her light came from the Lord, not from physicians.

In summary, it seems very likely that Mrs. White read a half dozen articles on health, most

of them very brief, before her vision of June 6. But her awareness of the full significance of these things, and her practical knowledge of how to apply them in the treatment of illness remained quite vague.

What is the significance of these facts? Do we claim, as believers in the gift of prophecy, that it is only through visions that God leads His people? By no means. Do we claim that Adventists knew nothing about health prior to 1863? No. As early as 1866, J. H. Waggoner declared:

We do not profess to be pioneers in the general principles of the health reform. The facts on which this movement is based have been elaborated, in a great measure, by reformers, physicians, and writers on physiology and hygiene, and so may be found scattered through the land. But we do claim that by the method of God’s choice *it has been more clearly and powerfully unfolded*, and is thereby producing an effect which we could not have looked for from any other means.<sup>15</sup>

“The method of God’s choice” was a vision, and the vision was important, Waggoner argues, not merely because it offered information about health reform, but because it helped Adventists sense the vital importance of adopting the principles of health reform.

Even though the health reform vision of 1863 did constitute a “sign from God indicating his pleasure,” as stated in *Prophetess of Health* (p. 81), we cannot conclude that it was merely a confirmation of what Mrs. White already knew and practiced. She wrote of that experience: “I was astonished at the things shown me in vision. Many things came directly across my own ideas.”<sup>16</sup>

Rather than saying, as does the book, that by the time of her vision Adventists were in possession of the “main outlines of the health reform message,” it would be more correct to say that *some* of them were in possession of *some* fragments of health reform, even as they continued to ignore other principles of healthful living. The key word in this statement is “message.” A message is a coherent body of information with a purpose. Bits of scattered information, however correct in themselves, are not a message any more than a jumble of printer’s type is a logical sequence of thought expressed on a printed page.

In Ellen White’s vision of June 6, 1863, the

bits of information, that is, the correct principles of healthful living, came together into a message. It was by means of Ellen White's vision that Adventists gained "a systematic and harmonious body of hygienic truths" as J. H. Kellogg later termed it.<sup>17</sup>

Very soon after the 1863 vision, as Mrs. White began to speak against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air and proper diet, those who heard her often remarked: "You speak very nearly the opinions taught in the *Laws of Life*, and other publications by Drs. Trall, Jackson and others. Have you read that paper and those works?" "My reply," Mrs. White says, "was that I had not, neither should I read them till I had fully written out my views, lest it should be said that I had received my light upon the subject of health from physicians, and not from the Lord."<sup>18</sup>

*Prophetess of Health* argues concerning this statement that "in her anxiety to appear uninfluenced by any earthly agency . . . Ellen White failed to mention certain pertinent facts" (p. 84). The book points out that she ignored "her reading of Jackson's article on diphtheria" (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that in her statement Ellen White makes a clear distinction between "works," by which she obviously means "books," and "papers," meaning, of course, periodicals or magazines. Indeed, she was quizzed in the latter category only about the *Laws of Life*. Since she had not studied the books written by contemporary health reformers nor did she know of the magazine *Laws of Life* at the time, she answered her questioners accordingly. In the flood of light provided by the vision, any fainter glimmers paled into insignificance in her mind. She did not list in her response every health item the *Review* had published or that she may have read prior to the vision. She gave the message she received in vision. She gave the message because she had received it in vision, and she had received it independently of other sources. This is the substance of her argument.

*Prophetess of Health* points out that Mrs. White was incorrect in regard to the exact time when James White ordered health books from Dansville (p. 84). We must remember that she

never laid claim to divine guidance or an infallible memory in recalling biographical events. The point that needs to be emphasized is this: It is of little importance when James White ordered the books, so long as Ellen White did not read them until after she had written out her account of her vision. Her main point is that she got her views from the Lord, not from physicians.

*Prophetess of Health* asserts that the chapter on "Health" in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4, "reads in places like L. B. Coles" (p. 83). Now, Mrs. White freely acknowledges that sometime after publishing *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4, and sketching out her six articles on "How to Live," she read the works of other health reformers. Thus, her later employment of similar phraseology is an entirely different question from the alleged similarities between her *Spiritual Gifts* chapter and the writings of L. B. Coles. In a footnote, *Prophetess of Health* cites four brief passages from Ellen White's basic chapter on health in *Spiritual Gifts* and lines them up in parallel columns with extracts from L. B. Coles' books (p. 232, 233). How can these seeming similarities be explained?

In the four brief passages which *Prophetess of Health* cites, in the case dealing with physicians and drugs, the statements are so remote from each other in their linguistic patterns that one strains to see any possible literary relationship. The other three passages all deal with tea, coffee, or tobacco—subjects on which Ellen White had received visions as early as 1848 and about which the *Review* and *Herald* had been publishing articles for years. It is plain, therefore, that Ellen White need not have read Coles to have been well acquainted with these arguments years earlier. Mrs. White freely declares:

After I had written my six articles for *How to Live*, I then searched the various works on hygiene and was surprised to find them so nearly in harmony with what the Lord had revealed to me. And to show this harmony, and to set before my brethren and sisters the subject as brought out by able writers, I determined to publish *How to Live*, in which I largely extracted from the works referred to.<sup>19</sup>

By this, Ellen White indicates that along with her own articles in each of the six numbers of *How to Live*, published in 1865, there appeared selections from other writers on similar subjects.

Among the writers which she found to be “so nearly in harmony with what the Lord had revealed” to her were Horace Mann and Larkin B. Coles. All of the parallel passages are found in the writings of one or the other of these two men. Some of the very passages from Coles and Mann that have been found to parallel passages in Mrs. White’s later writings (1868-1890) were published by Mrs. White herself in her *How to Live* pamphlets. These appeared as separate articles with the authors’ names attached. It is not surprising that since Mrs. White found these men to be “so nearly in harmony” with what the Lord had revealed to her she would occasionally employ their language in later years when writing on the same subjects. The question of the ethics and legality of her procedure is discussed in the critique referred to in a footnote at the end of the article.

To summarize: In 1864, *after* she had published her account of her June 6, 1863, vision, which Mrs. White declares she received not from men but God, in subsequent writings on health she did borrow phraseology from Mann and Coles, both of whom she includes among those health reformers whose views were “nearly in harmony” with what the Lord had revealed to her. But let it be emphasized, according to all evidence found to date, these borrowings began to appear in her writings only *after* the time she freely acknowledges she read from these very writers.

How do these facts relate to Mrs. White’s claims about the source of her writings? Mrs. White has said, for instance:

Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.<sup>20</sup>

What was Mrs. White’s point? Her point was that she had to find her own words to express the thoughts the Holy Spirit impressed upon her mind. The Holy Spirit only rarely dictated the very words she should use. In a few cases, the process of finding the best language to express truths the Spirit had revealed involved using the phraseology of other writers. Thus, for example, when writing on historical topics the words of historians were sometimes used when their state-

ments afforded “a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.”<sup>21</sup>

We now turn to a review of *Prophetess of Health* as a whole. In this review, we shall mention a few positive contributions which the book makes, then offer a further discussion of its weaknesses and shortcomings. There are some praiseworthy aspects to *Prophetess of Health*. The book is written in a clear, readable style.

The third chapter of the book—on the American health reform movement—constitutes a thorough and illuminating treatment of that subject.

It is also possible that the book will spark interest in Ellen White in scholarly circles outside the church as well as lead Adventists to study Ellen White’s life and work and the function of inspiration more carefully and more deeply.

In these areas, then—style, treatment of the health reform movement in chapter three, and as a spur to further study—the book has merit.

What about its weaknesses, its shortcomings? The book promises to be as objective as possible. It sets out “neither to defend nor to damn but simply to understand” (p. ix). Yet, the book has a tendency throughout to present conclusions and the evidence for such conclusions rather than conflicting evidence and various alternative interpretations. The conclusions presented in the book are negative and consistently leave Ellen White in an embarrassing or unfavorable light.

We have already discussed one example of this tendency when we dealt with health reform experiences of early Adventist pioneers. The reader of *Prophetess of Health* sees the evidence for random Adventist adoption of health reform practices, but not for their continuation of practices inconsistent with health reform.

Another example of the omission of significant evidence occurs in the book’s discussion of the circumstances of 1855 under which James White was replaced by Uriah Smith as editor of the *Review*. The book strongly implies that James White was made a “scapegoat” for the church’s lack of progress in the early 1850s because he had shown a low regard for the Spirit of Prophecy by failing to include the visions in the *Review* and, finally, because in 1855 he is

said to have “exploded” and wrote “angrily” (pp. 28, 29), “What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. White’s views? . . . The *Review* for five years has not published one of them.”<sup>22</sup>

Some important evidence is clearly omitted from the treatment of this sequence of events in *Prophetess of Health* or else the evidence is misread. In any event, the book’s reconstruction of the episode is misleading.

James White prefaced his remarks by including in that same October 16, 1855, issue of the *Review* four other articles stressing the importance and perpetuity of spiritual gifts.

These ringing affirmations of the place of the prophetic gift in the church were followed by his article, “A Test,” in which he took up the charge that “the *Review* and its conductors make the views of Mrs. White a test of doctrine and Christian fellowship.”

The sequence of these events is of importance. In the August 7, 1855, *Review*, James White asserted that he must be freed from the responsibilities he had been bearing for the *Review*.<sup>23</sup> In the September 4 issue, he removed his name from the editor’s position on the masthead, leaving the space blank. In this same issue, he happily announced that the brethren in Michigan were taking over the responsibilities of the office and that it would be his “duty and privilege” to be free of the office.<sup>24</sup> Finally, it was not until the October 16, 1855 issue that James White’s article, “A Test,” appeared in which, according to *Prophetess of Health*, he “exploded” and “angrily” asked: “What has the *Review* to do with Mrs. White’s views?”<sup>25</sup> It is clear, then, that his October 16 article could have nothing to do with his retirement from the editorial chair of the *Review*.

To the book’s credit, evidence contradictory to the author’s conclusions is occasionally included in footnotes, but not in the case just mentioned.

**H**ere and there through *Prophetess of Health* unsupported assumptions are set forth. The “whining complaints” (p. 29) from individuals writing “poisonous letters” referred to in the *Review and Herald* of August 7, 1855 are assumed to relate to James White’s position on the visions while the documentary source of the phrase “whining complaints,” both by context

and text, reveals that the criticisms were leveled against his handling of the financial affairs of the office.

Ellen White, supposedly following the lead of Graham and Fowler, is assumed to have held unrealistic views which would limit sexual relationships between husband and wife to a frequency of no more than once a month (pp. 157-159). Not a line is cited from Ellen White in support of this contention, nor can such be found. Ellen White calls upon husbands and wives to avoid excesses, but writes tenderly of the “privilege of the marriage relation.”<sup>26</sup> It is unfortunate that a book which is so largely footnoted would make use of unsupported assumptions or frequently employ such terms as “doubtless,” “ostensibly” and “probably” in its interpretation of various events.

In 1851, Ellen White mentioned in a letter to her friends, the Dodges, that “the visions trouble many. They [know] not what to make of them.”<sup>27</sup> *Prophetess of Health* speculates on the

**“There seems to be an effort to belittle the efforts and action of Ellen White. More importantly, evidence becomes distorted because of the author’s bias on his subject, a bias that tends to unbalance the book.”**

possible causes of this “dissatisfaction” over the visions. Two reasons are advanced: Mrs. White’s “changing stand” on the “shut door” and resentment over her “habit of publishing private testimonies revealing . . . secret sins—and names” (p. 28).

Mrs. White’s letter to the Dodges was written before the publication of Ellen White’s *Christian Experience and Views* in which several of the “shut door” passages were omitted. The question is, therefore, how could anyone have yet been puzzled over a “changed” position when the evidence suggestive of such a change had not been produced? As for the second reason, it was years later—in the late 1850s—that Ellen White published any testimonies containing even the initials of those to whom counsel was directed.

Often a condescending tone can be detected throughout the book, and at times there seems to

be an effort to belittle the efforts and action of Ellen White and her fellow believers. But more importantly, evidence becomes distorted because of the author's bias on his subject, a bias that tends to unbalance the book. Why, for instance, is half a chapter devoted to the most minute details of Ellen White's efforts to encourage dress reform and only a few sentences to her role in the establishment of health care facilities like Loma Linda University? Loma Linda is one of her most enduring and successful ventures, while dress reform, as Mrs. White said, was "among the minor things that were to make up the great reform in health."<sup>28</sup>

This bias is again shown in the book's emphasis on the distasteful, problematic, controversial and negative. Ellen White's rebuke of the amusements at the Western Health Reform Institute is reported, but not her positive counsel on recreation given during this same period in a discussion of the same issues.

There is one point where the author not only misread completely the evidence, but also engages in some speculation for which it is difficult to see any basis at all. It is claimed that Mrs. White vetoed a chance to obtain the manufacturing rights to Corn Flakes and that this decision cost the church a fortune.

In 1907, after the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company was incorporated and was no longer a denominational enterprise, Dr. J. H. Kellogg and his brother, Will offered the successful managers of the Sanitarium Health Food Company at St. Helena, California, the chance to buy the West Coast rights to manufacture Corn Flakes. The offer was made, however, to the men themselves as private businessmen, not to the denomination's food company at St. Helena. Indeed, the offer was extended on the specific and firm condition that it would *not* be a denominational enterprise or in any way connected with the denomination. Correspondence at the time makes these conditions very plain.<sup>29</sup> So Mrs. White could not have vetoed a chance for the denomination to acquire the rights to Corn Flakes because such a chance was never offered.

Mention has been made of the thrust of the book. The point that Ellen White was a child of her times has been discussed. The second point is that there was a progression and change in Ellen White's counsels over a period of time. We

recognize that there were additions to the content of her teaching through the years, and shifts in emphasis. We attribute this to the fact that God was leading His people along, step by step, as they accepted and lived up to the counsel. Furthermore, as conditions in society changed so as to make some counsels more or less timely than they had formerly been, emphasis changed. As Mrs. White herself said concerning the testimonies, "nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered."<sup>30</sup>

By now some readers may be thinking: "True enough, *Prophetess of Health* does distort, but haven't some Adventist writers been guilty of distortion in their efforts to create a favorable image of Ellen White? Haven't they too sometimes shied away from introducing contradictory and qualifying evidence? Haven't they, in their zeal to extol and praise her, often oversimplified and overgeneralized?"

This is a tendency that cannot be denied. We could offer extenuations for this tendency, but our effort should be constantly to improve the quality of our writing, not merely to defend or explain what has already been done. We need to take an approach which will allow us candor without condescension, affirmation without distortion.

Seen in this light, this book is not so much a threat as it is a disappointment. One could have hoped that such a book, drawing on a wide array of sources, would have produced a multi-dimensional portrait that would enable us better to understand Ellen White's role as a "prophetess of health." Instead, we are left wondering how anyone so unoriginal, contradictory and vacillating as the book pictures Ellen White to have been could possibly have inspired the confidence she inspired, or met with the success she enjoyed. The attenuated image of Ellen White that emerges from the pages of this book has no reality in the history of the church.

Finally, this book fails to account for Mrs. White's successes as a health reformer and as a founder of the church's medical work. If this portrait of Ellen White is to be credited, then the success of the medical work Ellen White founded and guided can only be attributed to the gullibility of those who have believed in her. And yet, the demonstrably better health that

those followers enjoy today testifies to something other than their gullibility.

Ellen White's counsel has changed the smoking, drinking and eating habits of several million people, and changed them *every day*. Ellen White's influence, rooted in valid Christian experience, is doing daily what the combined influence of almost the entire modern medical establishment is unable to do—it is changing people's health habits and saving people's lives.

Why did people follow Ellen White? Why did people believe in her? How is it that she was so successful?

True, her remarkable success is not, in and of itself, an evidence of providential guidance. After all, other American religious leaders, some of whom claimed direct divine inspiration, have been successful. But the fruits of a prophet's labors should be *one* evidence of divine guidance. And, even in a purely historical sense a book that really portrayed the true image of Ellen White, a book that really attempts to "understand" her, would need to explain the historical dynamics of her success—something which *Prophetess of Health* fails to do.

The book has demonstrated that the task of establishing Adventist health work was more difficult and controversial than some have believed. *Prophetess of Health* has shown that Ellen White

did use the language and many of the concepts of her times. But she did more than that, much more. In the end, the reader of *Prophetess of Health* has the feeling that although the author tried neither to defend nor to damn, but to understand, he had not understood nor has he helped us to understand.

While it is not our duty to pass judgment on individuals or to impugn their motives and integrity, it is our duty to stand in defense of truth and to remind the readers of Ellen White's prediction that "the very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29:18)."<sup>31</sup> Can it be doubted that the enemy of souls will use such a book to accomplish this very work? "Satan will work ingeniously," the servant of the Lord tells us, "to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony."<sup>31</sup> For whatever purpose the author may have intended that the book should serve, it will no doubt be used by some to undermine confidence in the work of Ellen White.

This book must nevertheless be taken as an opportunity to increase our understanding of our history and our ability to deal with such challenges with appropriate skill, firmness, equanimity and knowledge.

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Note: This review is a condensation of a 24-page double-column document titled, "A Discussion and Review of *Prophetess of Health*," available on request from the Ellen G. White Estate, 6840 Eastern Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.

A more lengthy chapter-by-chapter critique may be obtained on request for \$4.00—the cost of duplicating and mailing. In this critique a more detailed analysis as well as much additional documentation will be found. Items dealt with in the full critique include: Ellen White's brush with phrenology, her own practice in the area of diet, her teachings on dress, her discussion of masturbation, Mrs. White's visions, the evaluation of the hostile witnesses, etc., and a host of missing exhibits.

Copies may be secured at the White Estate offices in Washington, D.C., or Berrien Springs, Michigan, or at the Ellen G. White-SDA Research Centers at Loma Linda University, California; Newbold College, England; or Avondale College, Australia. Mail orders in the United States should be directed to the Ellen G. White Estate, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.

## III. Ellen White's Emotional Life

Review by Fawn M. Brodie

Ellen G. White is described in Ronald L. Numbers' new biography as one of the four 19th century founders of a major American religious sect, the others being Joseph Smith (Mormonism), Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science), and Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses). But it is William Miller who is accorded the role of founder of the Adventist movement in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Mrs. White is not mentioned at all. It will come as a surprise to readers of Professor Numbers' biography who have

known little about the Seventh-day Adventist Church to learn that it was indeed this tiny, energetic, resourceful mystic who rescued the Adventist movement—after the staggering disappointments of 1844 when Jesus failed to come as Miller had promised—and welded the scattered fragments into a vital religiomedical organization which still uses her "revelations" as fundamental doctrine.

Professor Numbers, historian at the University of Wisconsin, began his research for this biography at Loma Linda University. He is an Adventist. He writes, however, not as a hagiographer but as a professional intent on a dispassionate examination of the sources of Ellen White's ideas. "This, is, I believe," he writes, "the first book about her that seeks neither to

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defend nor to damn but simply to understand.” (p. xi). His book fills a gap in the history of American women as well as American religion. It is excellent, meticulously documented social history, and the author is an expert intellectual detective.

Ellen G. White, like the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, was an eclectic. Both leaders drew from multiple sources the ideas they incorporated in their “revelations.” Mrs. White was indebted chiefly to the health reformers of her time, James C. Jackson, William Alcott, Sylvester Graham and L. B. Coles. Devout believers in the divine origin of her ideas will be disturbed to see the evidence in this volume of how closely some of her revelations parallel paragraphs in Coles’ *Philosophy of Health* (1853), a book she knew intimately. But there is no malice in Numbers’ exposure of her plagiarism. He writes with great respect for the Adventist movement and for the extraordinary little lady who was responsible for its consolidation and expansion.

The author deliberately avoids “extended analyses of her mental health and psychic abilities.” (p. xii), leaving a psychobiographical examination of her life to future writers. The material he provides as background for any clinical study is, nevertheless, rich and provocative. An identical twin, Ellen Harmon was disfigured as a child when struck in the face by a rock. The incident had incalculable consequences—disturbed vision, hand tremors, dizziness, anxiety, to say nothing of the traumatic realization that she must through the remainder of her life see in the face of her twin sister the beauty she had lost. As a convert to Millerism in 1842, she followed the classic adolescent conversion patterns—hours of praying resulting in vivid religious dreams—but with special intensity. Importantly, it was her mother who attributed Ellen’s initial “fainting spell,” when she tried to pray in public for the first time, to “the wondrous power of God.” Thus, the crippled child was supported in her pathology and signaled out for greatness.

Fainting fits, especially among women, were commonplace in the nineteenth century. The relation between such fits and hysteria, and their connection with sexual inhibition, were to be demonstrated brilliantly in the writings and clinical discoveries of Sigmund Freud. It is not sur-

prising that the sexual revolution of our own time has coincided with the virtual disappearance of “hysteria” from our clinics and hospitals. But Ellen G. White was no simple hysteric. The evolution of her fainting spells into the complicated religious trance, followed by “revelations” from God or angels, is the most crucial development in her life. With great deftness, Professor Numbers suggests the importance of models in determining the nature of this evolution. There was first the Reverend Samuel E. Brown, whom she saw turn “porcelain white” and fall from his chair, later recovering to give a testimony with his face “shining with light from the Sun of Righteousness” (p. 12). Later, there were William Foy and Hazen Foss, the latter her sister’s brother-in-law. Ellen White’s trances became ever more stylized and dramatic; her heartbeat slowed and her respiration became imperceptible. Hers were not epileptic seizures, as some have suggested, which always result in amnesia. Though the author does not say so directly, they were clearly related to self-hypnosis, a phenomenon far better understood today than in the midnineteenth century, when “mesmerism” was a fad all over America. The fact that many of her ailments—hand tremors, partial paralysis, difficulties with speech—disappeared after specific trances serves to underline the psychogenic nature of much of her chronic ill health.

