

Brian C. Wilson,
*Dr. John Harvey
Kellogg and the
Religion of Biologic
Living* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014)

A Tale of Faith and Doubt: *Reviewing the Latest Book on Dr. John Harvey Kellogg* | BY JAMES L. HAYWARD



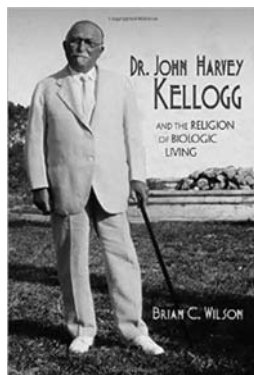
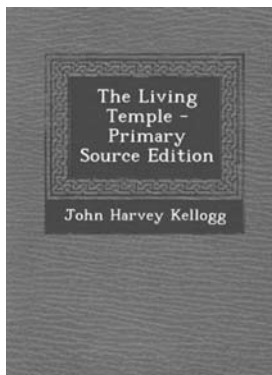
Turn-of-the-20th-century breathing exercises

Several months ago I inherited a copy of John Harvey Kellogg's *The Living Temple* (1903). The book, given to my dad when he was pastor of the historic Battle Creek Tabernacle, once belonged to the doctor himself. "J. H. Kellogg" is neatly penned in cursive hand at the top of the second page. On the third page, the word *cut* is written in blue pencil. Numerous original leaves of the volume are missing. According to Dad, in preparation for a tome more palatable to Adventist taste and theology, Dr. Kellogg cut out all the pages that contained paragraphs offensive to Ellen White and the church leaders.

The buildings of Kellogg's erstwhile Battle Creek Sanitarium,¹ legendary in Adventist lore, are located only two hundred yards from Dad's old church. When Dad was still a teen, he landed a job as a bell boy at a Massachusetts-

based satellite of the Battle Creek facility, the "New England San." There he converted to Kellogg-style vegetarianism, joined ranks with Adventist "health reformers," and met my nurse-in-training mom. And there, seven years later, I was born—like cornflakes, a veritable product of Kellogg's "biologic living."

Needless to say, I was pleased to discover *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living*² by Brian C. Wilson, professor of American religious history at Western Michigan University. Wilson's book sheds new light on the intriguing and eccentric personality that was Kellogg. According to the preface, Wilson purposed to "focus on an aspect of Dr. Kellogg's career that has not been fully explored in earlier works: his theological development" (xiii). Indeed, the six chapters and conclusion that follow



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weave an intriguing tale of faith and doubt on the part of a physically diminutive man with an oversized ego, a man who changed a church and was out to change the world.

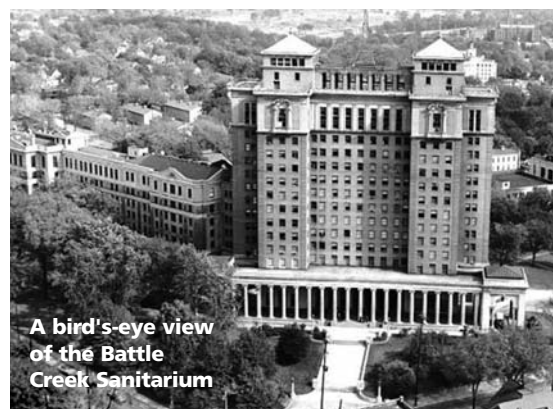
In contrast with Richard Schwartz's thematic approach in *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.: Pioneering Health Reformer*,³ Wilson's tack is chronological. Most of the story takes place in Battle Creek, Kellogg's home for the majority of his 91 years. The first chapter points out that mid-19th-century Battle Creek "from all outward appearances, looked like many another mill town of the Yankee diaspora" (2). Yet Battle Creek was also a hotbed of religious fervor engendered by settlers migrating "from the 'burned-over' districts of Vermont and upstate New York" (2). Quakers, Universalists, Swedenborgians, and Spiritualists, along with more traditional religious traditions, all were welcome here. A spirit of progressive reform filled the air. It is no surprise, then, that a nucleus of Sabbatarian Adventist believers began to thrive in Battle Creek in response to the evangelistic efforts of former sea captain Joseph Bates. In 1856, a restless convert to Adventism, John Preston Kellogg, his wife, and sixteen children, including sickly four-year-old John Harvey, joined the little group.

