

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,

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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.”¹

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.”² (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.

As 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

Fritz Guy, whose doctorate in theology is from the University of Chicago, is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Loma Linda University.

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