There are many resemblances between Ellen G. White and Mary Baker Eddy. Both were semi-invalids as children; both found motherhood difficult and temporarily abandoned their own infants; both found extraordinary reserves of energy for speaking and for religious organization. But where Mrs. Eddy ceased being ill upon reaching maturity, Mrs. White was racked by sickness all her life. Illness followed by miraculous cure became an essential, repetitive pattern. The worst of her nervous collapses, like those of her husband, suggest that her virtual renunciation of sexuality, her spasmodic asceticism, her pathological anxiety over masturbation—which she said would bring crippling, deformity and insanity—contributed to her illnesses rather than alleviating them. In any case, there seems to have been a circle of reinforcement.

There were obviously excellent aspects to her health reform program. At a time when doctors regularly killed patients with their bleeding, purging and quack medicines, Ellen White, like many other health reformers, did a public service by persuading people to abandon all drugs, take regular baths, give up alcohol, tobacco and a fatty diet. Her water cure was not original, but was adapted, like her vegetarianism, from popular practices of her time.

Hydrotherapy, diet reform and temperance are not, however, substitutes for a healthy sex life. Her personal inhibitions, her dislike of "sexual excess" in marriage, common enough among women of her own day, unfortunately had a pernicious influence on her writings. In seeking solutions to her private illnesses and psychic conflicts, she used the device of "the revelation," thus generalizing from herself to mankind. The fact that the whole process was an unconscious one, and that she was genuinely self-deluded, did not prevent solutions which were not solutions at all from being formalized and solidified into dogma. Her followers, also seeking solutions for their own ailments or unhappiness, found either the necessary faith

required for their own self-healing, or else sufficient temporary surcease from clinical symptoms to insure their fidelity to the Adventist cause.

To many readers, the pathology in Ellen White will be apparent without further elucidation. But Professor Numbers never labels her as either pathological or as self-deluded. He is content to describe her, and to give us the background of frenetic health reform which provided her with nurture as important as that of her supporting mother. We do see her at her most absurd—when she attacks the long skirts "sweeping up the filth of the streets" as "devised by Satan," and when she warns that anyone wearing hairpieces risks "horrible disease and premature death" (pp. 146, 148). But we also see a compulsively dedicated woman with formidable administrative skills and a sense of mission that brought remarkable consequences. When one reads about her success in starting a worldwide system of medical missions and hospitals, and the continuing services performed by the Adventist groups, one is astonished again that it took so long for Ellen G. White to be written about by an able and dispassionate biographer.

## IV. The State of A Church's Soul

Review by Ernest R. Sandeen

Ronald L. Numbers' biographical essay is at the same time a valuable work of social history, a moving personal document and a report on the state of one American denomination's soul. As a historian of American social and religious history, I have appreciated this chance to share in another historian's discoveries. Ronald Numbers' account of Ellen White conforms to the highest canons of historical craftsmanship, and his narrative seems free of special pleading or

bias. His is a mature work of great value outside Adventist circles.

All of the elements which constituted Ellen White's historical environment have been familiar to historians of that epoch—millenarian expectations, health reform faddism, Graham diet, sexual theories, water cures, even direct visions and revelations. It is fascinating, however, to see how each of these elements combined in Mrs. White's own history and how she reacted to them. Numbers does violence neither to Mrs. White or to the general forces at work in the midnineteenth century, but allows us to see Ellen White's own completely individual and idiosyncratic reaction to these forces without depicting her as a puppet or the events as a card-

Ernest R. Sandeen teaches at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is considered the foremost historian of American Fundamentalism and has written, among other works, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*.

board background. If the Marxist historian has tended to fall victim to the first kind of historical error (materialistic determinism), the Christian historian, especially the historian of denominational leaders, has often allowed himself to portray his subject in such heroic proportions that historical conditions appear to possess only superficial relevance and play no real role in controlling or conditioning the person.

How can the historically conditioned also be divine truth? This is obviously the point at which the historian provokes a response from the believer. When the historian and the believer are the same person, the writing of a book can become an enterprise fraught with tension and, occasionally, agony.

One must be an obtuse reader, indeed, not to see this tension and even feel this agony in the pages of Numbers' book. As Van Harvey has argued, the historian and the believer can seldom inhabit the same skin in tranquillity and harmony; the believer's traditional response is trust while the historian's is skepticism. One often regrets the passing of those days (whether medieval or infantile) when trust alone was sufficient, but we would be denying our own historical present, ironically enough, if we were to attempt to escape this dilemma. Whatever the personal pain it produces in the historian, it does produce good historical scholarship. It almost seems like a historiographical law that the best scholarship is produced by the skeptical believer. That Numbers cares deeply about the history of Ellen G. White is apparent on almost every page.

He feels strongly about the importance of his subject, as every good historian must. But he has not accepted tradition or someone else's word concerning the career and teachings of this amazing woman. He has discovered things that appear to shock and surprise him, but he has had the courage to state them clearly.

The question, then, is passed on to the present-day followers of Ellen G. White. What will the Seventh-day Adventists do with this account of their nineteenth-century leader? *Time* has reported the existence of an official response, a kind of rebuttal to Numbers' volume. This is an understandable reaction, of course, but not one which I find characteristic of Adventist history or of the Adventists whom I have known. Numbers, in the last pages of his work, compared Ellen White with Mary Baker Eddy. The similarities are striking, but Numbers was quite right in emphasizing the differences—in the two women and in the denominations which they led. The Christian Scientists, since Mrs. Eddy's death, have labored unswervingly to protect Mrs. Eddy from historical scrutiny and preserve her solely as an object of belief. This has had the effect of creating a series of violently partisan views of Mrs. Eddy and has ultimately done great harm not only to the cause of historical scholarship but also, in my judgment, to the influence of the denomination. Numbers' biography of Ellen G. White has helped the Adventists avoid this trap. He has given Adventists the freedom to struggle with the real problem—what is the truth today for us?

## V. On Writing and Reading History

Review by Richard Schwarz

It is sometimes disturbing to the average reader to find that writers of history often differ widely in their portrayal of the same series of past events. Such readers may quickly assume

Richard Schwarz, chairman of the history and political science department at Andrews University, wrote *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.*, and is working on a textbook of Seventh-day Adventist denominational history.

that one or the other of the historians in conflict is ignorant, dishonest or both. In actuality, he may be neither.

The lay reader's misconceptions arise largely from a misunderstanding in two basic areas: 1) the nature of historical facts and 2) the methods used in putting these facts together. Sadly, too often we historians have been guilty of contributing to our reader's misunderstanding, instead of

seeking to allay it. In part this is because, as with other professionals, historians largely tend to write for each other. Realizing that his peers have been exposed to roughly the same methodology as he has, the historian will trust his fellows to understand him—to know when he is generalizing, making value judgments or overstating a point in order to secure a desired effect. But, alas, most readers of an historical treatise, especially one done in a popular style, may not recognize these literary techniques, employed by an author to make as strong a case as possible for the viewpoint he is propounding.

Almost all history today is written from a particular viewpoint or thesis. Gone are the days of the nineteenth century historian who sought to write a simple narrative history according to Leopold von Ranke's famous injunction to "write history as it actually happened." The move toward "thesis" history was itself the result of several factors. First, was a realization that, for all their pretensions to objectivity, the great narrative historians like Ranke and Parkman really could not escape arranging and interpreting the facts with which they worked according to their own preconceptions and value systems. Since this was the case, many modern historians argue that it is better to let the reader know at the start the assumptions and point of view from which they write. Second, many historians believe that by writing their account to bolster a particular thesis, they are stimulating discussion, further investigation and the reflection necessary to more closely approach Ranke's goal of "seeing things as they have actually happened."

Historians work with many kinds of "facts." Some are easily verified because they were widely observed and carefully recorded. All historians would probably agree that Cincinnati defeated Boston in the 1975 World Series. There are many other easily verifiable facts in this particular instance—the scores of the series games, who pitched in each game, etc.

Soon, however, we come to things that are more debatable. How many errors were there in a particular game, for instance? The number of errors recorded by the official scorers can be easily ascertained. It is a *fact* that they scored x number of plays as errors in the third game, let us say. But were all of these *actually* errors? This may depend on many things—the observer's

physical view of the play in question, his predilection for one team over another, his understanding of the rules of baseball, etc. The sports historian, faced with several conflicting accounts, will probably accept the one that best fits his own understanding of baseball, the value of the various reporters as witnesses, etc.

The point I am trying to make is that many "facts" are facts only in the mind of the observer. To someone else, they may appear in an entirely different light. It is possible to assemble these "facts" in a number of different ways according to the pattern in the mind of the narrator. To illustrate, a child may use the same blocks to build a tower, a house or a wall. But the blocks which he puts together to form a house may appear to be a prison stockade to someone else.

All this is by way of background to try to explain why Dr. Ronald Numbers and I, using essentially the same facts, can come up with very different viewpoints on the development of Ellen G. White as a health reformer. We both agree that she wrote extensively on the subject of healthful living, that her writings were the dominant cause of Seventh-day Adventists' incorporating a gospel of health into their teachings, that she advocated simple natural remedies, and that her particular emphasis varied from time to time.

We disagree as to the source of her inspiration (secular or divine), the quality and truthfulness of some of the witnesses who provide "facts" to use in reconstructing certain events and the interpretations to be placed on many of these events. By stating this, I do not mean for one moment to imply that Dr. Numbers is dishonest. He, in fact, states frankly in the preface of his book that he has "refrained from using divine inspiration as an historical explanation." From this, I think, we may deduce that he feels that it is both possible and preferable to explain Ellen White's views and visions on matters of health as the result of natural or human causes.

While I would agree that it is possible to arrange a selection of the facts to arrive at this viewpoint, I would argue that a consideration of the entire life, work and writings of Mrs. White makes the supernatural explanation more satisfying to me. I will, then, consider that the way I

see things more nearly approximates the “truth” or things “as they actually happened.” This I do frankly admitting that since historians and natural scientists use vastly different data, it cannot be proven with scientific precision that the supernatural forces of good and evil have operated as I think the evidence suggests.

It seems vital to me that readers of Dr. Numbers’ book constantly bear in mind the viewpoint from which he is writing—one of naturalistic explanation *alone*. Readers should also understand that in trying to prove the “noticeable” influence of men like Horace Mann, Dio Lewis and L. B. Coles on Ellen White’s ideas, Dr. Numbers is trying to do one of the most difficult things facing an historian. Long ago, Louis Gottschalk pointed out that similar ideas held by different individuals “may be due to other factors than the direct shaping of the later man’s ideas by the earlier man’s.” Among other things,

**“It seems vital to me that readers of Dr. Numbers’ book constantly bear in mind the viewpoint from which he is writing—one of naturalistic explanation alone.”**

Gottschalk suggests that both may have been influenced “by an independent third person” or that it “may be due to similar cultural and intellectual atmospheres.”<sup>1</sup>

Gottschalk goes so far as to argue that to prove an influence “it is necessary to show that the similar ideas thus dressed up would not have been born in the mind of the later thinker or would have had a different form or emphasis if they had not been generated or modified directly or indirectly by the supposed source.” “Such a demonstration,” he continues, “involves *speculation* upon how things might have happened if they had not in fact happened as they seem to have.”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine.)

Thus, while it is permissible for Numbers to argue Ellen White’s debt to Mann, Lewis and Coles, it is just as permissible (and I think as intellectually respectable) to argue otherwise. In some instances during her lifetime, it appears that Mrs. White gave information available to her from no known source; on other occasions that

she supplied information at a particularly apropos or crucial time when she could hardly have known through human means how crucial the situation was. (There are numerous testimonials to such cases.) In such circumstances, it seems reasonable to me to conclude that her information was supernaturally received.

It is even possible to *speculate* that Lewis, Coles and Mann may have received supernatural enlightenment—not necessarily in visions, but through that elusive means called “insight.” Thus, Coles and White might have had a common source for their beliefs—although receiving their inspiration in different ways. And even if we concede that Dr. Numbers has proven that Mrs. White “borrowed” organization, ideas, or language from Coles, have we proven that this could not have been Inspiration’s way of bringing this material to her?

There are a number of other points on which I differ with Dr. Numbers. I have little confidence in some of the “facts” he derives from certain witnesses. Although recognizing that H. E. Carver, D. M. Canright, Frank Belden, and M. G. and John Harvey Kellogg are hostile witnesses, Numbers places more faith in many of their assertions than I would. Strangely, he appears to give little weight to the many favorable comments of Canright and the two Kelloggs made during the period before they became disenchanted and bitter toward Ellen White. The evaluation of Mrs. White’s visions that Numbers uses of M. G. Kellogg, for instance, comes from Kellogg’s old age—at a time when he was financially dependent upon J. H. Kellogg, who was then in a bitter dispute with Adventist leaders over the source of some of Mrs. White’s visions. I think it reasonable to suspect that M. G. Kellogg, perhaps approaching senility at this time, was more anxious to be sure of his brother’s favor (no sustenance in those days!) than to be in complete historical objectivity. Incidentally, he, too, had had his toes stepped on by Ellen White in the past.

**A**s another example, Numbers cites J. H. Kellogg as the source for stating that by 1900 vegetarianism was more the exception than the rule among Adventists. This *may* be so. Yet Kellogg was hardly a disinterested observer. Anyone reading his correspondence, or talking



to those who knew him, can readily realize that Kellogg had a virtual “phobia” on this point. Never known to understate things, but rather for his repeated tendency to exaggerate, it seems just as plausible to me that the good doctor was exaggerating in this instance. Other instances of what I consider to be “poor” witnesses by Dr. Numbers could be cited.

I hasten to add, however, that Dr. Numbers undoubtedly has reasons for believing the witnesses he cites—for him to do otherwise would be dishonest, and I feel that I know him too well to entertain for a moment the idea that he would cite a witness for dishonest purposes. It is just that on the basis of our different backgrounds, religious presuppositions, study, etc., we evaluate these men’s testimony differently. It is a *fact* that they said what they did, but not necessarily that what they said was true.

There are other areas in which I disagree with Dr. Numbers. To mention them all would weary the reader, but perhaps several other samples will be useful. I believe, on occasion, Numbers generalizes beyond what his facts warrant. One case in point is his statement that the Millerite movement caused some cases of insanity. This again *may* be true, but given the level of diagnosis, the type of records and the complexity of deciding what causes irrational behavior, I would prefer a more cautious and qualified statement. There are other instances of this. Was “poor health” really the “one constant” during Ellen White’s early difficult years? I suspect there were others. Can we on the evidence we have say with assurance that other early SDA leaders “undoubtedly” spoke to James and Ellen White of their “enthusiasm for health reform.” Can we be *certain* that James Caleb Jackson was the inspiration for Ellen White’s moderate attitude toward the use of salt?

There are times, too, when Dr. Numbers exaggerates to make a point. We might class this as literary hyperbole—overstatement in an attempt to call attention to a condition generally true, by ignoring minor contradictory data. For instance—Dr. Numbers in referring to the Millerite movement, specifically the Midnight Cry movement, states that by mid-August 1844, “all hopes” were fixed on October 22. It would be more accurate, but less forceful, to say *most* hopes. Numbers knows, of course, that key Millerite leaders like Himes and Miller himself

did not accept the October 22 date until late September or early October 1844. Yet, the bulk of the rank and file had done so by late August. Clearly, he has utilized literary hyperbole to make a point. Having done this, would it be too far-fetched to ask him to accept Ellen White’s right to do the same in denying her health teachings were derived from others. I think not.

Having pointed out areas where I disagree with Dr. Numbers’ interpretations, it is only fair also to indicate contributions I feel his book makes to our knowledge of Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventist history. Although we have previously been aware of Mrs. White’s change of views regarding the use of swine’s flesh and the proper time to begin observance of the Sabbath, Dr. Numbers shows a considerable shift in her attitude toward prayer for the sick. He demonstrates that Mrs. White’s early strong condemnation of consulting physicians was abandoned quite early. One gathers that in later years she would probably have regarded her earlier call to rely on prayer alone as bordering on the fanatical.

Allied to this point is Numbers’ emphasis on Ellen White’s maturation as a reformer, something I think many Adventists have not always noted. It would seem that her later writings, such as *Ministry of Healing*, written to give a unified picture of her health views, may be the most authoritative work to consult in this area.

I am happy that Numbers has rescued L. B. Coles from obscurity and has pointed out the contributions of men like Dio Lewis and Horace Mann to the health reform crusade. Adventists have long known of Sylvester Graham, R. T. Trall and James Caleb Jackson, but Coles in particular has been virtually ignored for almost a century. Ellen White evidently valued his work highly. He deserves recognition.

It seems to me that Dr. Numbers has tended to make Mrs. White more human through emphasizing her faulty memory in details, such as the exact time when James first had contact with Dr. Jackson and his works. The same is true as we learn of her apparently passing interest in phrenology. Too often, perhaps, Adventists have made Ellen White out to be a plastic saint, who looks too unlike us to be real. I find the fact that she had some difficulty in becoming a vege-

tarian, even when she was certain God had indicated such a diet as the “best” one, comforting. It helps me relate to my own struggles to follow truths that cut across human inclinations, just as I am comforted to know that the apostle Peter was not always consistent in following definite instruction from the Lord—yet was not abandoned because of his human weaknesses.

In uncovering the paucity of H. S. Lay’s medical preparation, Numbers throws new light (although he does not make a point of it) on why the Whites may have been unwilling to see a rapid development of the Western Health Reform Institute in 1867, when Lay was at its head. By showing Uriah Smith’s efforts to hurry Mrs. White into recommending the Institute’s early expansion, Numbers gives a graphic example of a rather common trait in Adventist circles—attempting to secure Ellen White’s support for a cherished viewpoint. By showing her yielding to pressure and later acknowledging this as an error, he even more humanizes God’s “Messenger.”

Some of the things I consider helpful contributions in *Prophetess of Health* will probably not appear in the same light to others. Here an appeal to charity is in order—and also an appeal to consider *carefully* what in Numbers’ account

may have disturbed the reader. A little hard thinking as to alternative explanations to those suggested or implied by Numbers may result in helpful new insights. Such has been my own experience.

One final word—What will be the impact of Dr. Numbers’ portrayal of Ellen White as a health reformer? It would be presumptuous to prognosticate. Some will undoubtedly conclude that she was a “pious fraud.” Others will conclude that Dr. Numbers is maliciously dishonest. I believe neither. My own hope, and prayer, is that the reader of Dr. Numbers’ elaborately researched and skillfully written study will be led to consider at least several things more carefully: 1) What was the *entire* impact of Ellen White’s work? 2) What are my reasoned views for accepting or rejecting her supernatural inspiration? 3) Just what is the role of prophets—are they somehow so controlled by God as to lose their human characteristics? 4) How does inspiration work? 5) Am I a victim of presuppositions that have not been carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully arrived at? If the reader is led to the thoughtful consideration of such topics, Dr. Numbers will for that person have performed a service. I rather suspect that this was what he originally wanted to do.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Louis Gattschalk, *Understanding History* (1961), p. 241.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42.

## VI. What Should We Expect From a Prophet?

Review by Fritz Guy

It is true for a church as well as an individual that the real significance of an event is determined not by the event as such but by the response to it. And the character of that response is determined not only by the particular character of the event but also by the insight

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and creativity of the person(s) doing the responding. So, while it is evident that Ronald Numbers’ *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* is an interesting and important book, the exact nature of its importance is yet to be determined—chiefly by the way in which the church responds to it.

The book’s first two chapters—“A Prophetess Is Born” and “In Sickness and in Health”—sketch Ellen White’s childhood in New England, her development into a prophetic figure among

sabbatarian Adventists of the midnineteenth century, and her early interest in health as a dimension of Adventist religion. To give a sense of the contemporary cultural context, Numbers then provides a survey of “The Health Reformers” with their interests in vegetarianism, hydropathy, homeopathy and phrenology.

The next pair of chapters—“Dansville Days” (referring to the western New York location of a “water cure” institution patronized by Mrs. White and other prominent Adventists) and “The Western Health Reform Institute”—constitute the focal point of the book. They are concerned with two events of the 1860s and their consequent developments: Mrs. White’s health-reform vision of June 1863 and her first extended writings on the subject; and the establishment of the first Adventist health institution and the rise of Adventism’s most famous physician, John Harvey Kellogg. Then the book turns to a somewhat more detailed consideration of three particular subjects related to health—female dress reform, abnormal and excessive sexual activity (especially masturbation) and diet—in chapters entitled “Short Skirts and Sex” and “Whatever Ye Eat or Drink.” The final chapter—“Fighting the Good Fight,” in which the major topic is Dr. Kellogg’s separation from the church—is a very brief overview of the four and a half decades from 1870 to Mrs. White’s death in 1915.

The primary thesis of the book seems to be (although it is not stated as such) that the life and work of Ellen White can be best understood in terms of sociocultural and psychosomatic factors, and that these factors provide an entirely adequate explanation of her role in the development of Adventist health ideas and activities. Thus, Numbers devotes much attention both to the endeavors and influence on Mrs. White of antecedent and contemporary American health reformers (especially Larkin B. Coles, Russell T. Trall and Jacob C. Jackson) and also to Mrs. White’s physical, interpersonal and spiritual traumas. Specifically, he insists that by the time of the 1863 vision, “Seventh-day Adventists were already in possession of the main outlines of the health reform message” (p. 81), and that “the content of this vision was hardly new,” inasmuch as “since the 1830s Sylvester Graham and his fellow health reformers had been preaching virtually the same thing” (p. x).

A secondary thesis (also implicit rather than explicit) is that Mrs. White exhibited many of the personal foibles characteristic of humanity generally—namely, certain ideological and practical inconsistencies, ambition for status and power, and (perhaps most disconcerting of all) a reluctance to admit either her changes of judgment or her intellectual indebtedness to other authors.

These major contentions will seem hardly exciting to the general public, but they will be disturbing to many Adventist readers who will regard them as incompatible with their view of Ellen White as a divinely appointed and authorized spokesman. The messages delivered by such a person must originate with God, and cannot come from purely human factors. Yet, the fact remains that, as a foundation for his very readable narrative, Numbers has done an impressive amount of homework, resulting in 46 pages of references and supplementary notes, plus a four-page bibliographical essay. The result is a book that no future study of either the ministry of Ellen White or the development of Adventist efforts in the field of health will be able to ignore.