Young "Johnny" Kellogg suffered from rickets and felt insecure about his small size. But "he would compensate for his physical shortcomings by energy, assertiveness, and a burning ambition to do something with his life," observes Wilson (11). Apocalyptic urgency on the part of his parents prevented him from exposure to formal education until age twelve. Once enrolled, however, he quickly caught up with his peers and became a

widely read teen. It wasn't long before James White, who, with his prophet-wife Ellen, had moved to Battle Creek in 1855, invited John Harvey to work as an apprentice at the fledgling Review and Herald Publishing Association. Within four years he was appointed an editor. Ellen herself was impressed enough with the boy to receive a vision in which she saw that John Harvey would play a significant role in the Advent movement.

Prior to Kellogg's birth in 1852, a Christian physiology movement had emerged in Jacksonian America, largely in reaction to the medical establishment's obsessive use of bloodletting and toxic purgatives. Sylvester Graham, Larkin B. Coles, William A. Alcott, Russell T. Trall, and James C. Jackson, among others, led the movement that promoted preventive health by prescribing a blend of fresh air, water, a careful diet, exercise, and rest, along with the avoidance of fat, seasonings, caffeinated beverages, tobacco, and alcohol. If sickness did occur, hydrotherapy was the treatment of choice. Living according to the "laws of life" was as much a Christian duty as a devotion to Scripture. According to Wilson, "Christian physiology was not the only religious approach to health reform that emerged during the period [but] it was to be the most visible and popular" (18).

Christian physiology came to Battle Creek in the 1840s, initially adopted and promoted by the Battle Creek Progressionists, a group that would eventually embrace Spiritualism. But endorsement by Progressionists and Spiritualists notwithstanding, two visions by Ellen White before and a third vision after she and her hus-



band moved to Battle Creek validated many of the same principles championed by these groups. Both Joseph Bates and John Harvey's father practiced elements of Christian physiology, and the Whites' intermittent poor health attracted their interest as well.

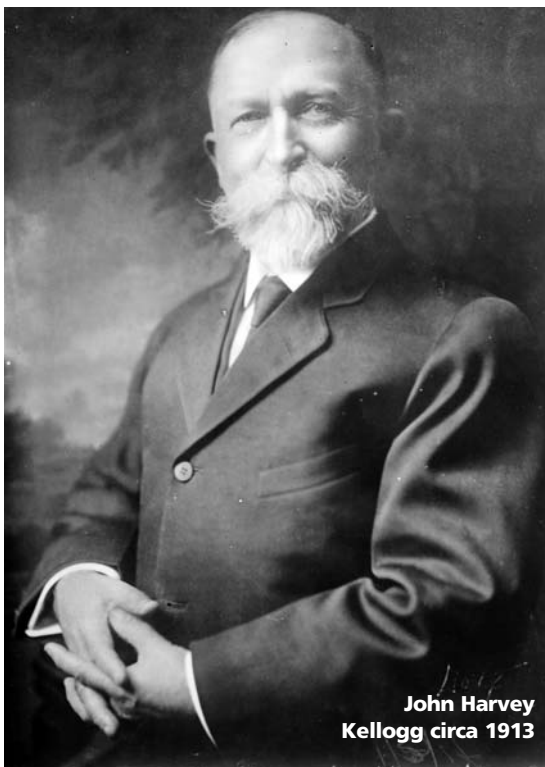
The Great Disappointment of 1844 had led early Adventists, including the Whites, to develop the sanctuary doctrine, in which Christ was interceding in a literal Most Holy Place in a literal heavenly sanctuary. As Wilson points out,

The physicality of White's conception of the heavenly realm would have consequences for the meaning of physicality in this world. In the run-up to the millennium, according to White, "while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ." For early Adventists, striving for perfection . . . [included] purification of the body (23).

It was this highly charged religious and cultural climate that nurtured the young John Harvey Kellogg.

In an effort to deal with health problems faced by their immediate family during the early 1860s, Ellen and James White twice visited Dr. Caleb Jackson's Our Home on the Hillside in New York. They were impressed by the hydrotherapeutic treatments offered, but they did not condone Dr. Jackson's emphasis on health reform over religious revival. They also disapproved of the singing, dancing, and card-playing sanctioned at Our Home. These disappointing experiences, along with impetus from an 1865 vision, led James and Ellen to open an Adventist-owned Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek in 1866. The new facility, which featured "Bible hygiene" and "the religion of Christ," was slated as a missionary endeavor open to Adventists and non-Adventists alike. A paucity of trained medical personnel, however, was apparent during the first several years, so in 1872 James hired Dr. Merritt G. Kellogg, older half-brother of John Harvey, to work at the Institute.

Merritt Kellogg had graduated with a six-month MD degree from Dr. Russell Trall's



Hygeio-Therapeutic College in New York City. Merritt, in turn, saw promise in his younger brother and urged James White to include John Harvey in a group of young men sent to Trall's facility to take medicine to enhance the medical personnel roster at the Western Health Reform Institute. But at the end of his training John Harvey was not satisfied with the superficial education he had received from Trall. So with continued financial support from White, he enrolled in the College of Medicine at the University of Michigan and top-rated Bellevue Hospital in New York City, where he earned a real MD degree. And at age 26, one year after his return to the Western Health Reform Institute, Kellogg was appointed superintendent. "Despite his small physical size and high, squeaky voice," writes Wilson, "Kellogg nevertheless exuded a charisma that drew people to him" (37).

The energetic young doctor quickly took charge. One of his first acts as director was to change the name of the Institute to the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Kellogg coined the word *sanitarium* to designate "a place where people learn to stay well" in contrast to a "sanatorium," where they came to get well (37). The "San" was part

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luxury hotel, part health spa, part hospital. In addition to a vegetarian diet, clients thrived on breathing exercises, calisthenics, hydrotherapy, and electric light treatments, among other real and imagined health-enhancing activities. Lectures and question-and-answer sessions by the doctor rounded out the activities. Although the facility attracted both Adventists and non-Adventists, Sabbath observance was maintained, a practice that appealed to some non-Adventist clients and irked others. "[O]ne of the more unusual features of the sanitarium," Wilson notes, "was Kellogg's insistence that women and men receive identical treatments in terms of diet and exercise. Dr. Kellogg rejected the popular cult of female invalidism of the late nineteenth century and its ideology of the constitutional weakness of women" (39).

The sanitarium quickly outgrew its original quarters, and by 1891 it occupied a large five-story building that could support three hundred guests. The clientele was typically well-healed, although Kellogg instituted a program for those who could not afford the standard rates. By the turn of the century, he presided over more employees and a larger budget than all non-health-related entities of the General Conference combined. But "despite Dr. Kellogg's success, or probably just as likely because of it," notes Wilson, "not all in the Seventh-day Adventist Church shared his zeal for biologic living" (55). Tensions grew over Kellogg's frequent complaints that "the majority of Adventists, especially the clergy, were not taking the health teachings seriously enough and were working to undermine his influence" (55). Kellogg expressed frequent irritation that prominent Adventist clergy advocated the view that only prayer and faith in God's power were necessary for health and healing. The clergy, in turn, were angered by some of the doctor's pronouncements, such as "Christian physicians might do more for the moral elevation of man, more for the redemption of the lost ones in the dark places of our great cities than all the priests, preachers, and evangelists of every description combined" (57). Kellogg also insisted that church-sponsored medical missionary work should be totally nonsectarian.

As he garnered influence during the latter part of the 19th century, Kellogg began to advocate not just procedural variances from standard church practice, but also more fundamental biblical and theological positions that raised ecclesiastical eyebrows. He repeatedly claimed, for example, that religion and science would get along better if

Christians would simply avoid literalistic readings of Scripture. He dismissed "'creeds, forms, and ceremonies,'" he defined religion as "'the preservation of moral health'" (66), and he preached a dualistic view of human nature which held that at death the human soul, as a pattern of an individual's life, was kept in heaven until the resurrection; at the resurrection, the saved would be provided perfectly pure bodies in preparation for paradise, whereas the wicked would be given impure bodies destined for destruction.