Yet, the real importance of *Prophetess of Health* may finally depend not so much on the final appraisal of its accuracy and adequacy, but more on its function as a stimulus to further historical study and theological discussion.

**H**uman nature being what it is, it is possible to predict some of the principal Adventist reactions that the book will surely evoke (partly by its substance and partly by its style) with varying degrees of justification.

Some of the initial response will be highly emotional—and not very constructive. Many readers (and especially nonreaders) will fear the book as a threat to the church’s confidence in the prophetic mission of Mrs. White, on the incorrect (although understandable) supposition that she is somehow “on trial.” This feeling may indeed be encouraged (unintentionally) by Numbers’ declaration that his is “the first book about her that seeks neither to defend nor to damn but simply to understand” (p. xi), a claim that seems to imply a careful and perhaps even sympathetic objectivity.

These readers will be all the more upset,

therefore, by the rhetorical tone of the book, which conveys a kind of breezy secularity and amiable skepticism as it refers to Mrs. White's "most satisfying miracle" (p. 34) and her "greatest triumph as a temperance lecturer" (p. 168), her "anxiety to appear uninfluenced by any earthly agency" (p. 84) and her "flirtation with phrenology" (p. 149), the "high point of Ellen White's short skirt crusade" (p. 143) and the "spate of sex-oriented testimonies" (p. 158). They will be upset also—and perhaps even more—by the explicit attribution to Mrs. White of unworthy motives and interests, including "personal ambition" (p. 21) and "efforts to maintain control of an expanding church organization" (p. 124).

At the same time, other Adventists—those who have for one reason or another been uncomfortable with the role of Ellen White in the life of the church—will welcome the book as a symbol of liberation from a disagreeable religious domination. They will be pleased to note a reference to "her occasional inconsistency and insensitivity" (p. 30); and they will probably sympathize with James White, who "had his own cross to bear—living with a woman whose criticisms and reproofs came backed with divine authority" (p. 181). And they may appreciate the picture of "an aging and sometimes bewildered prophetess" involved in the sensational excommunication of Dr. Kellogg, who along with others was "raising embarrassing questions about the validity of her testimonies" (pp. 190-91).

Neither the fearful nor the delighted Adventists, however, will profit much from the book, because their reactions to it will be determined largely by the extent to which it challenges or confirms their own opinions of feelings regarding Ellen White. And—ironically—both groups will be the victims of the same theological misunderstandings: confusions about the nature of a prophetic ministry and the grounds of confidence in such a ministry.

Some more sophisticated Adventist readers, however, will instinctively "play it cool." On the one hand, noting that there is no such thing as truly "objective" history of a religious move-

ment (or of anything else, for that matter), they will regard the book and its central theses as simply the result of the author's naturalistic presupposition, which he states forthrightly in the preface: "I have refrained from using divine inspiration as an historical explanation." This, he continues, means that he does not begin with the assumption that Adventism is a divinely guided movement, or that Ellen White was a divinely chosen messenger who was impeccably honest and whose followers were reliable witnesses to her character and work (pp. xi-xii). Since this stance is so different from that of traditional Adventism, it will be supposed by many that the resulting research is largely irrelevant to committed "believers," and therefore need not be taken seriously.

But this reaction is still too superficial. For it ignores the possibility that a book with presuppositions radically different from the reader's may nevertheless contain information, ideas, or insights that deserve consideration. Even in the comparatively "subjective" discipline of religious history, where the "objective truth" and "actual facts" seem especially elusive, evidence is still evidence.

On the other hand, some readers will probably be tempted by the theory (which by its very nature is not easily refutable, any more than it can be conclusively established) that this sort of book is a verbalization of the author's own religiopsychological problems: unresolved hostilities toward the church, perhaps, or toward his parents. This is another easy response that seems to render the book quite harmless, so that it can be readily ignored. But it is a kind of poppsych, *ad hominem* speculation that is not really very useful—not only because it is intrinsically dubious, but also because it diverts attention toward the author's inner motivations (which are none of the reader's business) and thus away from the actual presentation and its implications (which are the proper object of critical reflection).

Then again, although there are few places where Numbers has the facts simply wrong or the chronology seriously muddled, Adventist critics will charge that often his interpretations are biased and his generalizations overstated, sometimes to the point of caricature. And there is, unfortunately, some basis for this complaint. For example, it is clever but hardly accurate to

say that “while politicians in Washington quarreled bitterly over the best method of healing a divided and scarred nation, the Adventists of Battle Creek dedicated themselves to curing mankind with water” (p. 104). Or that “Ellen White lived out her last years as a true health reformer, happily subsisting on a simple twice-a-day diet of vermicelli-tomato soup or thistle greens ‘seasoned with sterilized cream and lemon juice’” (p. 117).

Statements of this sort will strike some readers as a symptom of a fundamental imbalance in *Prophetess of Health*, an imbalance that seems evident in other, more crucial ways. For one thing, the narrative concentrates on the problematic rather than the positive, the frustrating rather than the successful episodes in Mrs. White’s career as a health reformer. While this emphasis may result in part from the fact that the book focuses on the difficult decades of the 1860s and 1870s, the total picture even at that time was somewhat brighter than Numbers paints it. For another thing, the story is frequently oversimplified and one sided. It includes evidence that supports the author’s own interpretation of a situation, but it fails to acknowledge—much less take adequate account of—evidence that would support an alternative interpretation. This is the case in regard to the “shut door” theology of the 1840s, Mrs. White’s relation to other health reformers and the significance of the health reform vision of 1863, the plan to enlarge the Western Health Reform Institute, the final dispute with J. H. Kellogg, et cetera. Moreover, when it comes to secondary sources, Mrs. White’s foes seem regularly to get more space and credence than do her friends—even when the friends seem to have something important to say.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, yet other readers will probably miss the book’s potential importance, and that is regrettable.

For there are—in spite of its apparent imbalance, its naturalistic presupposition and its frequent skepticism regarding Ellen White’s integrity—some good reasons for taking *Prophetess of Health* seriously and reading it constructively.

In the first place, it can actually be beneficial to see what a familiar subject looks like when it is viewed from a very different (and even somewhat uncomfortable) angle. Many Americans,

for example, might gain increased understanding of what happened in the colonies in the 1770s by reading an account of those events written by someone (such as a British historian, or a colonial Loyalist) who did not simply assume the political and moral rightness of the American Revolution. This is not to say, of course, that the absence of such a presupposition is a necessary (much less a sufficient) prerequisite for writing accurate history. Indeed, just such a presupposition may well open up insights into the subject that are not accessible from a deliberately “neutral” viewpoint. Yet, it is surely legitimate and honorable for a historian not to presuppose the absolute righteousness and infallible virtue of his subject—whether he is writing about the American Revolution or about Ellen White.

In the second place, the unbalanced presentation that frequently characterizes *Prophetess of Health* may even be regarded as a kind of negative virtue, insofar as it calls attention to aspects of the subject that might otherwise be overlooked. It can thus increase our knowledge of the total factuality of Adventist history and of the ministry of Ellen White. In this respect, the references to and citations from her critics may be of some value, for most of them have not been given a very extensive Adventist hearing in the past. Indeed, if he chose to do so, Numbers could defend the one-sidedness of his account by appropriating an argument and illustration offered by Francis D. Nichol in a different (but somewhat parallel) context:

When a teeterboard has seated on it a child at each end, then someone may be needed to stand in the middle, to throw his weight, first on one side and then on the other. But if one child after another sits down at the same end, the only hope of bringing the board into line is for someone to throw all his weight on the other end. Now during a hundred years a host of writers—one after another—have added their weight to one end of the board that constitutes the record of Millerism. . . . Under some circumstances we believe that a heroic move must be made by someone in order to bring things into balance. It would never have occurred to us to stress certain of the facts in the record as we vigorously do, were it not

that these facts deal with matters long emphasized in an opposite way. If the reader thinks we have walked far out to one end in our emphasis of the evidence for the Millerites, we invite him to remember the teeterboard.<sup>2</sup>

And in the third place, even if the particular presuppositions of *Prophetess of Health* do limit the adequacy of its interpretations of persons and events, the facts which it presents are still facts that should not be excluded from the church's understanding of Ellen White's prophetic ministry. It is clear, for instance, that she originally advised her fellow Adventists not to "dishonor God by applying to earthly physicians" (p. 31), and that she initially condoned the eating of swine's flesh (p. 43). In declaring her independence from contemporary health reformers, she gave an incorrect date as the time when her husband ordered some health books from Dansville, and she did not mention her reading of materials that had appeared in the *Review and Herald* (p. 84). The "reform dress" was indeed a disappointment and an acknowledged failure (pp. 145-56). On the basis of the 1863 health reform vision, she warned of not only functional but also organic diseases that would result from masturbation (p. 152). She used the vocabulary and logic of both phrenology (p. 148) and vitalism (pp. 154-55). She incorporated into her writing some materials taken without acknowledgment from Horace Mann and L. B. Coles (pp. 155-56, 162-63). And for 20 or more years she was not consistently vegetarian in her diet (pp. 170-72).

Although some of these facts have long been available from other sources, they have not been a part of the general Adventist consciousness. It is now likely that they will be.

**I**t is unlikely, however, that Numbers' picture of Ellen White will constitute any threat to her continually influential role in the life and thought of Adventism—provided there is adequate understanding both of the nature of a prophetic ministry and of the appropriate grounds for confidence in it. Regrettably, however, there seems to be fairly widespread confusion on both points—a confusion not only afflicting many potential readers of *Prophetess*

*of Health* but also reflected to some extent in the book itself.

A prophet as a human being is not, and should not be regarded as, infallible—informationally, logically, behaviorally, or linguistically. There are limits in regard to the nature and amount of information available to him through both ordinary (or "natural") and extraordinary ("supernatural") means. To be called to a prophetic ministry is not to become omniscient, any more than it is to be removed from the influence (positive and negative) of one's interpersonal and cultural environment, or to be relieved of human emotional needs, feelings, temptations and tendencies to sin. As Kenneth Wood puts it,

In many ways prophets are just like other people. They eat, they sleep, they hear, they read, they learn, they speak, they travel. Prophets may be well informed in some areas of knowledge and poorly informed in others. They may have a large vocabulary or a small one. They may be well educated or poorly educated. . . . They obtain some kinds of information as do others. As time goes along, they may improve their skills, such as reading, speaking, or writing.<sup>3</sup>

As a person, therefore, a prophet can—and sometimes does—make mistakes. At some point or other, he is likely to receive and follow poor advice, or misjudge the factors involved in a particular situation. He may on occasion be discouraged, overoptimistic, shortsighted, or irritable. There is ample evidence of the human fallibility of the authors of the biblical documents (including Moses, David, Peter and John as some of the more obvious examples); and we would be naive to suppose that there would not be any similar evidence in the life of Ellen White. To demand or expect personal perfection would be unreasonable and unfair. Besides, it would divert to her personal life some of the attention that should be given to understanding the implications of her ministry for our own individual and collective experience as Adventists.

Nor is the prophet infallible in the formal communication of his message. To write "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" does *not* mean that one's pen is "literally guided by God," as Numbers suggests (p. 201). A prophet may suffer a lapse of memory, indulge in overgeneralization, or express his thoughts with



something less than ideal clarity. When Mrs. White says, “I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them” (quoted on p. 163), she is not claiming divine authority or absolute precision for her verbal formulations. And, when she goes on in the same sentence to say, “The words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own” (quoted on p. 197), she is not claiming unique originality for her language. On the contrary, in this twofold statement she is acknowledging her own human limitations and at the same time accepting the responsibility of her choice of words. Elsewhere she wrote, “In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible.”<sup>4</sup>

This is not to say, of course, that the quality of a prophet’s life is irrelevant to his mission and ministry, or that his messages may be garbled and unintelligible. Nor does it suggest that the life and work of Ellen White were characterized by hypocrisy, dishonesty, arrogance, or greed, or that her writings are inconsistent and confused.

**“There is ample evidence of the human fallibility of Bible authors, and we would be naive to suppose that there would not be any similar evidence in the life of Ellen White.”**

On the contrary, the incredibly detailed documentation we have of her daily activities supports belief in the genuineness and integrity of her religious dedication and gives impressive confirmation of her prophetic vocation. And, given the extent of her written work for nearly 70 years—an estimated 45,000 or more pages of manuscript materials, 4,500 published articles, and more than 50 books now in print—the degree of systematic coherence and conceptual consistency is remarkable.

To the extent, therefore, that Numbers has called attention to Mrs. White’s human fallibility, the church ought not to regard this reality as an embarrassment. For it is a reality which, even if often ignored, has never been denied by the church. Nor is the recognition of

this fallibility a threat to the continuing effectiveness of her prophetic ministry in Adventism.

At the same time, the church has a scholarly responsibility to identify those points at which Numbers has misread the evidence or exaggerated its implications, and to carefully correct or clarify the picture he gives of Ellen White’s life and work. Knowing that it is not necessary for the final picture to disclose absolute personal perfection, the church can go about this task without anxiety or defensiveness.

**T**here is, furthermore, a fundamental and crucial difference between determining the presence of a genuine prophetic ministry in the church and discovering the precise nature and shape of that ministry.<sup>5</sup>

The former task may be accomplished in the light of four general criteria: 1) fundamental compatibility with the biblical revelation, which remains the ultimate standard of religious truth, the final rule of faith and practice; 2) internal coherence and integrity, which enables it to “make sense” to the church; 3) overall contribution to the spiritual growth and practical life of the church; and 4) validation in the personal religious life of individual members, who continue to hear in it the voice of the Eternal with its gift of forgiveness, its challenge to service and its claim for ultimate allegiance.

Once these criteria have been met, so that the validity of the prophetic ministry has been solidly established, it is appropriate for the church to examine it in detail, in order to understand it thoroughly and accurately, and thus to benefit from it as much as possible. In this setting, a detailed study of the life and work of a prophet is neither a mark of disrespect or skepticism, nor an occasion for worry that the conviction of validity will be undermined. Rather, just as it would be in the case of studying the work of a great musician or painter, it is a result of profound interest and seriousness, and an occasion for deepening appreciation.

Unfortunately, however, the procedure outlined here—first to determine the presence of a valid prophetic ministry and then to discover its precise characteristics—is not always followed. An alternative and all-too-common approach puts the cart before the horse. First, it attempts to establish *a priori* specifications for a divinely

inspired message (usually including the assumption that a perfect God would certainly provide a perfect revelation, without any sort of human deficiency); and the next step is to show how the materials under consideration meet these specifications. This approach, which can be seen typically in “evangelical” Protestantism in regard to the biblical revelation, is also taken by some Adventists in regard to the work of Ellen White.

But, however commonly it occurs, this procedure is a methodological mistake. For the specifications that are offered have no authoritative ground of their own; they are merely the characteristics that someone thinks a divinely initiated message *ought* to have. In contrast to this deductive approach, it is better to proceed inductively—that is, to examine a message that is recognized as divinely inspired and thus to discover what characteristics it *actually* has. In this way, the conclusions can be based on evidence rather than theological supposition.<sup>6</sup>

The problem here, furthermore, is not only methodological; for the procedure of establishing *a priori* specifications has some serious religious consequences. It requires ongoing (and often anxious) explanatory activity in the face of every newly discovered (or merely alleged) discrepancy between the actual characteristics of the revelatory materials and the predetermined specifications. And, if the explanation is not finally persuasive, the validity of the previously acknowledged revelation is thrown into question.

In the case of the “evangelicals” and the biblical documents, the discrepancies between the ideal and the actual have led to the invention of hypothetical “inerrant autographs,” which are supposed to have the required perfection that appears to be lacking in the extant biblical manuscripts. Adventists, however, need not resort to this kind of hypothesis. As Wood explains,

Seventh-day Adventists do not draw up and seek to defend artificial battle lines in the area of inspiration. They do not make exaggerated claims for inspiration. They do not declare that inspired writings are “inerrant in the original autographs.” They know better. They have “original autographs”! They have Mrs. White’s original manuscripts, and they know that those autographs, though bearing infallible truth regarding the way of salvation, give

evidence of having been produced by a fallible human being.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, although occasional imperfections may appear in the life and ministry of the prophet and even in the verbal formulation of the prophetic messages, confidence in the overall validity and reliability of those messages is not thereby disturbed.

**A**n awareness of these last two major points—first, that a prophet is not, and must not be expected to be, personally infallible, and second, that there is a basic difference between recognizing a prophetic ministry and understanding it in detail—makes it possible for the church to engage in a careful, scholarly study of a prophetic ministry in which it has learned to have complete confidence. Therefore, although the limitations of Numbers’ *Prophets of Health* keep it from being the last word on the subject, it can well serve as an incentive for the church to continue the study.

And the study surely needs to continue—not only to clarify and correct the picture that Numbers has provided, but also to complete and supplement it. While Numbers has clearly documented Mrs. White’s use of some of the work of other American health reformers, yet to be studied are the extent and nature of her *differences* from them, which may turn out to be more interesting and significant than the similarities. In any event, this kind of study will illuminate the distinctiveness of her own constructive contribution.

The attention Numbers has given to the sociocultural context of Mrs. White’s work as a health reformer needs also to be supplemented with further study of the Adventist ecclesiastical context. There is a need for an examination of the interrelationships between the church’s interest in health and the concurrent (or immediately subsequent) interest of Adventists in education and in overseas mission work. The Western Health Reform Institute was only eight years old when Battle Creek College was founded in 1874, and when J. N. Andrews left for Switzerland as an official missionary.

And there is a need for an examination of the theological context and implications of the Adventist interest in health. What, for example, are the reciprocal relationships between this

interest and the Adventist understanding of the nature of man (theological anthropology)? . . . the process of salvation by grace through faith (soteriology)? . . . the end of present history with the second coming of God in the person of Christ (eschatology)? . . . the meaning and experience of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship? What part does the subject of health play in the total concept of "the great controversy," which is the central systematic theme of Adventist theology?

Finally, there is a need for a comprehensive theological synthesis of Ellen White's views of health as a dimension of religious life and as a concern of the church. Besides the first slender books that get most of Numbers' attention—*An Appeal to Mothers* (1864) and the collection of pamphlets entitled *How to Live* (1865)—she published numerous articles on health in various journals. Toward the end of her career came the systematic elaboration of her thought published as *The Ministry of Healing* (1903), and there

have been several posthumous compilations of both previously published and unpublished materials—*Counsels on Health* (1932), *Medical Ministry* (1930), *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (1938) and *Temperance* (1949). By way of secondary sources, first Dores E. Robinson's *The Story of Our Health Message* (1943) and now Numbers' *Prophetess of Health* (1976) have provided historical narratives. But *The Ministry of Healing* is not sufficiently comprehensive, the compilations are not sufficiently coherent, and the narratives are not sufficiently theological to give the church a clear, complete and integrated understanding of the whole of Ellen White's writings on health.

To the extent that *Prophetess of Health* functions as an encouragement to these kinds of further historical study and theological interpretation, its publication can be a significant and constructive event as the church grows into a more complete understanding of the prophetic mission and ministry of Ellen G. White.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. An example here is Francis D. Nichol's extensive consideration and documentation of Ellen White's relation to the "shut door" theology, in *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1951), pp. 161-252, 586-615, and 619-43. There is also a less elaborate discussion by Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White and the Shut Door Question* (Washington: Ellen G. White Estate, 1971).

Numbers is aware of these materials (see p. 218, n. 50, and p. xii), but he does not comment on them.

2. Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry: A Defense of the Character and Conduct of William Miller and the Millerites* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1944), pp. 12-13.

3. Kenneth H. Wood, "Hear the Word of the Lord," a

Bible study presented at the 1975 General Conference session in Vienna and published in the *Review and Herald*, July 16, 1975, p. 11.

4. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 37.

5. This approach to the issue at hand derives from a conversation with Warren C. Trenchard of Canadian Union College at College Heights, Alberta.

6. See Everett F. Harrison, "The Phenomena of Scripture," in *Revelation and the Bible*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 238-50.

7. Wood, "Hear the Word of the Lord," p. 11. See also his editorial, "The Divine-Human Word," *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1976, pp. 2, 14-15.

## VII. An Author Replies To His Critics

by Ronald L. Numbers

First, I want to thank the editors of SPECTRUM for giving me this opportunity to respond to my reviewers. Although I am partic-

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ularly appreciative of the comments of Norwood, Brodie and Sandeen, most of what I say will be directed toward the criticisms of the White Estate, Schwarz and Guy, which raise serious questions about the quality and reliability of my work.

The Estate's allegations are not new. In February 1975, it provided me with an extensive

paragraph-by-paragraph critique of my then unpublished manuscript. Assisted by Richard W. Schwarz and Ron Graybill, whom the White Estate sent to Wisconsin to confer with me, I carefully evaluated its arguments and evidence and revised my manuscript accordingly. Thus, before the publication of *Prophetess of Health*, I was able to incorporate the Estate's criticisms that I felt were valid. The present review raises few new issues. It is, as the Estate points out, a condensation of a recently published 24-page pamphlet, which is a lineal descendant of the 1975 critique prepared largely by Ron Graybill, Robert Olson and Arthur White of the Estate staff.

The points of contention, then and now, are primarily interpretative rather than factual. The Estate believes that there is objective evidence to substantiate the claim that Mrs. White was divinely inspired. It maintains, for example, that her ventilation of a sickroom in response to a vision "goes far toward supporting her claims that her light came from the Lord, not from physicians." But this kind of "evidence," I am afraid, is unacceptable to the historian. Although I personally do not deny the possibility that Mrs. White was inspired by God, I think that appeals to supernatural explanations are out of place in strictly historical studies like *Prophetess of Health*. Furthermore, I am not aware of any historical evidence for her inspiration besides her own claims, which, I believe, must be accepted primarily on the basis of faith.

The Estate singles out as "the crux of the matter" the question "Did Ellen White receive her health message from the Lord or from earthly sources?" But this is a question the historian, *qua* historian, cannot answer. It is unfair to ask him to do so or to fault him for not doing so. The Estate also claims that to write about a prophet one must have "a correct and adequate concept of inspiration." I disagree. That requirement would virtually limit the writing of Adventist history to members of the church, and it sounds too much like saying that only a devout Roman Catholic should write about the pope or that only a Communist should write about Lenin.

Despite its criticism of "unsupported assumptions," the Estate makes two crucial ones of its own: that Ellen White was inspired and that her testimony is generally accurate. It believes *a priori* that naturalistic explanations of her

visions and testimonies are wrong and that evidence of her inaccuracy is invalid. Thus, those who harbor such views must possess a faulty methodology or be Satanically inspired—or both. (It is ironic that Adventists praise Fawn Brodie's excellent biography of Joseph Smith while damning attempts to apply the same methods to understanding Ellen White.)

I agree wholeheartedly with the Estate that "the truth can be approached only by a conscientious and thoughtful investigation of *all* the available evidence on all sides of a question." But why, if this is its philosophy, does it continue to restrict access to so many of Ellen White's manuscripts and to prohibit the use of others? Why did it repeatedly withhold requested documents—and on one occasion even deny the existence of a key manuscript locked in the Estate vault and instruct its staff not to mention its discovery? Why, too, if it desires to facilitate access to the evidence, does it prohibit researchers from taking notes while working in the Estate's collections and require them to submit all release requests to two committees of church elders for approval? But these are separate issues.

In my study of Ellen White I say that "by June of 1863 Seventh-day Adventists were already in possession of the main outlines of the health reform message. What they now needed to become a church of health reformers was not additional information, but a sign from God indicating his pleasure" (p. 81). The White Estate claims this is not true, but in proving its case it distorts what I said. First, it incorrectly identifies "message" rather than "outlines" as the "key word" of my statement; then it arbitrarily defines message as "a coherent body of information with a purpose." Since SDAs did not possess "a coherent body of information with a purpose" before June 1863, the Estate, apparently forgetting what I actually wrote, concludes I am wrong.

The Estate also cites evidence, which I allegedly overlooked or suppressed, showing that even those Adventists who knew about health reform continued to practice their old habits. However, my statement clearly refers to their *knowledge* rather than their *practice* of health reform, and the evidence is abundant that many Adventists knew about health reform before the

June 5 vision. Mrs. White herself said that in the months after her vision she was “often” asked about the similarity between her views and those of Trall, Jackson and others. If Adventists knew as little about health reform as the Estate would have us believe, then how does it explain the widespread and detailed familiarity with the writings of Trall and Jackson?

Besides, it is logically fallacious to suppose a necessary relationship between knowledge and practice, as the Estate seems to do. The lapses of the Kelloggs, Loughboroughs and Andrewses reveal as little about their knowledge of health reform as Mrs. White’s continued use of meat until 1894 tells us about what she knew. Using the Estate’s reasoning, we would conclude that her knowledge of vegetarianism was only fragmentary until the 1890s, three decades after God revealed to her the evils of meat-eating. My point was that the content of Mrs. White’s June 5 vision was not new, even to many Adventists. And nothing the Estate has presented refutes that.

The Estate says that *Prophetess of Health* “offers the reader none of the facts cited here which show that . . . early Adventists continued to use therapy and indulge in practices which most health reformers of the day would have abhorred.” This simply is not true. Though more concerned with familiarity than with habits, I did, for example, mention the Kelloggs’ use of beer and ale (p. 221) and Bates’ reticence to discuss his views on health reform (p. 38)—which raises an interesting question: How did James White know that Bates only discussed his dietary views when “interrogated upon the subject” if he never interrogated the captain?

What did Mrs. White know? In *Prophetess of Health* I argue that even Mrs. White knew more about hydropathy and health reform before June 1863 than she liked to admit. I specifically cite her successful use of Jackson’s water treatment for diphtheria during the winter of 1862-63 and her undisputed familiarity with articles on reform appearing in the *Review*. The authors of the Estate review, wanting to attribute all her knowledge to the vision, minimize her acquaintance with health reform, which leads them, it appears, into an unsuspected trap.

To show how little the Whites knew about health reform in 1863, the Estate refers to Henry’s fatal illness in December 1863, when his

desperate parents called in a local physician. “Is it not strange,” it asks, “that she [Mrs. White] failed to use her supposed ‘system of medicine’ to save the life of her own son?” Yes, indeed it is—for two reasons. First, the Estate seems to have forgotten that Henry’s death occurred six months *after* the June 5 vision, when God had shown her “the remedial value of water treatments” [W. C. White, *Review and Herald*, 113 (Nov. 12, 1936), 4]. Thus, if she did not use water treatments, it was not Jackson’s system she was ignoring; it was God’s. Second, the Estate’s assertion that the Whites “stood helplessly by while their boy died” is an unwarranted assumption based on the absence of evidence. We simply do not know what the Whites did besides calling a physician, and it seems likely that they would have tried every remedy, including water, which had proved so successful the previous winter and which God had recently endorsed.

In its review, the Estate attempts to demonstrate that Mrs. White’s views on health came from the Lord, as she claimed, and not from earthly sources. It seems to think that if she were not indebted to human predecessors, her chances of being divinely inspired are increased. But in so reasoning, the Estate fails to recognize that many uninspired authors have written original works. Even if Mrs. White were unique, it would add no *historical* evidence to her claim of inspiration.

The only historical question in this section relates to the accuracy of Mrs. White’s denial that she had read “*The Laws of Life* and other publications of Drs. Trall, Jackson and others,” before writing out her June 5 vision. To justify this statement, the Estate unfortunately paints a picture of the prophetess as a master casuist, deliberately misleading her questioners while technically telling the truth. When the people asked if she had read the “works” of Trall and Jackson, they were obviously trying to find out if she were acquainted with their views, regardless of the source. But, according to the Estate, Mrs. White cleverly took “works” to mean just “books,” which enabled her to deny any familiarity with previous health reformers without actually lying. It would be less damning simply to admit that she was mistaken.

The Estate concedes that she had indeed read some brief selections from the health reformers,

but suggests that “in the flood of light provided by the vision, any fainter glimmers paled into insignificance in her mind.” Surely, the Estate’s rules of evidence do not permit an assumption of such magnitude. The Estate also admits that Mrs. White incorrectly gave the date when her husband ordered books from Dansville, but passes it off as a minor biographical error, not recognizing that the important question is *why* she made this particular mistake. The main point, it says, is that she did not read the books; but this is another assumption, based solely on her own testimony, which, because of the possibility of self-interest, is suspect as historical evidence.

If I have read the Estate correctly, its current answer to the question, “Did Mrs. White copy?” is “Yes, but it’s not really important.” Surprisingly, the Estate does not seem to be nearly as concerned about the instances of outright copying as in trying to show Mrs. White’s lack of familiarity with the literature before 1865. Thus, it divides the alleged examples of copying into two categories: those before 1865, when according to her own testimony she began reading books on health reform, and those afterwards. Since most of the pre-1865 parallels found so far concern tea, coffee, or tobacco—topics about which she was knowledgeable before June 1863—the Estate believes they are not significant. As for the post-1865 parallels, the Estate says that “it is not surprising that since Mrs. White found these men to be ‘so nearly in harmony’ with what the Lord had revealed to her she would occasionally employ their language in later years when writing on the same subjects.” Perhaps it would not be so surprising if Mrs. White (and the Estate) had not repeatedly insisted on her literary independence.

The Estate seeks to minimize the importance of the post-1865 parallel passages by arguing that they were limited to “a few cases,” that she was not trying to fool anyone, and that plagiarism in the nineteenth century was not the heinous crime that it is today. But, as they well know, we are not talking about “a few cases.” Despite the difficulty of detecting literary dependence, we already know that she borrowed extensively in her health writings, in *Sketches*

from the *Life of Paul*, and in *The Great Controversy*. Virtually entire chapters from *The Great Controversy* were extracted—historical errors and all—directly from other books.

Since Mrs. White borrowed from sources familiar to many of her readers, it does seem unlikely that she was *consciously* trying to fool anyone. For that reason, I have consistently refrained from accusing her of plagiarism, which implies a conscious attempt to deceive. Before this issue can be resolved, we need to know much more about the unconscious processes that may have been operating.

In the meantime, it is inaccurate for the Estate to suggest that nineteenth-century Adventists and other Americans winked at plagiarism. In a note on “plagiarism” in the September 6, 1864 issue of the *Review and Herald*, the editors accuse a woman named Luthera B. Weaver of stealing lines from one of Annie Smith’s poems and publishing them as her own. Plagiarism, they say, “is a word that is used to signify ‘literary theft,’ or the taking the productions of another and passing them off as one’s own. . . . We are perfectly willing that pieces from the *Review*, or any of our books should be published to any extent, and all we ask is, that simple justice be done us, by due credit being given.” If Mrs. White had only adopted this principle, she would have avoided much needless criticism.

The Estate argues in its review that I consistently put Mrs. White “in an embarrassing or unfavorable light,” the implication being that I have done so unfairly. In other words, if Mrs. White looks bad, it is a result of my distortions, not her actions.

To illustrate my tendency to omit contradictory material, the Estate points to my discussion of the events surrounding James White’s “retirement” from the editorship of the *Review* in 1855, claiming that I either misread or omitted important evidence. In contrast to the controversies I describe, the Estate has White “happily” stepping down from the editorship. But—as I am sure any objective reader will concede—there is much more to the story, a crucial element being White’s attitude toward his wife’s “gift.” His October outburst may not have led directly to his departure, but the views expressed in it certainly influenced the committee that appointed Uriah Smith as his successor. For



what it's worth, I am not alone in adopting this interpretation. In a still unpublished paper Dr. Dalton Baldwin, of the Loma Linda University Division of Religion, concludes that "it would seem that the policy of the *Review* [under James White] in not using the writings of Ellen G. White except on the human level fits the description of the condition that the committee felt displeased God."

The Estate misrepresents my account of this episode when it implies that I intentionally ignored other reasons than White's controversial attitude toward the visions for his leaving the editorship. I specifically stated that "in recent months he had come to fear that his editorial burdens were threatening his health, and he had publicly expressed a desire to relinquish his position" (p. 29).

The Estate also criticizes me for making a number of "unsupported" assumptions, which I suppose means that my assumptions are often unwarranted. It also finds it "unfortunate that a book so largely footnoted would . . . frequently employ such terms as 'doubtless,' 'ostensibly' and 'probably' in its interpretation of various events." However, I find it hard to believe that the Estate would be happier without the qualifications.

The Estate offers five examples of unsupported assumptions. First, it says that I erroneously assumed that the "whining complaints" and "poisonous letters" James White received in 1855 pertained to his attitude toward his wife's visions. Yet, they assume that the letters concerned "his handling of the financial affairs of the office." Since the letters in question are not extant, we are unable to settle the issue with finality. I suspect that we are both correct, that the complaints criticized him for his administration as well as for his views on the visions. But perhaps it would be best for neither of us to make assumptions.

Second, the Estate censures me for suggesting the following interpretation of Mrs. White's warnings against excesses of the marriage relation: "Although she never defined exactly what she meant by excessive, it seems likely—since she generally agreed with earlier health reformers in such matters—that she would have frowned on having intercourse more frequently than once a

month" (pp. 157-58). It is "unrealistic," the Estate says, to have so little sex. I agree, but it's beside the point.

The Estate admits that Mrs. White never explicitly defined what she meant by marital excess; thus they concede that no evidence contradicts my interpretation. And some important evidence supports it. In *Solemn Appeal Relative to Solitary Vice, and the Abuses and Excesses of the Marriage Relation* (1870), an expanded edition of Mrs. White's earlier *Appeal to Mothers* (1864) edited by James White, we find this advice by O. S. Fowler: ". . . to indulge, even in wedlock, as often as the moon quarters [i.e., twice a month], is gradual but effectual destruction of both soul and body." Why did James White select this passage to accompany his wife's inspired views on the marriage relation? Again, we cannot be sure, but one analagous explanation seems plausible. We know the material appended to *Appeal to Mothers* was included because it was "corroborative of the views presented [by Mrs. White] in the preceding pages." And the excerpts added to *How to Live* (1865) were included because Mrs. White found them to be "so nearly in harmony with what the Lord had revealed." Is it unreasonable to think that Fowler's statement was included for the same reasons?

Third, the Estate rejects my explanation of Mrs. White's 1851 comment that "the visions trouble many." In *Prophetess of Health*, I wrote that "some" Adventists were "doubtless" puzzled by "her changing stand on the shut door, while others resented her habit of publishing private testimonies revealing their secret sins—and names" (pp. 27-28). The Estate points out that *Christian Experience and Views*, the book from which her shut-door passages were deleted, did not appear until after her comment about the visions, and it asserts that she did not publish "any testimonies containing even the initials of those to whom the counsel was directed" until years later. (My italics.)

Though it is true that *Christian Experience and Views* appeared in 1851 a few weeks or months after Mrs. White's comment, this does not mean, as the Estate suggests, that until the publication of this volume no one was aware of her changing views on the shut door. Even the Estate concedes that she had been publicly advocating an open-door policy for some time

before publishing *Christian Experience and Views*.

The Estate does, however, have some legitimate grounds for criticizing my reference to Mrs. White's "habit of publishing private testimonies." I should not have used the word "habit." Nevertheless, it is true despite what the Estate maintains, that she published testimonies exposing individual errors before 1851; see, for instance, her reproof of Brother Rhodes in the *Present Truth*, 1 (Dec., 1849), p. 35. But I must admit that this practice did not become habitual until later. Then, however, she published names, not just initials, as the Estate implies. To pick one of many possible examples, her very personal testimony "Extremes in Health Reform" (now found in *Testimonies*, II, pp. 377-90) originally appeared with the erring brethren, H. C. Miller and H. S. Giddings of Monroe, Wisconsin, plainly identified by name and residence.

More important, even if Mrs. White was not habitually *publishing* private revelations of sins by 1851, she certainly was *publicizing* them, which seems ample reason for dissatisfaction. (See, e.g., *Life Sketches*, pp. 85-94, 129-35.) In *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. II (1860), p. 294, she wrote:

In bearing the testimony which the Lord has given me for the last fifteen years [since 1844], I have been opposed by many who became my bitter enemies, especially those whose errors and sins have been revealed to me, and have been exposed by me. Some of these have carried out their feelings of revenge, as might be expected, in attacking the humble instrument, and circulating unfavorable reports against me.

Thus, although my language was imperfect, my sentiment was sound.

Fourth, the Estate apparently sees no valid reason for devoting "half a chapter to the most minute details of Ellen White's efforts to encourage dress reform and only a few sentences to her role in the establishment of health care facilities like Loma Linda University." The explanation is simple. We often learn as much from failures as from successes and, according to Mrs. White herself, "perhaps no question has ever come up among us which has caused such development of character as has dress reform." This alone is sufficient justification for discussing it at length.

But there are additional reasons. She was much more directly involved with dress reform than she was with the turn-of-the-century sanitarium building, and her dress reform activities shed more light on her connection with the health reform movement than does institutional growth, important as that may have been.

Fifth, the Estate has directed some of its strongest criticism against my statement that Mrs. White in 1906 "vetoed a chance to obtain the rights to . . . Corn Flakes" (p. 189). According to it, I "not only misread completely the evidence, but also [engaged] in some speculation for which it is difficult to see any basis at all." Correspondence from that time, the Estate

**"The Estate finds in 'the demonstrably better health' of Adventists evidence of Mrs. White's inspiration. Does the better health of Mormons tell anything about Joseph Smith's inspiration?"**

says, makes it "very plain" that "Mrs. White could not have vetoed a chance for the denomination to acquire the rights to Corn Flakes because such a chance was never offered." But it chooses to overlook Mrs. White's own testimony. Writing to J. A. Burden in November 1906, she said:

In regard to the health food business, I would urge you to move slowly. Dr. Kellogg's proposition to sell the corn flake rights to our people for twenty years has just been considered by our brethren here; and I fear, if I had not been on the ground, this matter would have been carried through to the loss of our food business. When a thing is exalted, as the corn flakes has been, it would be unwise for our people to have anything to do with it. It is not necessary that we make the corn flakes an article of food.

From this letter, it is clear that Mrs. White understood that Kellogg had made an offer, that he had made it to "our people," and that she was the one responsible for not accepting it. In view of this, how can the Estate say that I have

“misread completely the evidence”? And how does it explain not even mentioning this letter in its discussions of the corn flake episode?

Concerning progression in Mrs. White’s teachings, the main difference between the Estate and me is not over the presence of change—though they prefer to call it “progression”—but in explaining it. I offer historical explanations; the Estate appeals “to the *fact* that God was leading His people along, step by step, as they accepted and lived up to the counsel.” (My italics.) This is not a *fact* as the term is commonly understood; it is an assumption based on personal faith.

Despite the numerous changes in Mrs. White’s inspired writings, the Estate accepts her contention that “nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside.” But how then are we to explain her absolute rejection of the reform dress in the 1870s, or her repudiation in the 1850s of her 1849 admonition never to resort to earthly physicians? In its 24-page critique of *Prophetess of Health*, the Estate attributes the latter to “the fact that the youthful Ellen White did not always in those early days make herself entirely clear.” Perhaps so, but this explanation severely undercuts her claim that she was “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision.”

In remarks calling for “candor without condescension,” the Estate maintains that I have failed to “explain the historical dynamics of her success,” but what really concerns it, I think, is that I have not dealt with the supernatural dynamics, to which the Estate attributes virtually all her accomplishments. Throughout *Prophetess of Health*, I offer a number of possible explanations for her appeal and her success. In the first chapter, I allude to her personal ambition (p. 21) and point out that “despite her occasional inconsistency and insensitivity, most members clung to the belief that she represented a divine channel of communication. To them, dramatic visions, supernatural healings and revelations of secret sins were persuasive evidences of a true prophet” (p. 30). I also give considerable emphasis to the roles of James White and J. H. Kellogg. “Seventh-day Adventism,” I say, “would not have been the same without Ellen White; it would not have existed without James” (p. 182). Frankly, I suspect that

without James, Ellen today would be remembered only as another Portland visionary of the shut-door persuasion. And without Kellogg, I doubt if the Adventist medical work would ever have gotten off the ground. By the 1870s, he was already beginning “to eclipse the prophetess as the church’s health authority” (p. 169P), and during the last quarter of the century, when Mrs. White’s interest in health reform waned, he almost singlehandedly kept the Adventist health reform movement alive.

The Estate finds in “the demonstrably better health” of Adventists evidence of Mrs. White’s inspiration. But is it willing to grant that the demonstrably better health of Mormons tells us anything about Joseph Smith’s inspiration?

What should we conclude from all this? As the Estate says, my study of Ellen White “does not stand or fall on one or two errors of fact or interpretation; it stands or falls on whether its major theses are sustained by the overall weight of evidence.” Judged by this criterion—or by the criterion of accuracy—my study stands. The most the Estate has found, after investing two years and thousands of dollars checking every phrase and source of my study, is that on p. 216, note 32, I inadvertently give the date of Merritt Kellogg’s letter as June 3 rather than June 18, 1906, and that my statement that Mrs. White was in the “habit of publishing private testimonies” by 1851 represents a poor choice of words. The remainder of the Estate’s allegations are, I believe, either factually inaccurate or dependent on appeals to supernatural explanations.

Since the appearance of an August 2 *Time* article mentioning that Mrs. White had a vision showing “that masturbation could lead to ‘imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen hands and deformity of every description,’” various church leaders have argued that I erroneously attributed these problems to masturbation, when Mrs. White in the next sentence describing her vision attributes them to “sins and crimes, and the violation of nature’s laws.” Thus, I am accused of taking the statement out of context. Unfortunately, my critics seem to be overlooking the remainder of the disputed paragraph, in which Mrs. White makes very clear just what sins and crimes she is talking about.

On pages 17 and 18 of *An Appeal to Mothers: The Great Cause of the Physical*,

*Mental, and Moral Ruin of Many of the Children of Our Time* (1864), Mrs. White writes the following:

The state of our world was presented before me, and my attention was especially called to the youth of our time. Everywhere I looked, I saw imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen heads, and deformity of every description. Sins and crimes, and the violation of nature's laws, were shown me as the causes of this accumulation of human woe and suffering. I saw such degradation and vile practices, such defiance of God, and I heard such words of blasphemy, that my soul sickened. From what was shown me, a large share of the youth now living are worthless. Corrupt habits are wasting their energies, and bringing upon them loathsome and complicated diseases. Unsuspecting parents will try the skill of one physician after another, who prescribe drugs, when they generally know the real cause of the failing health, but for fear of offending and losing their fees, they keep silent, when as faithful physicians they should expose the real cause. Their drugs only add a second great burden for abused nature to struggle against, which often breaks down in her efforts, and the victim dies. And the friends look upon the death as a mysterious dispensation of providence, when the most mysterious part of the matter is, that nature bore up as long as she did against her violated laws. Health, reason and life, were sacrificed to depraved lust.

I have been shown that children who practice self-indulgence previous to puberty, or the period of merging into manhood and womanhood, must pay the penalty of nature's violated laws at that critical period.

To anyone familiar with the medical language and literature of the mid-nineteenth century, Mrs. White's message is clear: the practice of masturbation will result in "imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen heads, and deformity of every description."

Strangely, as I read the White Estate's review, I found myself empathizing with the authors. They sincerely regard *Prophetess of Health* as a deceptively well-documented study, the conclusions of which are based on arbitrarily selected evidence, unwarranted assumptions and

distortions, if not outright misrepresentations. I feel precisely the same way about their critique. Their fondest hope is that "every reader of *Prophetess of Health* would examine carefully and take into account the whole record before reaching conclusions." My hope is that every reader of the Estate's critique will carefully read and evaluate my study and this response before reaching a conclusion.

Richard W. Schwarz is deservedly one of the most respected historians in Adventist circles. He is also a friend of mine. Thus, I was doubly disappointed by his review, which in places is unfair both to me and, I fear, to himself. His introductory comments on the writing of contemporary history, for example, sometimes caricature rather than clarify the art. While it is true that historians no longer harbor the illusion of writing totally objective history, the best ones I know try nevertheless to be as objective (i.e., fair and factually accurate) as humanly possible. They do not arbitrarily pick a thesis and then go out looking for evidence to support it.