Most troubling to Adventists, however, was Kellogg's theology of the nature of God. A personal testimony from Ellen White in 1882 urged the young doctor to avoid the enticements of scientific materialism on the one hand and deism on the other, and to move instead toward an affirmation of God's sustaining work in nature, including with every breath and heartbeat. Kellogg resonated with this approach—so much so, in fact, that it led him into theological territory which, ironically, became offensive to Ellen White. To Kellogg, God became a mystical, omnipresent, non-anthropomorphic being who not only was at work in nature, but who literally lived within the bodies of human beings. In a paean to God's creatorship, Kellogg told attendees at the 1897 General Conference session that because "God has taken clay and animated that clay, [and] put into that clay his own self . . . and has given me a will, and has made himself the servant of that will, we see that God is man's servant" (75). In a talk two years later, Kellogg declared that "even when a man sins God serves in him in his sin; when a man strikes a deadly murderous blow God serves in that blow,—he puts himself at our command and allows us to use him and even to abuse him and to make use of his power" (78). The conclusion that God is sinful man's servant was clearly a departure from traditional Christianity, to say nothing of more fundamentalist Adventism.

But, Wilson notes, this "was not the only radical conclusion Kellogg derived from his theology. . . . [H]e also began to promote a radical perfectionism based on this conception of God" (75). Kellogg taught that "'the same divinity that was in Christ is in us, and is ever seeking to lead us to the same perfection which we see in Christ.'" Furthermore, "those who meet the Lord when he comes will be above the power of disease as well as above the power of sin" (76). Indeed, "the mark of the beast is the mark of the work of the beast in the heart and it changes the body as well as the character and also shows in the



Kellogg and a cockatoo

countenance. . . . [I]t seems to me our people have been wrong in regarding Sunday observance as the sole mark of the beast. . . . The mark of the beast . . . is simply the change in character and body that comes from the surrender of the will to Satan' " (76). Thus, writes Wilson, "physical and moral perfection that comes from biologic living" would be the mark that identifies God's elect (76). Kellogg also believed that the Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary was a "question of our bodies, and of ourselves personally, and NOT A QUESTION OF [HEAVENLY] ARCHITECTURE' " (80). He even made the outrageous claim that human beings "might live forever" if they ate the vegetarian diet of Adam and Eve (79).

Ellen White took umbrage with Kellogg's views. In 1899 she issued a testimony charging him with misunderstanding the role of God in nature and minimizing the value of Christ's atonement. But an unrepentant Kellogg pointedly dismissed White's testimony that same year in a Sanitarium lecture, downplaying the role of both White's revelations and those recorded in Scripture. Kellogg was on a collision course with White and Adventist leadership, as Wilson observes, not only by questioning "White's prophetic gifts, [but also by] rejecting three of the most distinctive doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism: the anthropomorphic nature of God, the

importance of the Saturday Sabbath, and the sanctuary doctrine of the atonement" (80). Despite his heterodoxy, however, public exposure of Kellogg's views had been limited to a relatively small group of listeners, a fact that kept Adventist leaders at bay—at least in the short term.

It was Kellogg's 1903 publication of *The Living Temple*, a book written for a lay audience, that spelled the beginning of the doctor's end with the denomination. Kellogg reportedly wrote the 568-page volume within a ten-day period using a team of three stenographers. The concept for the book had been approved by the 1901 General Conference Committee as a means of raising awareness of the importance of health among Adventists. But a 1902 fire that completely destroyed the sanitarium and hospital gave the project new impetus. Kellogg believed he could get rank-and-file Adventists to sell the book as a fund-raising effort to support the rebuilding of the sanitarium. General Conference president A. G. Daniells initially supported Kellogg's scheme, but with the caveat that the doctor leave out his peculiar theological beliefs and focus on health. Not surprisingly, Kellogg found this requirement too restrictive and proceeded to include his theological beliefs anyway. Consequently, Daniells and the General Conference pulled their support from the project, leaving Kellogg to print the book on his own. Only two thousand copies were published, far fewer than earlier planned.