I find his defense of supernatural revelation equally unconvincing, though I admire his valiant efforts to rescue Mrs. White from some embarrassing situations. His suggestions that multiple inspiration might explain her literary indebtedness to others, that her "borrowings" may simply be a reflection of God's method of communication, and that her blanket denials of earthly influences on her health writings were "literary hyperbole" rank with the best of F. D. Nichol's apologies. I suspect, however, that if the church accepts these explanations, its doctrine of inspiration will never be the same.

Like the White Estate, at whose request he originally prepared four-fifths of his review, Schwarz expresses doubts about the reliability of my methods. This certainly is fair, but several errors and misstatements should be cleared up. I did not, as Schwarz suggests, set out "to prove" the influence of nineteenth-century health reformers on Mrs. White's ideas. I discovered the parallels between their writings and hers and then described them in good Rankian fashion. Even Gottschalk, I think, would admit that such parallels in expression constitute convincing evidence of intellectual indebtedness.

Schwarz states that I occasionally use what

he considers to be hyperbole, overly broad generalizations, and poor witnesses, but some of his allegations are without any basis at all. He charges me with overgeneralizing in saying that the Millerite movement caused some cases of insanity. But all I said was that it “*allegedly* [drove] some distraught souls to suicide or insanity” (p. 12). He takes me to task for writing that poor health was “the *‘one constant’* during Ellen White’s early difficult years.” (My italics). But I did not say that. I wrote that “through the years of uncertainty and hardship one constant in Ellen White’s life was poor health” (p. 31).

By far the most potentially damaging of Schwarz’s criticisms concern my allegedly irresponsible use of the testimony of former Adventists who rejected Mrs. White’s claim to divine inspiration: H. E. Carver, D. M. Canright, Frank Belden, Merritt Kellogg and J. H. Kellogg. Similarly, the White Estate in its 24-page critique claims that I consistently give “preferential treatment” to such hostile witnesses.

The unsuspecting reader would no doubt conclude from these observations that my study of Mrs. White rests heavily on an uncritical use of these sources. But such is not the case. A quick count shows that *Prophetess of Health* contains roughly 1,185 citations: 31.7 percent from Mrs. White herself, 32.9 percent from traditional Adventist sources, 31.5 percent from neutral historical documents and a mere 3.9 percent from what might be called persons hostile to the prophetess. Thus, nearly two-thirds of my documentation comes from decidedly pro-Ellen White materials.

But more important than the number of my references to hostile witnesses is the use I made of them. Over half of all the citations to such sources appear in my last chapter, where I discuss the Battle Creek schism. To understand the difficulties that perplexed the Battle Creek brethren, no sources are more pertinent than their own words. This leaves approximately 20 citations from critics in the first seven chapters: Carver (7), J. H. Kellogg (7), Canright (3), M. Kellogg (2) and Belden (1). Except in one instance, the citations to Carver, Canright and Belden refer either to the words or opinions of other persons, not to the views of the critics themselves. And in the one exception (note 20,

p. 238) I pointedly *reject* Canright’s claim that Mrs. White wrote *Testimony No. 12* to justify her husband’s tearing down of the sanitarium. As for J. H. Kellogg, I question his veracity (pp. 120-21), say that he occasionally “had a tendency to embroider” the truth (p. 250), and refer to him as “the sometimes haughty czar of the Adventist medical institutions” (p. 101). This hardly seems like preferential treatment.

Whenever I accepted the testimony of a critic over an apologist, I did so for good reason. One example will suffice. The White Estate in its pamphlet criticizes me for relying on M. Kellogg rather than J. N. Loughborough in dating the last of Mrs. White’s visions in 1879 rather than in 1884. The Estate suggests that I arbitrarily chose the version I personally preferred. But the real reason I opted for 1879 was that Kellogg’s account seemed far more convincing than Loughborough’s comment that Mrs. White’s “last open vision” occurred at the Portland, Oregon, camp meeting in 1884. Writing to his brother John on June 18, 1906, Merritt Kellogg said:

When in Australia in 1894, I boarded in Mrs. White’s family, and while with her there I asked her how long since she had a vision. She then told me that she did not know if she had one since her husband died. She said she might have had one in the night at one time when in Portland, Oregon, but she thought it was a dream. She said Sister Ings was with her in Portland at the time.

I saw Sister Ings a few days ago and asked her about it. She knew nothing of Mrs. W. having a vision in Portland, never saw her in vision. I asked W. C. [White] when his mother had the last vision he knew anything of. He said it was in 1879, before his father died.

I was down in Oakland a few days ago and I had an hour’s visit with Sister L. M. Hall. I asked her many questions about her travels and association with Mrs. W., also about Mrs. W.’s visions, and when she had the last one of which Mrs. Hall had any knowledge.

She said that the last one was in 1879 before Brother White’s death.

Given a choice between Loughborough and Kellogg, I think 99 of 100 historians would unhesitatingly pick Kellogg.

Finally, Schwarz wonders why I did “not use the favorable comments of Canright and the two

Kelloggs that exist from the period before they became disenchanted and bitter toward Ellen White.” But here he overlooks the fact that I quote J. H. Kellogg as saying to Mrs. White “I have loved and respected you as my own mother” and that I mention his belief in the scientific accuracy of her testimonies (p. 191).

Fritz Guy finds two positive benefits in my study of Ellen White: a spur to further investigation and an opportunity for him to correct the “theological misunderstandings” of Seventh-day Adventists regarding inspiration. Other than that, he seems to have little regard for what I have done, believing it to be fundamentally imbalanced, one-sided and biased.

Unlike the White Estate and Schwarz, who are at least specific in their criticisms, Guy prefers innuendo, leaving the impression that my work is historically unreliable but never explaining exactly why. He suggests—without providing any supporting evidence—that I have distorted “the ‘shut door’ theology of the 1840s, Mrs. White’s relation to other health reformers and the significance of the health reform vision of 1863, the plan to enlarge the Western Health Reform Institute, the final dispute with J. H. Kellogg, et cetera.” Here, apparently, he is relying uncritically on the widely circulated White Estate critique, which makes the same points.

Frankly, I cannot understand why Guy thinks I have intentionally ignored evidence regarding the shut door but that F. D. Nichol and A. L. White have “done their homework well.” If Nichol deserves such high marks, why did he deliberately suppress the single most important document relating to Mrs. White’s view of the shut door, her 1847 letter to Joseph Bates? (According to one who assisted Nichol in preparing *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, he ignored the letter because it might raise too many questions.) And why did White overlook such crucial documents as Joseph Turner’s *Advent Mirror*, Otis Nichols’ 1846 letter to William Miller, and other early manuscript sources? Surely, Guy should judge Nichol and White by the same standards he applies to me.

The reason I did not deal with the arguments of apologists like Nichol and White in *Prophets of Health* was to avoid polemical debates. It seemed much more constructive simply to write from the historical sources without constantly alluding to my differences with others.

While I am delighted to have Guy (and others) use my study of Ellen White as the occasion for theological reinterpretation, I prefer to leave an evaluation of his insights to others more theologically competent than I. However, I can comment on three historically related points. First, the view that Mrs. White’s pen was “literally guided by God” is not mine, as Guy implies. The credit (or blame) for that opinion belongs to Jerome Clark, who wrote in the second volume of his 1844 trilogy, published by one of the Adventist publishing houses: “Seventh-day Adventists believe that she [Mrs. White] wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that her pen was literally guided by God” (p. 255). Second, it seems premature for Guy to say that the “systematic coherence and conceptual consistency” of Mrs. White’s voluminous writings is “remarkable” when serious analysis has just begun. And finally, I can assure Guy that in the area of health reform Mrs. White’s *differences* from other reformers, taken collectively, were negligible.

It obviously would be self-serving for me to dwell on the essentially favorable reviews of Norwood, Brodie and Sandeen, but I would like to reemphasize a few of the points they make. Norwood’s distinction between the work of a theologian and a historian is absolutely essential. If only this separation of function were appreciated, I believe that nine-tenths of the church’s discomfort with my study would vanish.

Brodie, in discussing the psychodynamic elements in Mrs. White’s life, touches on the most sensitive and unexplored area in Adventist historiography. Although I am not in a position to evaluate her observations, I do think that Adventists should not shy from psychological analyses of the prophetess. If we are truly committed to discovering the truth about Ellen White, we cannot afford to leave any explanation—no matter how unpleasant—untested.

Of all the reviews, Sandeen’s most nearly captures my own feelings. It is not easy to examine critically the beliefs that have given meaning to one’s life. Sometimes the task can be excruciatingly painful, but it is always immensely rewarding. As the Apostle John once said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

# Ellen White's Authority as Bible Commentator

by Joseph J. Battistone

Two of the most vexing questions concerning Ellen White's writings concern her interpretation and use of Scripture and our interpretation and the use of her writings. The two questions are related. For example, there is Ellen White's interpretation of the story of Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). The glorious appearance of Moses and Elijah with Christ on the mount is understood as a miniature representation of the second coming of Christ. Moses typifies the saints who will be resurrected at that time; Elijah represents those who will be translated.<sup>1</sup> The credibility of this interpretation is enhanced when we consider the preceding passage (Matt. 16:21-28). At its end is the problematic text, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28, RSV). By interpreting the transfiguration as a symbolic portrayal of the second advent of Christ, Ellen White resolves the difficulty.

Nevertheless, there are commentators who interpret the figures in the transfiguration scene differently.<sup>2</sup> For them, Moses represents the law,

and Elijah the prophets. Instead of the second coming of Christ they see in the transfiguration the atoning work of Jesus. Support for this interpretation can be found in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

Some persons in the church view these two interpretations as complementary rather than contradictory. Others, however, find difficulty in accepting an interpretation of Scripture that differs from one advanced by Ellen White. This difficulty arises, to some extent, from the fact that Ellen White's writings are viewed by Seventh-day Adventists as an inspired—and hence authoritative—commentary on the Bible. But the problem may also develop from a failure to understand in a precise way the purpose of Ellen White's writings. And if we do misunderstand the nature of her commentary, we will inevitably misinterpret and misuse her work.

It is important to distinguish between belief in the inspiration of Ellen White, and the theory of how inspiration functions. I may believe her writings are inspired and, at the same time, fail to understand and use them correctly. This is why faith cannot be a substitute for skills in thinking and reading.

We need also to clarify the functional difference between contemporary biblical commentaries and the writings of Ellen White. Commentators today often use tools and techniques in

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their Bible study that Ellen White did not use. Moreover, their approach to Bible study involves techniques that fall outside the scope of Ellen White's concern. Questions relating to the study of ancient manuscripts, the linguistic and literary character of words in the Bible, the authorship, date and place of a particular writing, or the various literary forms of the material in the Gospels—these are raised from a perspective much different from that of Ellen White's.

**T**o be sure, the truth of the Bible—the knowledge of God's saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ—is not dependent upon our ability to answer such questions. Still, the knowledge gained through such inquiry will enhance and render more precise our understanding of saving truth. So, we cannot dismiss the work of biblical

**“A high view of Ellen White's writings can be easily misapplied. It would be inappropriate to use her writings to settle questions relating to the reading of a text, the meaning of a word, the authorship or date of a biblical book.”**

scholars as unimportant for a practical approach to Bible study. While biblical scholarship is not necessary to grasp a knowledge of God's saving power in Jesus Christ, it is indispensable for understanding the historical process by which God's revelation has come to us.

If Ellen White's approach to the Bible, then, is different from that of contemporary scholarship, how are we to understand her contribution to the church? I believe that Ellen White's genius—that is, her divine inspiration—is revealed in her understanding and presentation of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Here lies the uniqueness of her work. She takes a profound and abstract theological problem—the

problem of evil—and discloses in a sublime way its practical significance for each individual. Consequently, her writings assume a sense of urgency akin to that of the Scriptures. Indeed, her keen sensitivity to sin and her profound awareness of the forces of evil operative in the world, have given her ministry prophetic significance<sup>4</sup> for the church. Her works enjoy a unique status in the church, second in importance only to that of the Scriptures.

Without question, the theme of the great controversy is the most important in her writings. It constitutes the basic perspective from which she interprets the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

As a case in point, consider her commentary on the prophet Elijah. Ellen White devotes more space to his life and ministry than to that of any other prophet.<sup>6</sup> Upon reading what she says, two points of emphasis emerge which explain her keen interest in Elijah. First, she refers repeatedly to his character—his unflinching loyalty, dauntless courage and admirable faith.<sup>7</sup> Second, she refers, by way of contrast, to the striking condition of the society of Elijah's time—its alarming apostasy, gross immorality and rampant lawlessness.<sup>8</sup>

The contrast between the character of the prophet and the society of his time are important to Ellen White because of their typological significance in the scheme of the great controversy. This becomes clear in Chapter 14 of *Prophets and Kings*. The entire chapter is a homily on the poverty of spiritual leadership in the modern world, the widespread infidelity and apostasy, and the alarming indifference to the decalogue resulting from the impoverished leadership. Such abysmal apathy, she argues, is the reason for violence and crime in the world.

One of her major concerns in this chapter is the seventh-day Sabbath. Modern-day Baalism—the counterpart or antitype of Israelite apostasy—comes to surface in the “well-nigh universal disregard of the Sabbath commandment.”<sup>9</sup> While men and women pursue riches, fame and pleasure, she notes, they neglect Bible study, reject God's law, despise His love and ignore His messages. But God has a faithful remnant who will not bend their knee in false worship.

In the chapters on Elijah's ministry, references and allusions to the great controversy



abound in the form of brief homilies, object lessons and general counsel. According to Ellen White, Elijah typifies the saints living at the time of Christ's return.<sup>10</sup> The crisis Israel faced on Mount Carmel represents the great test awaiting the church in the last days. Baal worship in ancient Israel corresponds to apostate Protestantism today.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the message to be proclaimed by the remnant church—the “Elijah message”—is essentially a message of judgment.<sup>12</sup>

One further observation is important. In her study of the Old Testament prophets, including Elijah, Ellen White focuses more attention on their actions than on their words. She is more interested in relating the practical results of the prophetic preaching than in explaining the theological significance of the actual messages.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, her writings tend to be more homiletical than exegetical. This becomes more apparent in the frequent parallels she draws between the time of the prophets and the period of the church today. These parallels enable her to draw lessons from the biblical material which relate to the theme of the great controversy.<sup>14</sup>

This points to a fundamental feature of her writings—an interest in the practical nature and value of Bible study. To her way of thinking, Bible study is more than a matter of learning facts or concepts. It is an exercise that generates from an attitude of prayer, faith and humility, culminating in the spiritual edification or enrichment of the student.<sup>15</sup> In other words, there is an inseparable relation between Bible study and character development. The study of the Bible, Ellen White believes, will eventually lead to a dynamic change in the thinking and behavior of the student.

The tendency of Ellen White to draw attention to the controversy between Christ and Satan, particularly as it relates to the individual,<sup>16</sup> clearly demonstrates her own understanding of the practical significance of Bible study. At the same time, it offers insights into the uniqueness of her prophetic ministry. Through her inspired writings, we gain a better understanding of the role of Seventh-day Adventists, collectively as well as individually, in the closing stage of the great controversy.<sup>17</sup>

The very nature and purpose of her work, then, determine the uniqueness and, hence, the

value of her writings. These writings abound with insights into the crafty schemes which Satan employs against the world to counteract the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ. She wishes, first, to alert her readers to the reality of Satan's presence in the world, to his cunning influence in the church, and to the subtle temptations he employs against individuals. She wishes, second, to clarify the nature and consequences of the great controversy between Christ and Satan in order to persuade her readers to choose the way of righteousness and truth. While this takes her over many topics and fields of study—history, religion, theology, science, health, education and others—the basic framework throughout is the theme of the great controversy.

What, then, do we mean when we affirm a unique place—a place second only to the Bible—for her writings in the church? We mean that we cannot simply place them on the same level of importance and authority as that of other commentaries. Such a high view of her writings, can be easily misunderstood and misapplied, however. It would be inappropriate to use her writings to settle questions relating to the reading of a text, the meaning of a word, the authorship or date of a biblical book, etc. We would consider it quite strange, for example, to defend the use of the King James Version against modern translations on the grounds that Ellen White used the former and gave no explicit instruction for the need of the latter. And yet, an “all-purpose approach” to her writings leaves us vulnerable to such reasoning.

On the basis of the observations advanced above it seems more accurate to describe her interpretation of Scripture as primarily a religious exposition of the great controversy theme on a cosmic, historical and personal level, than to characterize it as scientific exegesis in a technical sense. In no way is such a classification denigratory. To the contrary! It may help prevent further misunderstanding and misuse of her writings. If her writings were designed to answer questions of a scholarly nature, their significance would be restricted to a relatively small group, and would in time become dated. Such is the nature of scholarship. But her writings have a deeper purpose and a wider scope.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 422, and *Prophets and Kings*, p. 277.

2. The different interpretation is not due to a liberal or modernist mindset. See, for example, Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 155.

3. During the New Testament period, the figures of Moses and Elijah were understood to represent the essence of the law and the prophets. See, for example, Matt. 23:2, Luke 16:29; cf. also Luke 24:44 and John 1:17 for Moses. References to Elijah appear in Matt. 16:14; 17:10-11; cf. Mal. 4:5-6, where Elijah is depicted as the one who prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah.

4. By the expression "prophetic significance," I wish to include more than the predicatory aspect of her ministry. Without attributing canonical value to her writings, I believe her role in the formation, development and sustenance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is comparable in some respects to the part performed by Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist in the history of Israel and Judaism.

5. The dominant role of this theme in her writings is evident in the titles appearing in the "Conflict of the Ages Series." Note, for example, such topics as "Why Was Sin Permitted?", "Satan's Enmity Against the Law," and "Ancient and Modern Sorcery" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. The importance of the theme is reflected, moreover, in Ellen White's selection and application of biblical passages. Often the amount of space that she devotes to a passage is out of proportion to the emphasis given to it in the Bible. Her discussion of the sin of Nadab and Abihu is a clear example. She devotes a full chapter to an incident that is presented in the Scriptures in three verses (see Chapter 31 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Compare this with Lev. 10:1-3), whereas she makes no comment on a large portion of the book of Leviticus. While she quotes from other portions of Leviticus, she does not offer a systematic exposition of the book. The great controversy theme appears also in connection with numerous character sketches, is found in the object lessons which are frequently drawn from the Bible and, finally, in a typology that is peculiar to Ellen White.

6. In *Prophets and Kings*, she devotes six chapters (Chapters 9-14) to the prophet Elijah. The book of Daniel is given about the same coverage (see Chapters 39-44).

7. See *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 140-142, 147, 152, 156-157.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 127, 133.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

10. "Elijah was a type of the saints . . . who at the close of the earth's history will be changed from mortal to immortal, and be translated to heaven without seeing death" (*Ibid.*, p. 227.).

11. Two features characterizing apostate Protestantism as the antitype of apostate Israel in the time of Elijah are said to be Sunday legislation and liquor traffic supported by Protestants (*Ibid.*, p. 186).

12. According to Ellen White, it is the message of the three angels of Revelation 14 (*Ibid.*, pp. 188-189).

13. As a case in point, we cite her study of the book of Daniel. For the most part, it is not the prophecies that receive attention, but the stories of Daniel and his companions. Six chapters (Chapters 39-44) contain moral lessons which stress the practical value of the biblical narratives for the life of faith. While she affirms the relevance of the prophetic portion (Daniel 7-12) for the church in the last days, she offers no comment on the material.

14. In connection with her study of the book of Jonah, for example, she underscores the urgency of our mission in the world today, particularly in the great cities. The imminence of God's final judgment is proclaimed through conditions of moral decadence and social injustice, coupled with natural catastrophes. During this period of probation, the church must rise to its task and announce the "glad tidings of salvation" (*Ibid.*, pp. 274-278.)

15. The inquiry characterizing this type of Bible study has more than academic significance since it has to do with questions of ultimate concern, namely, the eternal destiny of the individual. Far more is at stake here than the solution of a literary riddle or a historical problem. At the center of such Bible study are questions relating to issues of life and death.

16. This is evident in the numerous character sketches of Old Testament personalities. Some examples are her portraits of Aaron, Miriam, Korah, Balaam, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Samuel and Saul (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 319-320, 360-361, 385, 395, 447, 449, 452, 475-477, 557-558, 561-562, 568, 572, 575, 602, 635, 684-688).

17. The idea of a controversy between Christ and Satan is not, of course, unique to Ellen White. What is original to her, however, is her understanding of the place of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the scheme of the controversy. This seems to be one of her foremost concerns in volume one of *Spiritual Gifts*.

# THE CHURCH AND THE WAR IN LEBANON

## I. Interview with A Union President

by Malcolm Russell

Robert Darnell was most recently president of the Middle East Union of Seventh-day Adventists. He holds a doctorate in Near Eastern languages and literature from the University of Michigan, and is a new member of the faculty of Loma Linda University. The following interview took place Aug. 25, 1976, shortly after Darnell's return to the United States. A note about the interviewer may be found on page 46.

—The Editors

**Russell:** In your score of years in the Middle East, you have been through many crises, but this one has probably been different in duration and destruction. How have our church members and institutions fared up to the time of your departure in July?

**Darnell:** The Lord has shown remarkable providence over us and our properties. Despite the heavy fighting, physical damage has been limited mostly to broken windows, the results of stray bullets rather than malice. At the

'Ashrafiyya Church, for example, which lies near the Museum and the dividing line in Beirut, every window has been broken. On Sabtiyya hill, where most of our institutions are located, the damage was generally less, particularly before the fighting around Tal al-Za'tar.

Our members likewise generally remained safe, although Krikor Yessayan, a dedicated binder at Middle East Press, was killed last fall while buying food for his family. Others have recovered from wounds, or lost some possessions, but God has blessed and cared for his members.

**Russell:** Was this protection observed by others?

**Darnell:** Certainly. Until this latest fighting around Tal al-Za'tar, children played in Sabtiyya Street, and refugees came to the area "because God was protecting the hill." You must remember that tragedy has struck almost every home, that proportionately 2,000,000 Americans would have died.

**Russell:** Aside from the physical destruction, how could our institutions operate during the fighting? How did Middle East College complete a full academic year when no other institution of higher learning in the country managed to do so?

**Darnell:** To answer the second question first, when the battles first started, it was not unlike the past—the periodic turmoil which we have experienced in Lebanon in 1958, 1971 and 1973. We thought that the fighting would pass; certainly, it would be over for the summer tourist season. Thus morale was high, and problems at the college escalated at a slow pace: if the shell had hit the cafeteria in the beginning, the school would naturally have been closed quickly.

**Russell:** What's this about shelling the cafeteria?

**Darnell:** Both the college administration building and cafeteria were hit by shells in July, during the fighting for Tal al-Za'tar. The administration building was not structurally damaged, although the glass around the stairwell was sent flying. On the other hand, the cafeteria suffered

**“The serious question is really, ‘Can a national constituency survive?’ There is little doubt that when peace comes there will be fewer members, but hopefully there will also be wider opportunities for witness.”**

a direct hit, at the end of mealtime, by a 122 mm shell. This knocked one of those hewn limestone blocks out of the wall and sent it flying across the room, missing the students seated within before it hit the opposite wall. The shell itself did not follow the stone inside the building, but rather fell back outside, and there exploded. To those who were there, the absence of serious injuries was evidence of God's providence—but I doubt that we would have continued the school year if something like this had happened at the beginning.

**Russell:** Back to where you were before we

interrupted: How did the college manage throughout the school year?

**Darnell:** It was probably the best learning experience the students ever had. They did learn their normal courses, but in addition they experienced God's care in a very personal way. One result of this was the special *Pine Echoes* [the Middle East College yearbook], which contained student testimonials of God's care.

Now all this does not mean that we did not have problems, particularly with supplies. Herbert Faimann, at the college bakery, tried to continue deliveries of his bread, but eventually the trucks could not cross the demarcation line to stores in West Beirut. New outlets opened up, and he continued to produce at the usual level. However, Brother Faimann had no inside track on flour, and the high-grade imported quality which he uses became very scarce after the port was closed by fighting. At one point, it seemed that his supplies would be exhausted; almost none were left. Then a truck entered the city, carrying flour for other bakeries. The driver, fearing cross-fire and even murder, decided to cut his route short and asked for nearby bakeries. He was directed to Middle East College, where he sold the whole load—right at the time of exhaustion.

Similarly, gasoline reserves were used up. Some of our people went down to the main street, to hail down tanker trucks and ask for deliveries. One who refused to deliver his present load promised to do something in the future. Now our workers thought that this was polite evasion, but two days later the same driver brought so much oil that the storage tanks were filled to overflowing, and they had to call in families to bring their cars and cans to purchase all that the driver had supplied.

Fuel oil, used for heating, seemed miraculously to last until spring, when the weather was warmer and the heat was no longer needed.

There was always enough water and food, but prices were sometimes high. Gasoline was very scarce, and was stolen from some cars, but there was nowhere to drive most of the time, anyway.

**Russell:** Besides the college, how did the larger Adventist community manage during the fighting?

**Darnell:** Church attendance grew. Elder Schantz, then the president of the East Mediterranean Field, conducted several excellently

attended evangelistic series despite nearby gunfire. Amid the fighting, there were people who looked for something spiritual.

**Russell:** Would you say, then, that the Lebanese, long famed for worldly sophistication, are in their suffering turning to God and seeking comfort in spiritual things?

**Darnell:** Unfortunately, that's not really the case. Satan uses war to influence the minds of man, and while people look for security, and more come to church, Christ's love and teachings actually have almost no place in most people's minds.

There are also serious disadvantages in trying to operate a church mission under these circumstances. The literature evangelism, work was halted by the kidnappings, torture and killings. Then there have been the tremendous economic costs of continuing to operate during the conflict. The Middle East Press, for example, which previously shipped books directly from the airport now has had to truck them through one militia checkpoint after another, finally leaving the country and reshipping them abroad. The five primary and secondary schools also suffered: with the students' parents out of work, they were not able to pay tuition. Rather than turn away students who in some cases had been attending our schools for years, we allowed them to continue. Now, of course, our schools owe great debts and in practical terms are bankrupt. Only large aid from the church in the rest of the world will reestablish our work again.

**Russell:** With much of your income dried up, how were you able to pay the teachers and other workers during the fighting?

**Darnell:** To understand how that was done, you will have to remember that the major institutions—the college, press, division and union—are all located on one hill, which lies within the Christian zone. One bank remained open in Jounieh [the small port north of Beirut which has served as the Christian “capital”], and maintained ties with a bank in Paris. The General Conference sent funds through France to us; while a couple of times the payroll was late because the roads were closed, the funds eventually got through. While talking about help from the General Conference, I would like to mention the special gift the General Conference sent to each of our workers, national as well as foreign.

**Russell:** You mentioned nationals and foreigners. Was there any tension between these two groups as a result of the troubles?

**Darnell:** No, not really. There was fear that when it became too dangerous only the missionaries would be evacuated. It wasn't so much a point of controversy, but of concern. Elder Schmidt [C. E. Schmidt, the Afro-Mideast Division treasurer] did point out the particular obligation of the church to return a worker to his homeland; there were also assurances that the Lebanese would not be ignored. In fact, there was no serious talk of evacuation by local denominational leaders until the final battle (Tal al-Za'tar).

**Russell:** Did the outside funds, foreign workers and large institutions give the impression in Lebanon that the Adventists were American-oriented, and likely to be aligned with particular political groups?

**Darnell:** The question really assumes too much. I do not think that Adventism is perceived as particularly American—there have been too many European missionaries for that. On the other hand, we are viewed as “western.” But we have avoided alliances with political groups or objectives and we do not seem to be identified in the public mind with any particular political group. Geography placed most of our institutions and members within the Kata'ib (Phalangist) zone, but our welfare work has served all.

**Russell:** What kind of relations has the Adventist Church in general, and the College in particular, had with the various sides which are now fighting in Lebanon?

**Darnell:** With the political groups as such, we have had very little official contact. It has not been our policy to become involved in local politics. On the other hand, we have let our beliefs be known, and students from all communities came to Middle East College over the years.

**Russell:** Could you be more specific?

**Darnell:** Well, take the Druze community, for example, one of whose leaders, Kamal Jumblat, is a nonsmoking vegetarian. He is now the number one leftist. Druze students have come to Middle East College and enjoyed the clean air, food and life style. The Adventist community would probably welcome certain of the goals of the Left, such as the establishment of a secular

state and the abolishment of confessionalism in the government. On the other hand, if secularization meant the elimination of parochial schools, there would be great hardship.

Russell: Well, what about the Right?

Darnell: Much the same could be said here. The Maronite Community has also given students to Middle East College. They have given Lebanon its uniqueness—a character which has made it a bridge between east and west. Adventists chose Lebanon as the site for Middle East College because of the nation's special character. We remain aware, of course, that there are fanatical religious elements who are not pleased to see Seventh-day Adventists in the country. We don't think they dominate the right any more than the left is dominated by its extremist elements.

Russell: As a result would our work be hurt if the "left" won?

Darnell: As far as what might happen if any particular party achieves complete victory, it is difficult, and probably unwise, to conjecture in print. A negotiated peace, by confirming a pluralist society, might be particularly beneficial and at the same time lie within Lebanese tradition. At any rate, whoever wins, our work is under God's care, and we will continue to carry on, perhaps with greater liberty than before.

Russell: But given the brutality and closeness of the civil war, hasn't the Adventist community, deliberately or not, been linked with a particular side?

Darnell: We have been a help to all communities. We remained, and paid our workers when other foreign organizations pulled out, leaving their workers unemployed. The population has generally recognized that the Adventists did not come merely to enjoy Lebanon's prosperity, and then leave in adversity. Even the local Phalangist militia saw this: we were specifically exempted from the shakedowns and demands for protection money. However, the Adventist community had already collected a sum of about \$1,500, which was made available for use at this time. Informed of this, the militia commander exclaimed, "Other churches talk, the Adventists do!"

In fact, it has been a very good thing that our members have stayed out of the fighting. For example, once in leftist-held territory, a local militia commander was assassinated. Like other homes, those of our members were searched,

and often ransacked, with the household lined up against the wall. For them it was a very frightening experience. Had they possessed any guns, they would have been executed.

Russell: Has this position of noninvolvement led to serving the interests of those around? Have the militias, for example, tried to fight from our institutions?

Darnell: Well, obviously we will not oppose armed men, but our policy has been to inform any would-be occupiers that the area by agreement is not to be involved in fighting because it is religious and educational property. This may make the group leader halt and check with his headquarters, which will know of the understanding.

Russell: Turning from the recent past to the near future, what do you expect will happen to the Adventist Church in Lebanon?

Darnell: This is obviously a most critical time for decisions. Most of the Middle East College student body has decided to transfer to another college for the coming year, and many of the faculty have done so, too.

Much of the Lebanese population has been forced by the war circumstances to abandon

**“We remained when other foreign organizations pulled out. The population has generally recognized that the Adventists did not come merely to enjoy Lebanon's prosperity, and then leave in adversity.”**

their homes. The general experience is that an unoccupied property is looted. However, we still have workers remaining at each of our institutions.

Our Lebanese members recognize that opportunities for jobs with the church and for schooling for their children may be lost. This leads to emigration. The serious question is really “Can a national constituency survive?” There is little doubt that when peace comes there will be fewer members, but hopefully there will also be wider opportunities for personal witness.

**Russell:** Isn't this what some have said for years—that our membership in Lebanon and much of the Middle East was far too dependent on denominational employment?

**Darnell:** This war does emphasize the obvious—that if the church stopped employment, Sabbath problems, economic needs and other matters might make our members leave.

**Russell:** Leave the church?

**Darnell:** No; leave the country, emigrate. For many of our members, there is no real alternative. This, of course, is a weakness. It shows how difficult it is for the Church to set deep roots in the community, but perhaps that is God's will—we are, after all, pilgrims here. Our church is not alone in this problem. Emigration from Lebanon is something of a national tradition.

**Russell:** You have now told us about the experiences of the past year and the difficulties looming in the immediate future. Are there any long-term lessons which you can see resulting from these events?

**Darnell:** Certainly. We found that God provided everything we needed. His care was unbelievable compared to the sufferings of the people around us.

We can perhaps generalize somewhat about the specific qualities of those who decided to remain at their posts in hazardous times. In the first place, of course, some people can tolerate more danger than others. Secondly, there must be a faith in God as a sustainer. One phrase seemed obvious to those of us who remained, and was frequently repeated: "We can go ahead because God is with us."

The third requirement for effective work in conditions of personal risk is an understanding of the objectives and purposes. One must have the feeling "I'm here for a purpose, I know it, and I must fulfill it." Some jobs are obviously more purposeful than others—the welfare director, the baker and the local teacher all serve specific needs. On the other hand, someone teaching American students the same courses as they would receive in the United States is less

likely to see any necessity of doing this in some dangerous spot.

If we really believe that we're going to complete the work under difficulties, as we have been told, then we need to have a growing trust in God's care; we need to improve our threshold for handling difficulty, and we must gain a well-defined image of ourselves individually and as a church. Only then can we achieve its purposes.

Thinking specifically of Lebanon, we have learned how easily the spirit of brutality and inhumanity can possess people who are normally courteous, hospitable and kind. What has hurt the most, even more than the daily tragedies of destruction, is the hatred in people's hearts towards others of whom they know nothing: the label "Moslem," or "Christian" is enough to evoke the darkest passions.

**Russell:** What about our wider mission work—will strife in Lebanon between Christians and Moslems hinder our work in other Islamic countries?

**Darnell:** It will increase the difficulties. Reports of atrocities have often been slanted for local consumption, and the news from Lebanon has led to a new bitterness towards Christians in the rest of the Moslem world. However, the increase in Moslem opposition only challenges us to reach an excellence of Christlikeness that God can use to remove that bitterness. The Moslem-Christian confrontation is further reason for us to seek out the means by which the Holy Spirit works in the Moslem world. The Holy Spirit may work as the Moslem world consolidates against the Christian to expose the real aims of the apostate forces in the Last Day. Without this reinforcement of resistance to Christianity, the Moslem lands might suffer a cultural collapse which at this time could further the spread of apostasy in the Moslem world more than open doors to righteousness. While current events in the world may increase difficulties for our work here and there, we also see them controlled so as to accomplish the divine purpose. The strife in Lebanon is doubtless an example of this fact.

**Russell:** Thank you very much.

## II. Recent Political History in Lebanon

by Malcolm Russell

In the summer of 1974, the *Daily Star*, Beirut's English newspaper, printed a satirical article suggesting that the south of Lebanon be rented as an arena to settle military conflicts around the world. After all, the Palestinians and Israelis were already using it for that purpose.

The author could hardly have realized that within little more than a year Beirut itself, the commercial center and fleshpot of the Middle East, would itself be blown apart by its Lebanese and Palestinian residents.

The suddenness, ferocity, and duration of the fighting caught many by surprise, for as recently as the spring of 1975 political analysts were still commenting on the "remarkable stability and absorptive capacity of the Lebanese system in the face of the country's pluralistic, heterogeneous makeup."<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, however, the conflict does not seem surprising. Lebanese politics, while democratic in form, have been more akin to an international balance of power rather than any model of a nation state.<sup>2</sup> The Republic of Lebanon, in fact, was and is a state at best. It is not a nation, but a unit drawn up to meet the requirements of the modern world and the past desires of a certain section of its population.

Greater Lebanon was formed by France, in 1920, as a colonial enterprise, in contrast to the traditional Jabal Lubnan (Mt. Lebanon). The latter had remained an outpost of Christianity and a refuge for minorities for centuries. The new state was the fulfillment of Maronite Catholic aims: to the lean but free Mountain was added the commercial wealth of Beirut and the fertility

of the Biqa' valley to the East. The port of Tripoli, with excellent communications to the interior, was also added, as was the predominantly Shi'a Moslem area bordering on Palestine.

Thus, what had been a largely Maronite and Druze (heterodox Moslem) principality under Ottoman rule became a state with a slight Christian majority holding to one culture while a large Moslem minority looked to union with Syria, defined by fluctuatingly limited or expansive borders.

With the coming of independence from France in 1943, relations between the major communities were defined by the National Pact, which stipulated national policy on the chief issues of the day. Both Moslems and Christians were to turn away from political links with other nations, and support an independent country. Internally, a confessional government was established, with the president of the republic and the military commander both from the Maronite sect. The National Pact was reaffirmed by the 1958 civil war, which blocked an attempt by a Maronite president to gain greater power and a second term. Foreign policy, too, was affected: henceforth, it would be basically neutralist, rather than pro-Western.

Leadership and power in the country have generally gone to traditional notable families, who have been compared to city bosses in American cities at the turn of the century. Their careers have spanned almost the entire independence period; Kamal Jumblat, Pierre Jumayyil and Camille Cham'un, today respectively the leader of the Moslem left, Christian right, and interior minister, united in 1952 to oust a president. All three of these men, and many other deputies like them, established "parties" and organized private militias, but in fact gained and maintained power as individuals. In this, they were aided by the electoral system, under which

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the unicameral parliament was apportioned on the basis of religion, and voters generally selected only the local representative of their religion. Electoral reform, by creating larger districts or even a single one for the whole nation, might have upset the traditional aristocracy by forcing them to appeal for votes in other religious communities and to create alliances—parties—with ideologically similar politicians of other sects. To date, however, no uniquely Lebanese party spanning the religious divisions of society has appeared.

Within such a pluralistic state, it was natural that many freedoms would be maintained. The press, worship, education and even personal status have been largely beyond the government's control; similarly, the levantine mercantile traditions continued, with private enterprise providing services which elsewhere in the Middle East and Europe were state responsibility. As a center of banking and commerce, few controls were placed on the economy, and imported goods were widely in evidence.

But behind the facade of the new skyscrapers and land values among the highest in the world, there were certain crucial government weaknesses, which are generally conceded to have been an element in the growing dissatisfaction which provided the background for the present conflict. Personal income lay largely beyond the tax structure, which was generally based on indirect taxation and was largely regressive. Income was very unequally distributed: about half the population, in 1959, was considered poor or destitute, while four percent of the inhabitants earned a third of the wealth. These statistics have not been updated, but there is reason to believe that the gap between rich and poor has been growing. The gap certainly has become more visible, despite a growing professional class in some ways akin to a "middle class" in the United States. Related to this socially undesirable feature was relatively high unemployment, despite a system of labor permits which excluded many Palestinians (who might have even been born in Lebanon) and other non-Lebanese.

Other aspects of the economic system were not so free, and the general public frequently suffered from governmental measures. Importers

were allowed exclusive franchises on their goods, thus allowing some monopoly profit. Despite a steep revaluation of the Lebanese lira, greater than that of the German mark against the dollar (1973-74), prices of imported goods rose rather than fell. Beirut was no longer an attractive place to purchase merchandise ranging from Swiss watches to American pens and Japanese cameras, and certain goods—inexpensive textiles from the Far East, for example—did not seem to find their way into the country. From this the poor suffered, but Parisian fashions were displayed for the wealthy at prices the poor could not imagine.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, the economy was growing, at a rate close to ten percent annually, but the lower income groups were not helped by government policies such as a monopoly concession granted to one company in 1975 for fishing rights for the whole coast. Even those who had done well in the capitalist economy were strongly critical of the government's corruption and inefficiency,<sup>4</sup> and in recent years both left and right agreed on the need for significant reform.

Given the favorable Middle East economic situation, it is conceivable that concessions by the Maronites and Sunni Moslem notables could have satisfied many of the relatively moderate demands of the leftists. However, concession and change seem to have been contrary to the personality of the president, Sulayman Franjiyya, and the catalyst necessary for full-scale bloodshed was present in the form of the Palestinian guerrilla movement. The Lebanese state no longer could claim that most significant characteristic of governmental authority: a monopoly on the use of force.

Operating out of refugee camps which the Lebanese military were unable to defend from Israeli attack, the Palestinian Resistance in all its splintered forms soon became a state within a state. Guerrillas crossing the border were not subject to the same passport controls as civilians. Checkpoints of Palestinians demanded the identity papers of Lebanese citizens on Lebanese soil, and camouflaged as guerrillas, thieves stole automobiles and lesser valuables. Insecurity reigned, there were political kidnappings and murders, and the Lebanese press, despite legal freedoms, could no longer objectively report Palestinian affairs.

Both sides of the political spectrum utilized

the Palestinian presence in the political struggle. The left demanded reforms as a pre-condition for treating the "security issue," and the right, in keeping with tradition, required order first, then concessions. In effect, a new National Pact was needed to unify the country over new issues, and the leftists for the first time had a military force as disciplined and organized as their Maronite rivals on the right. Instead of compromise, Franjiyya attempted to bypass the traditional Moslem leadership and crack down on the guerrillas in 1973. He failed, and the inability of the police and army to halt fighting between the rightist, Maronite Kata'ib (Phalange) Party, and the Palestinians became evident over the next year. Armed and supplied from abroad, liberally financed by foreign

nations and groups, each side prepared for a conflict that was increasingly probable.

When it did come, and heavy fighting broke out, all Lebanon, not just the south, became the arena for a war among gladiators who had begun fighting over local issues but increasingly represented regional and international power struggles. Preserving the unity and integrity of Lebanon required the introduction of a peace-keeping force which would have conflicted with another currently popular ideal, that of not intervening militarily. Countries outside the Middle East made nonintervention their highest priority and so could do little but await the end of a conflict whose sides had been largely determined by religion, but whose goals were now almost completely political.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Peter Gubser, reviewing "Pluralism and Party Transformation in Lebanon: al-Kata'ib, 1936-70." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 29 no. 2 (Spring 1975), pp. 220-221.

2. See Michael Hudson's aptly entitled *The Precarious Republic*, probably the best book on Lebanese politics.

3. A reporter for the British press was amazed to find refugee urchins hawking gold cigarette lighters for 1.50

Lebanese lira each. The youngsters had looted them and were selling them for far below their value.

4. The postal service, while moderately successful in handling incoming mail for Beirut's main post office boxes, completely failed internally. A letter would take a week to ten days from posting in Beirut to delivery in Tripoli, 60 miles away.

## III. A Sociologist Looks At His Homeland

by Anees Haddad

**T**he Seventh-day Adventist Church has made Lebanon the nerve-center of its work in the Middle East and East Africa. In and around Beirut are the headquarters of the Afro-Mideast Division, the Middle Eastern Union, the East Mediterranean Field, Middle East Press, the Voice of Prophecy Correspondence Schools, and very significantly, Middle East College, a senior college affiliated with Loma Linda University.

Most of the denominational workers from Istanbul in the north to Khartoum in the south, and from Teheran in the east to Alexandria in

the west, have received their full or partial education at Middle East College. Situated about seven miles from the heart of Beirut, it sits astride a hill occupying about 70 acres, with a majestic view of the city and the Mediterranean Sea beyond.

Just to the northwest of the college sits Middle East Press, a multilanguage literature powerhouse for millions of people. Less than a block downhill is the headquarters of the Middle East Union Field, which has jurisdiction now over what used to be the Middle East Division. One half-mile downrange towards the capital is the headquarters of the Afro-Mideast Division of Seventh-day Adventists, a fence-encircled compound from which the affairs of 165,000 Seventh-day Adventists are managed.

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When the hill where these institutions are located was inhabited by more coyotes than men, it was called Sabtiyeh (meaning Sab-batarians), after the majority of inhabitants. But as the area flourished and \$2,000-a-month apartments were built, the elite who moved into Sabtiyeh soon outnumbered the Adventists. Sab-batarianism smacks too much of Jewishness—not exactly an advantage in the Arab world. Consequently, the non-Adventist population successfully petitioned the authorities to change the name from Sabtiyeh to Firdous, meaning Paradise. But the old name stuck, so that today when a puzzled taxidriver asks a passenger, “Where on earth is Paradise?” the ready answer is, “In Sabtiyeh, of course.”

The Adventists of Lebanon have a few concentrations of members. Paradise is the biggest and the most influential. During any troubles between Christians and Moslems, or between Lebanese and Palestinians, Paradise is potentially in trouble. Directly to the north of the hill is a large settlement of Shi'a Moslems. Directly to the southwest, less than one mile away from the hill, is the site of Tal al-Za'tar, one of the largest Palestinian camps in Lebanon. It was besieged for two months and finally captured by the Christian Phalangists during the summer of 1976.

Another Adventist stronghold is in north Lebanon, on the way to the remaining forests of cedars. This center is in the midst of a fertile plain with mostly Christian villages. From this general area the immediate past president of Lebanon, Sulaiman Franjeh, comes; despite his strong rightist position, many of these villages have leftist Christian elements. South of Beirut the Adventists have another concentration of members in a village whose inhabitants are mainly Moslem Druze.

In Beirut itself there are three major Adventist centers. One is near the Christian Armenian community, but close enough to the Moslem Kurds of the Karantine area that it was threatened and eventually occupied at one time by Kurds fleeing the fighting and seeking refuge. Another center is by the Damascus-Beirut main highway, within a block of the Beirut National Museum at the foot of Christian 'Ashrafieh, a hill that dominates Beirut. The Voice of Prophecy headquarters is there, along with a large evangelistic center and the offices of the East Medi-

teranean Field. The third location is in western Beirut between the Christian and Moslem areas. It was in this area that two of the workers of the church had their homes attacked and looted. Fortunately, no one was killed or hurt in the terrifying incidents.

Ninety-nine percent of the Adventists in Lebanon come from solid Christian backgrounds, as do other Middle Eastern Adventists. As far as their political loyalties are concerned, the missionaries have done a good job of divesting them of any political loyalties. It is very clear, however, that they do consider themselves a part of the Christian communities, and Adventists socially identify themselves with Christians. A very, very tiny percentage of Adventists in Lebanon (mostly the northern Lebanese) may have some political life. It is my understanding, however, that no Adventists were actually involved in the recent battles for Lebanon.

The Adventists in the Middle East universally espouse the basic denominational stand that the creation of the modern state of Israel is in no way to be interpreted as a fulfillment of prophecy. They are in sympathy with the Palestinians, and in general they would say that the basic problem in Lebanon is not between the Christians and the Moslems, but between the edgy Lebanese Christians supported by some moderate Moslems on the one hand, and the Palestinians, supported by militant leftiest Moslems, on the other.

But it must be made absolutely clear that any opposition to the Palestine Liberation Organization or the Palestine Liberation Army is not opposition to these groups' cause. The Christians of Lebanon have been among the most indignant at the injustices done to their southern neighbors and fellow-Arabs—the Palestinianians. Some of the most articulate defenders of the Palestinian cause on both the national and international levels are Christian Lebanese. Many of these are not even politicians, but rather men and women of letters who defend the Palestinian cause because of their strong conviction that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people have been violated.

In seminars in Middle Eastern Studies (a program I coordinate at Loma Linda University), in conversations with Arabs from all kinds of backgrounds, in direct contact with the situation in Lebanon during past summers, especially that of 1975, I have come to believe that there are some theories of the cause of the crisis that many hold almost hysterically. Here they are:

1) *The Outside Intervention Theory*. I should say "Outside Intervention Theories" and not just one "theory." Whether the intervention is seen as coming from Syria, the Palestinians, Iraq, Libya, Israel, or the Central Intelligence Agency, most Lebanese believe that their tragedy is caused by direct outside intervention. Lebanon, with its totally open society, has been a haven for any kind of activity desired. Some feel that Syria, Iraq and Libya are intervening to bring

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the Christians to heel once and for all. Some believe that Israel and the Central Intelligence Agency lit the fire in order to remove the Palestinian Commando pressure from Israel and to weaken the Arabs through internal fighting. Even if this theory is true, the results have backfired. If Lebanon becomes a "confrontation state" like Syria, Jordan and Egypt, Israel for the first time in 28 years would have gained a new, active enemy.

There seems to be no question that the Palestinians and the Lebanese Leftists have received a lot of support from Arab states. And if one reviews the freedom with which Israeli agents have been operating in Lebanon for years, and if one reviews the recent revelations about CIA activities around the world, then one does not find it so far fetched to believe that indeed these two parties may have been contributing their share in fueling the fire.

2) *The Global Conspiracy Theory*. There are some who even believe that there is an international, big- and small-power conspiracy to settle the problem of the Palestinians and their national rights at the expense of the Christians of Lebanon. This theory sees a plan that would give half of Lebanon to the Palestinians as a "National Home" with the same shamelessness that gave Palestine to International Zionists as a "National Home." And why not? Let the world's future generations come to terms with what might become the Lebanese Commandoes and the Lebanese Liberation Army seeking to regain their national and natural homeland—just as the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestine Liberation Army are trying to do now and have succeeded internationally in world-opinion support. According to this theory, it would take 30 years before the Lebanese Liberation Organization and the Lebanese Liberation Army could really disturb the world with the same ferocity the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestine Liberation Army have. Until then, Israel and all its other neighbors would have had a generation of peace. And let the next generation pay the "international debts" accrued by this generation. There is a precedent for such a policy.

3) *The Christians-Are-at-Fault Theory*. This is advanced by the political left and by some Christians in and out of Lebanon. For years, it was very apparent that the Christians were getting fewer in number, mostly because of emigration and smaller families, and the Moslems were getting more numerous for exactly the opposite reasons. Since 1932, the Christians, in their transition from a majority to a minority, have refused to allow a national census, have elected to believe that Lebanon is a "Christian Nation" no matter who says what, and have believed that France in particular and other Christian nations in general would always keep Lebanon "Christian." Perpetrating this myth of Lebanon as a Christian nation is responsible for the fighting. Lebanese Mohammedans have felt enough outrage from fellow-Moslems in the Arab world to precipitate the current major explosion in Lebanon. The presence of mostly Moslem Palestinian refugees (some 400,000) added impetus and opportunism to the Lebanese Moslem cause.

4) *The Palestinians-Are-to-Blame Theory*. This is very strongly believed by the Christians fight-

ing in Lebanon and by many of their supporters outside Lebanon. The Palestinians are guests in Lebanon, but by and by, the theory goes, they have almost totally forgotten that fact. Instead, they have rejected their role as guests in favor of their role as co-equal and even superior to the indigenous Lebanese. Lebanon, like any other Arab country, owes them not only the debt of hospitality while away from their homes in occupied Palestine, but also the greater debt of total aid in their quest to return. Both Jordan and Syria, for national security reasons, have kept the Palestinians very much under control. So has Egypt. But Lebanon, because of its pacific nature, small army, relatively free press and economy and general neutrality, was in some ways unwilling and in other ways unable, to control the Palestinians inside its borders. The result is a state within a state and friction unparalleled in recent Lebanese history. The dual role of guest and lord created the seeds that were to blossom into hatred and bloodshed. Both Lebanon's former president, Camille Chamoun, now leader of a Christian militia called the Tigers, and Pierre Gmayel, president of the Phalangist Party and leader of their militia, have declared on several occasions that the Lebanese Christians and the Lebanese Mohammedans have lived in peace for generations and will continue to do so if no outside influences come in to divide them. They believe that once the problem of the Palestinian refugees is settled, the problem of Lebanon will again assume manageable proportions.

5) *The Moslems-Are-to-Blame Theory*. This theory posits a situation in which the Lebanese Moslems took advantage of the presence of the Palestinian guests in Lebanon to press their demands for equality at least in government. The Christians believe that it is not true that they have the major power in the country. They point to the fact that in many departments of government the opposite is true, that the Moslem demands stem not from real grievances but from imagined ones. The Moslems in Lebanon are blamed for not being "true Lebanese." They are more Arab Arabs than Lebanese Arabs, it is said. And much as the Moslems believe that the Christian Lebanese are more pro-West than pro-Lebanon or pro-Arab, the Christians sincerely believe that the Moslems in Lebanon are at any time more pro-Arab than pro-Lebanon.

Thus, the Moslems are blamed for not fighting for their own country, Lebanon, taking advantage of the neighboring Moslem countries, taking advantage of the Palestinian presence, and using all this in their illegitimate fight against the "true" Lebanese. The argument makes the Christian Lebanese as ethnocentric as possible. "The only true Lebanese is the Christian Lebanese," sounds like a counter-reaction to the bigoted stand of some Moslems who claim that "the only true Arab is the Moslem Arab."

6) *The Political Ideology Theory*. In reading about the situation in Lebanon in newspapers and magazines, in hearing and seeing news and commentary on the air, there was a clear shift of emphasis from calling the conflict "Christians-against-Moslems" to "Almost-all-Christians-against-almost-all-Moslems." This came about because it became more and more apparent that there is a minority of Christians fighting on the side of the Moslems and a minority of Moslems fighting on the side of the Christians. This is where the rightist ideology is pitted against the leftist. The right in Lebanon sides with the West, and the left sides with the East. And given the current socialist drift throughout the Arab world, it is only natural for the political left in Lebanon to see every possible opportunity to conquer the political right.

7) *The Economic Ideology Theory*. In Lebanon, as in most of the world, it is the educated, the Protestant-ethic-oriented, that constitute for the most part the "haves." The "have-nots" are the uneducated "others." It so happens that the Left in Lebanon is composed of those who are less educated than the Right, composed of those who have larger families than the Right; and, in general, composed of those who have not had equal opportunity and access to the good life and the power structure. There was a lot of corruption in government. Bribery was a way of life. The rich were getting richer before the very eyes of the poor. Economic reform was needed at every level of government policy. The pressure was mounting incessantly. And when the explosion came, the destruction of the places and palaces of the rich, the looting at every turn, were manifestations of the "proletariat" getting back at the "bourgeoisie." Social justice could have gone a long way toward preventing civil war, according to this theory.

None of these theories can totally explain the Lebanese problem today. But probably each one of them has a kernel of truth. One needs to be eclectic, and stress a multicausality model rather than one that is monistic if he wants to describe accurately the cause of the Lebanese crisis.

Is there hope for Lebanon to continue as a country? Yes. The reason is as fundamental as the history and geography which produced the cultural diversity of Lebanon. Because of the combination of a pleasant Mediterranean climate and mountainous terrain (some peaks reaching 9,000 feet), for centuries Lebanon has attracted persecuted minorities fleeing from every area of the Middle East. The principal actors in the present drama all came that way: the Maronites, the Greek and Armenian Orthodox among the Christians; the Druze, Shiites, Ismailites, Nusayris among the Moslems. The Palestinians are only the most recent arrivals to a nation of refugees.

Lebanon's ancient and seemingly endless list of military conquerors further contributed to the diversity of the population and its traditions. A few miles north of Beirut, at the mouth of the Dog River, at least 19 different inscriptions are etched into the rock left by conquering armies stretching as far back as the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, continuing through Greece and Rome up to twentieth-century England and France. Even today many Lebanese are trilingual, combining Arabic, English and French phrases into a single sentence. Today, the return of troops from France, the country's last occupying power, is urged by one side or the other, depending on which side is losing the civil war.

The genius of Lebanon's prosperity since the establishment of the republic in 1946 has been its dizzyingly confusing pluralism. Religious divisions, so important in Lebanese life, have never been simple as Christian and Moslem. Moslems adjudicated all cases dealing with "personal status"—marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.—in different sectarian courts, with varying interpretations of Koranic Law. The Christian groups developed separate court systems, with the Catholics having their own courts, the Greek Orthodox theirs, and the Seventh-day Adventists theirs. All Protestant denominations in Lebanon formed a Supreme Council responsible for all their external/legal affairs *vis-a-vis* the govern-

ment. The Seventh-day Adventist denomination has been a full member of that council. For years, while I lived in Lebanon, I was the official representative of the Adventist denomination to the Supreme Council. As such, I found myself doing some odd things such as serving as a "judge" with "judges" from other evangelical churches, interpreting and applying the "law of personal status" to Protestant cases.

Political power has always been held through negotiating alliances among competing groups. It may be that the effect of both the protracted fighting and outside intervention will be to convince both the warring sides that despite the new reality of the Palestinians and now the Syrians, neither can impose a settlement on the other; perhaps the time-honored Lebanese custom of finding new combinations of groups from two apparently monolithic opponents is still the way to establish the basis for a new life in Lebanon.

The future, politically, is very murky, to say the least. But it is not necessary to give up on Lebanon as destroyed once and for all. There are some indications that after all the battles, all the bloodshed and tears, a changed but viable Lebanon will yet emerge. After their initial panic at leftist and Palestinian victories, the Christian rightists have convinced themselves that they can successfully draw on outside resources and internal will to defend their interests. But it is obvious to many smaller groups among the Christians that the Maronites will have to give up some of their cherished power and that they can no longer speak for a Christian Lebanon.

The struggle may also open Moslem eyes. They will win major concessions, but they will be aware of the futility of any attempt to Islamize Lebanon as, say Syria, Iran, or Egypt have been. Just as there are Christians cooperating with the predominantly Moslem leftists, some of the heretofore less powerful Moslem groups are already making signs of working with the predominantly Christian rightists. While various countries around the world dramatically illustrate how religion can fuel civil war, it may be that the sheer profusion of religious sects in Lebanon will still help to break up the solidarity of the armed camps presently dividing the country. It may be that with their wounds to tend to, the various factions in Lebanon will eventually come back to some sort of accommodation, and

the Cedar Tree will have weathered and flourished through yet another of its thousands of years of storms.

As for Adventism, it is not wise to assume that in a new Lebanon the foreign missionary will be able to remain indefinitely. Such a faulty assumption will delay the speedy preparation of national leadership as well as the actual turning over to local Adventists—Arab and African—of *all* the administrative functions of all Adventist institutions. With the threat of possible loss of accustomed liberties and freedom in the new emerging Lebanon, a corollary threat will emerge: the loss of institutions that are perceived to be foreign. Schools, hospitals and publishing houses have not fared well, in the surrounding countries when these institutions were seen as foreign in aims and administration. Therefore, it can be expected that the leaders of

“foreign missions” should multiply their efforts to convert these institutions from foreign to national at the earliest possible time. These institutions will have a foreign history behind them, but if the conversion is done with genuineness, speed and total integrity, the national church can reasonably hope to maintain their operation, ownership and administration.

It is my firm belief that wherever possible and as long as possible the cooperation of foreign and national missionaries is a great asset to the church. However, it is imperative to recognize that a strong position is always rooted in a strong national church, a church that is culturally acceptable to the society in which it lives and operates, a church that bears an unmistakable indigenous identity and self-image, while still connected with the mother church through the spiritual ties of faith and fellowship.

# Analysis of the 1976 Annual Council

by Tom Dybdahl

Among the 260 agenda items acted on at the 1976 Annual Council in Takoma Park, actions on divorce and remarriage, on licensed ministers and on the use of the tithe, together with a long proposal for “finishing God’s work” are especially interesting. Although most Annual Council business has been reported in the *Review*, these four items deserve a closer look.

The theme for the meeting was “Together, for a Finished Work.” The first agenda item was a 15-page, single-spaced proposal entitled “Evangelism and Finishing God’s Work.” Briefly, it described the current crises in the church, including “failure to fully implement God’s plan,” “serious slippage in standards” and “delay of our Lord’s return.” But the main portion was a plan of action for “finishing the work.”\*

One cannot find fault with the intent of the proposal. We would not be Adventists if we did not look forward to the return of Christ, and work and pray that it may be soon. The church should be greatly concerned about doing God’s

work. But a more careful examination of this document raises some questions.

First, it paints a very bleak picture of the church. “Not only is our membership failing to fit into God’s redemptive plan of personal spiritual growth and service, but more regrettable still, far too many leaders are occupied with lesser things. To say that the church is in crisis is to express it only mildly and the crisis is brought on by our inexcusable delinquency in failing to adopt God’s plan for finishing the work.”

Consequently, the main portion of the proposal contains a plan of action. There are ten points in this plan which focus on organizing both pastors and lay people to do effective witnessing and using all the resources of the church to accomplish this goal. Each division is also requested to set up a Primacy of Evangelism Committee to meet quarterly and study the local progress of this plan, and help insure that it is properly implemented.

But in order to have a plan for finishing the work, of course, there must be a clear definition of what “the work” is. And a very specific

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\*Quotations from Annual Council actions are from the meeting minutes.



definition is given: "It is the reaching of every person on earth with the claims and promises of God's message of love and salvation, so that this generation may have opportunity to be restored in His image, now and forever. Thus, the 'finishing of the work' means one thing: communicating God's message through the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit to all of earth's population so that God can proclaim His work finished. When this happens, Jesus will come."

But is it that simple, that mechanical? If we simply confront everyone with the gospel, will that mean the work is done?

God has commanded us to share the gospel with our fellowmen. And He has promised that He will come again. But He is not bound by our actions. If we could guarantee a way of reaching everyone with the gospel tomorrow, He would not *have* to come tomorrow night. We do not bring in the second coming. God is Lord of history, and He will bring it to its consummation, not the church.

Further, this approach tends to produce severe ups and downs in experience. People gear up for great efforts, and reach high levels of emotion that cannot be sustained. And if these efforts do not get fairly immediate results, they cause cynicism and further doubt about God's promises. We need a level of experience that is active, but that can also be maintained over the long haul.

Another problem with this proposal is that it opts for a restricted definition of evangelism. "Evangelism is the communicating of the essential elements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the setting of the three angels' messages in such a way as to make possible a response in the hearts of the hearers to accept God's provision of salvation from sin."

Thus, by default, anything that does not fall within this definition is not evangelism. Specifically, such "excellent programs and projects" that are concerned with diet, health, welfare and "other social benefits" are labelled "pre-evangelistic." And "worthy as they may be, if they do not lead to the new-birth experience in Christ and acceptance of the doctrinal tenets of God's remnant church, they consume the time, attention and money of the church and its working force without achieving God's ultimate objective of saving a man for eternity."

But is this definition biblical? (Interestingly,

"Evangelism and Finishing God's Work" quotes the Bible twice and Ellen White 34 times.) Is a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name not evangelism? What about the judgment scene in Matthew 25 where the only criterion is what we have done in Christ's name for the poor, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned?

And what happens to those whose talents and interests do not lie in the area of public evangelism? Should they feel that unless they force themselves to take part in these activities that there is no place for them in the church? Hopefully, these problems will be faced as this document is implemented.

Among the other agenda items, three are of particular interest. These were actions on divorce and remarriage, on licensed ministers and on the use of the tithe.

On divorce and remarriage, the council voted to set up a basic structure to deal with these problems on a case-by-case basis. This action was based on recommendations by an *ad hoc* committee that had been studying the issue for two years. They suggested that each conference set up a standing committee on divorce and remarriage, and that all readmission requests be referred to this committee. In addition, each union conference is to set up a similar committee, to deal with appeals.

With licensed ministers, it was decided that in North America they could perform all the functions of the ordained minister, provided they had two years of seminary study or one year of seminary training and one year of pastoral experience.

On the use of tithe, it was agreed to allow tithe money to be used for some purposes that had previously been funded by non-tithe money. Under the new plan, tithe money can be used to pay up to 30 percent of the salary of the church schoolteacher. This figure is based on a rough approximation of the amount of time the average teacher spends in Bible teaching and spiritual counseling.

But these actions are also interesting because each one shows a trend, namely, the accommodation of the policies and standards of the church to existing practices or current situations. A look at the reasons behind these actions makes that clear.

With divorce and remarriage, the biggest problem was a lack of consistency in dealing with church members. In some areas, people who divorced and remarried contrary to church doctrine were disfellowshipped and refused readmission; in other churches, they were hardly disciplined at all.

To deal with this inconsistency, the council voted not only to set up machinery for individual cases to be considered, but also proposed guidelines to help committees, as well as local pastors and churches, make decisions.

Specifically, these guidelines suggest that "a period of years shall be required between the time of divorce and application for readmission to church membership where there has been no remarriage or between remarriage and application for readmission to church membership."

**“Anything that does not fall within this definition is not evangelism. Such ‘excellent programs and projects’ that are concerned with diet, health, welfare, and ‘other social benefits’ are labeled ‘pre-evangelistic.’”**

The purpose of this time period is to show "renewed Christian experience," to show the healing of wounds from the old marriage and the stability of the new one, and also to be regarded as a "disciplinary" period. How long this period should be is not spelled out.

In some places, the "waiting period" is already practiced. This action will help the church deal with divorced and remarried individuals in a regular and orderly manner everywhere. Thus, we can take a more positive and helpful view of people and their problems, and still uphold the current church standards.

In the situation of licensed ministers, the catalyst for change was the United States Internal Revenue Service. Under IRS regulations, ministers are entitled to special tax treatment only if they are full-fledged ministers, able to perform all the functions of the church's ministry. And since in the past licensed ministers were

not able to baptize, perform marriages, or celebrate communion, they were not technically eligible for IRS considerations, even though most of them claimed this right.

The 1974 Annual Council dealt with this problem by ambiguously defining the rights and privileges of a licensed minister. But this was not really a satisfactory arrangement, and some individual licensed ministers still faced problems with the IRS.

As a result, it was voted that licensed ministers, given the training qualifications, could perform all the functions of ordained ministers. There was some opposition to this change, but when it was limited to North America, and when it was indicated that special consideration would be given in unusual cases, the change was voted.

This action, however, carries some additional implications. Will setting this special ministerial policy for North America establish any precedent for other changes? The ordination of women comes immediately to mind. A major objection to this has been that while it may be acceptable to ordain women as ministers in some areas of the world, it would be completely unacceptable in other places. Will various fields now be able to have different policies on this question?

There is also an important theological point here. What is the specific point of ordination? Does giving a licensed minister all the rights and privileges of the ordained minister change the value or meaning of ordination? These questions will need to be considered.

Perhaps the most interesting change had to do with the use of the tithe. A growing problem in the church had been that while tithe income had increased regularly, free-will offerings had not increased proportionately. Treasurers often found themselves with more tithe money than they could use, and with too little non-tithe money for their needs.

To deal with this problem, the tithe exchange program was developed to launder these funds. A union with an excess of tithe money could send this money (up to a certain amount) to the General Conference, and receive in return an equal amount of non-tithe funds. This proved to be a great blessing, and helped solve a financial problem.

But in recent years, even this program was not sufficient to keep up with needs. Consequently, General Conference treasurers found themselves sending back tithe for tithe, and this money was then used for non-tithe purposes. This particularly became clear as fund accounting—with its careful separation of accounts—was phased in. The treasurers were unhappy with this situation, and so they brought the question out into the open.

As a result, a group began to study the problem in terms of what the Scriptures and Ellen White said about the use of tithe money. The old policy had restricted tithe to the exclusive use of “the ministry,” and a few support personnel. But there were some inconsistencies, because sustentation funds, some of which came from tithe money, went not only to ministers but to teachers, secretaries and other workers. Further, overseas fields had not all made a careful distinction between tithe and non-tithe monies, and used tithe for almost anything that supported the work of the church. After a lengthy study, the group concluded that a broader use of tithe was appropriate.

There were, however, differences of opinion. Some at the council felt that the use of the tithe should not be changed. Others felt that it could be used to pay for the full salaries of church schoolteachers. And in the end, a compromise of sorts prevailed.

Specifically, it was decided that tithe money could be used for up to 30 percent of a church schoolteacher’s salary. Also, it was agreed that “personnel in a supportive role who directly relate to the work of soul-winning agencies” could also be paid from the tithe. These changes are expected to ease the financial bind.

But this action also represented to some degree a particular understanding of how inspiration works. An important question was whether this tithe-use change represented a real change in interpretation of Scripture and Ellen White, or whether it simply represented a policy change as a result of financial pressure. The official view, of course, was that while the problem may have prompted further study, this broader plan for

use of tithe was certainly legitimate. And the fact that the problem had been studied for three years supports that view.

But that meant, in some sense, a tacit admission that revelation is progressive—that some “new light” had been discovered. As one administrator put it: “Sister White made some modifications in her position during her lifetime. We felt an administrative responsibility to take the counsel we had and apply it to our current setting.” And so they did.

Yet, this raises questions about whether or not the same thing might happen in other areas of church practice and policy, such as Sabbath-keeping, standards, etc. Might there be changes that should be made in these areas? Some present pointed out that this action might set a dangerous precedent within the church.

But this point of view did not prevail, and for the time being that question has not been answered. But the change in tithe-use policy has raised it in a concrete way and, no doubt, there will be more discussion in the future.

One other item is worth mentioning, a tentative statement on the Adventist position on creation. The statement was prepared, but some brethren came to feel that it was not in a form appropriate for presentation to Annual Council, so in the end it was not introduced for discussion. Nevertheless, it has received considerable circulation. (This statement appears on page 58.)

This working document was prepared by a committee under the direction of General Conference Vice President Willis J. Hackett, chairman of the board of the Geoscience Institute. It has been revised a number of times, and more drafts are likely. The purpose of the statement is to clarify the church’s official position on such thorny problems as the age of the earth, the fiat creation of the earth in six literal days, the relationship of creation to the Sabbath, etc. Some, however, see it as an effort to put pressure on those who have serious questions about some of the specific points of this issue, so they will make a commitment one way or the other.

This statement is still being worked on by Hackett’s committee. It will probably be re-introduced at some point in the future.

# Tentative Creation Statement

1. In harmony with the basic position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, we accept the historical accuracy of the book of Genesis (including chapters 1-11) as providing the only authentic account of the divine creation of this earth and the creation of life upon it in six literal days, of the fall of man, of the early history of the human race and that of the noachian flood of worldwide dimensions. (See *Medical Ministry* p. 89; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 135, 136.)

2. We accept the chronological data of the first eleven chapters of Genesis as providing the basis for our belief in the biblical chronology.

3. We accept the Bible teaching that the earth was unorganized and void (Gen. 1:2) at the commencement of the creation of living things during the creation week. The fossil record of past life is largely the product of the catastrophic worldwide deluge (Gen. 7:21-23) rather than being the result of a gradual or sequential development over vast periods of time.

4. We believe that in the divine plan the weekly Sabbath, the observance of which was instituted by the Creator Himself at the end of the literal creation week, has great significance. It is a continual reminder to men, especially since the entrance of sin, of their Creator and their relation to Him as His creatures. Its observance is a perpetual sign of their loyalty and their allegiance to Him. Its rest is a sign of His recreative and redemptive power, in human lives in this age, and of the whole earth in the age to come.

Note: The above version of the creation statement is the third draft, revised in the fall of 1976.

5. We believe furthermore that an understanding of the creation and nature of man and of his salvation rests on the recognition of the literal intent and factual account of Genesis. Man was divinely created in the image of God as a unique being, capable of fellowship with God. The harmonious God-man relationship was broken through the historical event of sin in Eden when man became unfaithful to the divine command and followed the suggestions of Satan to place allegiance in someone or something other than God Himself. The fall brought about for the first time the entry of sin into this world with its effects upon men and nature. "...the moral image of God was almost obliterated by the sin of Adam, . . ." (Ellen G. White, *Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1078.)

6. We also believe the Bible teaching that man's separation from God could only be remedied through the substitutionary atoning death of Christ. The cross is the basis of Christ's continuing heavenly ministry of reconciliation which will climax in the eradication of sin, the restoration of the image of God in man, and the reestablishment of complete harmony between God and man on the recreated new earth.

7. We believe that there is a consistent linking, in Scripture, of a literal creation, a factual fall, and an adequate redemption at the Cross with a short chronology of man on the earth and a biblical eschatology that looks for the imminent return of Christ. Then God's plan for total reconciliation with and recreation of His people will be complete. If any one of these Scriptural teachings is denied, the tendency to deny others will be equally strong, and ultimately irresistible.

# Let's Stop Arguing Over the Wedding Ring

by C. G. Tuland

The fact that the question of jewelry and wedding rings came up again in connection with the General Conference Session in Vienna shows that this is by no means a trivial concern of Adventist life.<sup>1</sup> Our church takes the position that her teachings are based on clear confirmation of Scripture. Can this be said of the traditional prohibition (in America, at least) of wedding rings? When an issue stirs emotions as this one does, it is worthwhile to ask such a question.

Years ago I discussed the wearing of wedding rings with a fellow minister who quoted two texts from the New Testament in support of the traditional position: "Whose [the wives'] adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Peter 3:3, 4); and "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold,

or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (I Tim. 2:9, 10).

These admonitions of the apostles warned against excessive outward embellishment to illustrate the contrast between two types of adornment, a mere outward appearance versus an "unfading loveliness of an inner personality." (Phillips). This principle is as valid as ever also in modern times.

I asked my colleague whether these texts constituted a basis to prohibit church members to wear wedding rings. "Did the apostles intend to *prohibit* the braiding of hair as the words of Peter are said to state?" "That is correct," he answered. When I asked: "Did the apostles in these texts *prohibit* the use of ornaments of gold, rings and similar adornments?" he replied, "That is the way I understand it." Thus I continued: "To be logically consistent, did the apostles also *prohibit* women from wearing robes, garments and apparel?" He only said, "I have not looked at these texts from that angle."

My friend finally conceded that those texts do not *prohibit* the braiding of hair, the use of wedding rings or ornaments and the wearing of garments but merely stressed the necessary change from the former pagan outward adornment to the Christian ideal of a changed, spiritual character.

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While hairstyles, dresses and matters pertaining to fashions in today's Christian society are generally subject to only low-keyed and mild criticism, the use of wedding rings has been a matter of perpetual discussion among Seventh-day Adventists, way out of proportion to the relative importance of the subject. Strangely enough, the Bible does not present the use of rings as a specific problem. To the contrary, Joseph accepted Pharaoh's signet ring (privy seal) on his finger with a garment of fine linen and a gold chain around his neck (Gen. 41:42). Likewise, Mordecai the Jew received the ring of the Persian King Ahasuerus which entitled him to act on behalf of the king (Esther 8:2, 8, 10). In the New Testament, the father put a ring on the finger of the returning prodigal son as a token of renewed acceptance to his filial position (Luke 15:22). Monuments and documents from ancient history together with biblical records indicate that rings and other ornaments belonged to a man's attire almost to the extent that garments did, serving artistic and social as well as commercial purposes. They were used as seals on documents, denoting the position and authority. Beginning with the fourth century, Christians engraved their rings with invocations.

**T**he position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church rests mainly on the understanding—or misinterpretation—of the two above-cited New Testamental passages as well as upon at least partly misapplied statements by Ellen White. Many believers also forget that a large number of her earlier statements are today entirely ignored, as they no longer refer to contemporary situations (length of garments, trimmings, playing tennis, acquiring bicycles, etc.).

Answering an inquiry from overseas regarding the use of wedding rings, Ellen White did make the following statement:

“Some have had a burden in regard to the wearing of a marriage ring, feeling that *the wives of our ministers* should conform to this custom. All this is unnecessary. . . . *Americans can make their position understood by plainly stating that the custom is not regarded as obligatory in our country.* Not one penny should be spent for a circlet of gold to testify that we are married. In countries where the custom is imperative, we have *no burden to condemn*

*those who have their marriage ring; let them wear it if they can do so conscientiously. . . .*<sup>2</sup>

This issue is quite clear. Mrs. White's universal outlook on some matters took into consideration not only the social concepts of the conservative religious movements of the nineteenth century in America, she also considered the customs of other nations and countries. This is the

**“We are much vexed in our church by the fear that ‘standards are being lowered.’ What I am saying is that the wedding ring is not one of them.”**

very reason for the above-mentioned statement: “. . . we have no burden to condemn those who have their marriage ring.” Central Europe, Sweden and many other countries around the world had already definitely established rules in this matter. Our American ministers appointed to leading positions in Europe in the mid-twenties had to accept these customs while serving in such countries. While Mrs. White lived in Australia, May Lacey White—the wife of her son, William Clarence White—wore a wedding ring with Mrs. White's consent, because it also was a custom there. But times and customs have also changed in our United States.

Throughout the years, articles and comments appeared in denominational publications as well as a plethora of official pronouncements often confusing the issue and complicating matters, without offering clear and valid guidance. Often the explanation of the permissibility of the wedding ring for church members overseas has been: “It is the custom there.” What seems confusing is that now the same custom prevails in America, and still many Adventists look askance at persons in this country who conform to the custom. One lady I knew about—and I imagine many share her feeling—wanted a united, worldwide opposition to the wedding ring, saying its use or nonuse was a matter of morals: “If it is a sin to wear a wedding band in the United States, then should it not be a sin in Great Britain, Where is our consistency?”

That is the crux of the matter, for wearing a wedding band is *not* a question of morals or sin; it is merely one of the customs, which vary with national and social concepts.

We are much vexed in our church by the fear that “standards are being lowered.” What I am saying is that the wedding ring is *not* one of them. The Old Testament does not legislate on it, neither does the New Testament, including our key texts, the exegesis of which has been—put it mildly—unwarranted. Mrs. White’s counsel was primarily directed to the wives of ministers in other countries, in 1892, or 84 years ago; since then changes have taken place in America regarding the wedding ring custom. Thus, we need not fear that we are contradicting teachings of the Bible or the writings of Mrs. White in denying that the prohibition of the wedding ring is a standard of the universal Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yet, in spite of Mrs. White’s statement, “In countries where the custom is imperative, we have no burden to *condemn* (emphasis mine) those who have their marriage ring. . .”, many not only still condemn but are evidently not conscious that they condemn without cause.

**W**hy do problems like the above still exist in the church? Is there no solution? We have:

—Quoted *Scripture* only to discover that our interpretation failed in hermeneutical principles

and that the Bible does not support our position.

—Quoted *Mrs. White* and found that her counsel (given in 1892) applied to a time 84 years ago and was intended for believers in America only. That counsel granted freedom to other nationalities with different social customs in regard to the use of the wedding ring. It indicates that the church has not correctly interpreted and followed the counsel by Mrs. White.

—Seen that what is merely a matter of national and social customs is still mistakenly regarded as a matter of morals.

—Seen that, according to all evidences, not wearing a wedding ring cannot be classified as a *church standard*.

—Seen that without justification this issue has caused dissention and meaningless controversy among church members.

What should the church do in this (or other similar) situations? Mrs. White stated in 1898: “And in comparing scripture with scripture, we might discover errors in our interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> She also said that the fact that certain doctrines have been held for many years by our people is no proof that our ideas are infallible.<sup>4</sup> And if we add to her testimony that of the New Testament we find that Peter, Paul and the primitive church made serious mistakes. There was but one way to go: admitting them, they set things straight, even though they could not always remove some bitter consequences.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *Review and Herald*, Oct. 2, Nov. 30, 1976
2. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, No. 3, p. 6; 1892, quoted in *Outline Studies from the Testimonies*, by Clifton L. Taylor, 1918, Canadian Publishing Association Press, Oshawa, Ontario. *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 180, 181. (Emphasis mine)

3. *Review and Herald*, July 12, 1898.
4. See the *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1892.
5. See E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 399, 418.

# Do the Authorities Conflict on Perfectionism?

Review by Timothy Crosby

*Perfection: The Impossible Possibility*  
by Herbert E. Douglass, Edward Heppenstall,  
Hans K. LaRondelle, C. Mervyn Maxwell  
Southern Publishing Association, 200 pp., \$9.00

This work, the third in Southern Publishing's Anvil series, brings together essays by four Adventist scholars. On the issue of perfection, Douglass and Maxwell tend to take the "possible" position against Heppenstall's and LaRondelle's "impossible" (the subtitle was well chosen!). One must be willing to overlook the nine-dollar price tag for a 200-page indexless paperback, but the attractive gold cover, innovative layout and quality of the contents make the book worthwhile.

As a collection of rather controversial essays, this book is certainly a step in a new direction for the Adventist press. In the last decade or so, we seem to have lost a good deal of our reticence about putting conflicting opinions into print. This is not an unmixed blessing, but it does stimulate worthwhile discussion, and it helps to point up the unfinished areas in the house of Adventist theology. It also provides fascinating reading.

Douglass takes an eschatological approach to

the topic. His main point is that Jesus is waiting for a quality people who perfectly reproduce His character; and this, rather than the state of the world or any other consideration, is what will determine the time of His advent. Taking off on the parable of the harvest found in Mark 4 and Revelation 14, Douglass shows that Christ cannot return until the "grain" is fully ripe and "the fruit is brought forth" which, according to Ellen G. White, means "the reproduction of Christ's character in the believer."<sup>1</sup> Douglass points out that saying that calamitous world conditions will determine Christ's return is like a farmer's saying, "It looks as if there will be a bad thunderstorm; it must be time to pick my corn."

In the second half of his paper, Douglass delves into the subject of the nature of Christ in His incarnation, another unsettled issue in the church. Douglass emphasizes a Christ who took on man's nature "with all its liabilities," including our "fallen, sinful nature," for which he offers a battery of supporting quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy, ignoring those which do not support his view. To Douglass, this is a crucially important point since, if Christ's nature were superior to ours in any way, we could not be expected to overcome as He did.

Douglass goes on to show that "what Jesus achieved will be reproduced in the last generation," quoting such passages as *The Great Controversy*, p. 623: "He [Jesus] had kept His

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Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him. . . . This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble." Thus, God will be fully vindicated: "The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people."<sup>2</sup>

Heppenstall begins his article by noting that many who have "laid upon themselves the galling yoke" of achieving sinless perfection "have turned themselves into a moral machine without peace and without security before God." Then his thesis: "If Christian perfection means restoration here and now to Adam's sinless state and complete harmony with God, so that a man need no longer be classed as a sinner, then the Bible knows nothing of it."

According to Heppenstall, it is our present-day definition of perfection as an absolute acme beyond which there is no further progression which causes the confusion. In the Bible, perfection does not imply sinlessness, but "full commitment, a mature and unshakable allegiance to Jesus Christ." Noah was termed "perfect" (Gen. 6:9) even though three chapters later we find him in a drunken stupor (Gen. 9:21). Even "perfect" Job (Job 2:3) had to confess his sins (Job 42:6). And in the New Testament, those who are "perfect" still have to press on toward the goal, not having reached it yet (Phil. 3:13-15).

Heppenstall leans toward Calvin in his view of man's fallen nature, speaking of "the depravity under which he is held in bondage." Accordingly, "nowhere does man reflect the perfection of God in whose image he was made." This is in contrast to Christ, who possessed a "spiritual harmony and elevation of character unknown in our experience. The facts that Christ Himself was God as His incarnation and was born of the Holy Spirit deny His being was in any part out of harmony with His Father. Christ was unique in this, these conditions we do not have." Thus, we cannot achieve Christ's sinlessness.

Heppenstall does believe that it is possible to reach a state of "conscious deliverance from known sin," where "there is nothing we know of between us and Christ." Yet, "imperfection persists, not in . . . committing willful sin, but in . . . coming short of the ideal in Jesus Christ." He maintains that "there is a limit to the temptation that man can withstand in his sinful state." Rather than striving for sinlessness and

living "like a display piece in a shop window," we must "walk with God in love. This is Bible perfection."

LaRondelle, with less polemic and more exegesis, asks "How can man attain to sinless perfection? . . . Our specific purpose now is to investigate the inspired answer . . . recorded in the [scriptures]." LaRondelle then takes us on a guided tour through the entire Bible, elucidating the texts having a bearing on this topic. LaRondelle's biblically derived definition of perfection is similar to Heppenstall's. Perfection in the gospels is "the revival of the principle of perfect love as proclaimed by Moses and the prophets." In Paul's writings, perfection is "a present gift and reality; yet, in another sense, it is a promise to be realized only at the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of glory." LaRondelle's conclusion: perfection is "living daily out of God's forgiving and keeping grace. . . . The only absolutely perfect, that is, inherently sinless, character has been revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. . . . Through faith and baptism, the believer participates legally and dynamically in the perfection of Christ. Man has no perfection in himself."

Like Douglass, Maxwell approaches perfection from the standpoint of preparation for the second coming. Maxwell sees a difference between "resurrection holiness" and "translation holiness," the latter requiring sinlessness. This is because "God can blot out the sins of the victorious dead by simply attending to their records. They are dead and cannot sin again. It will be a vitally different thing for those who are alive when their cases are called up in the judgment. Can their sins be blotted out in heaven unless they are also blotted out on earth? Hardly! . . . Suppose just after their sins were blotted out, the saints committed new ones—what would the blotting out of sins have meant?"

As exhibit number one, Maxwell portrays the pre-Great-Disappointment Millerites who, according to Ellen G. White, were "unreservedly consecrated to God" and whose "faces shone with a heavenly light." Judging by these and other Ellen G. White statements about them, these people were perfect, according to Heppenstall's and LaRondelle's definitions of perfection. Maxwell then quotes *The Great Controversy*, pp. 424, 425: "But the people were

not yet ready to meet their Lord. . . . Those who are living upon the earth when the intercessions of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless. . . . When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.”

Like Douglass, Maxwell goes to great lengths to carefully define his terms, since the term “sinless perfection” has been abused to mean a state beyond the reach of sin, something Maxwell repudiates. He also disavows the possibility of absolute perfection beyond which there can be no progress.

Since the words do not appear in the Bible, Maxwell takes issue with the cry “by grace alone,” overlooking the fact that the phrase appears in one of the passages he quotes from *Steps to Christ* several pages later. True, he says, there is a sense in which we are saved solely by grace, as works have no merit, but men can only become conquerors over evil “through the grace of God and their own diligent efforts.”<sup>3</sup> Maxwell rejects the use of the opinions of the church fathers and Christian theologians in this debate (“Luther knew nothing of the third angel’s message.”). He devotes an entire section to defining sin, and another to answering objections to his position, which the other three writers tend to ignore, making his paper the longest of the four.

This is where the issue stands. Four competent Adventist theologians have started with the same givens and reach opposite conclusions. Can we find a reason for this?

First of all, it should be noted that each author’s opinion of the possibility of sinlessness is determined by his definition of sin. To Maxwell, sin is yielding to temptation. Heppenstall takes a much broader view of sin. It is a natural consequence of separation from God, a state into which all men are born. It is disharmony with God. Since this state will always exist until Christ comes, there will always be sin. As is so often true of theological debate, much of the problem here is one of definition. Much, but not all.

As I was reading the book, it occurred to me that there seemed to be a definite pattern to the way Adventist pastors and teachers take sides in

this issue. There are exceptions, of course, but generally the “impossibles” are the Bible scholars and the “possibles” are the Ellen G. White scholars. Notice the differing use of quotations from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in the following table:

Author	Bible	Spirit of Prophecy
Douglass	47	101
Heppenstall	53	8
LaRondelle	232	4
Maxwell	60	148

All four authors are guilty of biased selection of sources, but this is to be expected in essays of this type. Only Maxwell looks at passages that seem to contradict his interpretation of the problem. All four scholars employ, for the most part, some well-reasoned arguments, although Heppenstall has a penchant for making unsupported theological pronouncements which are far from self-evident. Neither side has a monopoly on the truth. It cannot be doubted that sinlessness is not implied in the biblical concept of perfection; the “impossibles” have proven their point. Yet, they have largely ignored the Spirit of Prophecy in doing so, as the above table shows. And it is difficult to deny that Ellen G. White taught that God’s people in the last days would reach such a state of holiness that they could stand faultless before God without a mediator; many of her statements are simply too plain to be explained away.

Is there a real contradiction here, or is there a deeper underlying harmony as yet unexposed? Is this a case of complete misinterpretation on the part of one side or the other, or might the apparent discrepancies be explained as a case of progressive revelation (Compare Heppenstall: “If Christian perfection means restoration here and now to Adam’s sinless state. . . . then *the Bible knows nothing of it,*” with Ellen G. White quoted by Douglass: “Everyone who by faith obeys God’s commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression.”)

Such questions as these the authors have not dealt with.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. E. G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 67.
2. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.
3. E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.