Ellen White disapproved of the book, declaring it a "snare that the enemy has prepared for these last days," a "scientific deception," and a work "containing the alpha of a train of heresies" (89). She referred to his philosophy as "pantheism," a charge leveled as a consequence of statements such as "'nature is simply a philosophical name of God,'" and that "'there is present in the tree a power which creates and maintains it, a tree-maker in the tree, flower-maker in the flower'" (86). For his part, Kellogg felt that White misunderstood his views. Although his statements may have sounded pantheistic, in reality they were not far removed from state-

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ments she herself had penned regarding God's involvement in nature. Kellogg did not believe with pantheists that trees, flowers, and humans were God, only that they contained God.⁴ But the prophet also charged the doctor with teaching that God is impersonal because of his rejection of an anthropomorphic God. Kellogg countered that just because "God is so great that we cannot form a clear mental picture of his physical appearance need not lessen in our minds the reality of His personality" (90).

Given its limited distribution, *The Living Temple* made little impact outside Adventism. In 1904 Kellogg attempted to republish the book under the title *The Miracle of Life*, in which he attempted to defend himself against the accusations leveled against him. But it too sold poorly. Ellen White, for her part, reported a vision in which she was told that " 'evil angels had taken captive the mind of ' the doctor, who was undergoing " 'spiritualistic education' " under their tutelage (104). This testimony, of course, only increased Kellogg's sense of alienation. Furthermore, "beyond simply ratcheting up tensions between Dr. Kellogg and the church," notes Wilson,

The Living Temple contributed to the theological conservatism growing within the church during the period, and some within the tradition point to the "Pantheism Crisis" as one of the primary reasons the Seventh-day Adventist Church became increasingly and deliberately wedded to its traditional biblical literalism after the turn of the century (105).

Following a series of reciprocally retaliatory political maneuvers by Kellogg and A. G. Daniells, the atmosphere became "increasingly poisonous and damaging to both the sanitarium and the denomination" (110). In 1907, one year after the Battle Creek Tabernacle had separated itself from the sanitarium, the local church leadership requested that Kellogg resign from the congregation, but he refused. So the church sent two local elders, George Amadon and A. C. Bourdeau, to interview Kellogg. Kellogg spent most of the eight-hour session defending himself and criticiz-

ing prominent Adventists, including A. G. Daniells and W. C. White, for manipulating Ellen White and her testimonies. Within weeks, Kellogg's name was dropped from church books for disrespecting "the gifts now manifest in the church" and for attempting to "overthrow the work for which this church existed" (112). Said a defiant Kellogg, "I propose to stand alone for the Lord, to stand for the truth alone when I have to . . . , and if we cannot do it co-operating with the Seventh-day Adventist people, we will co-operate with all the Christian people we can everywhere" (112).

Having wrested control of the sanitarium from the church before his ouster, however, Kellogg persisted in his work, which continued to prosper. The San had become famous throughout the country and world for its novel treatments and promotion of holistic living. But never one to be content with the status quo, Kellogg soon capitalized on his fame and administrative position by pursuing and promoting another of his interests, eugenics. For many years the doctor had worried about the biologic future of humans. For example, in an 1897 series of articles entitled, "Are We a Dying Race?" Kellogg had provided an unequivocal response: " 'Notwithstanding our marvelous accumulations of wealth and wisdom, we are certainly going down physically to race extinction' " (142). This degenerative process was not only the result of poor diet and the use of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, and other forbidden substances, it also derived from improvements in public health. Even as far back as 1881 he had claimed to the Michigan Board of Health that

"public hygiene alone would really tend to the deterioration of the race by the reversion of the process described by Mr. Darwin as 'survival of the fittest,' by keeping alive the weak and the feeble, and so securing the survival of the least fit, as a result of which the race would be deteriorated by heredity, and intermarriage of the strong with the weak" (141).

By "the strong," Kellogg in no uncertain terms meant whites. Unlike other "scientific racists," however, Kellogg believed in uplifting

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blacks and refused to exclude black clients at the sanitarium. Indeed, notes Wilson, “sixty-seven African American doctors and nurses graduated from the sanitarium’s schools in the twenty years before 1917, many of whom remained on staff” (145).

Kellogg soon became a national leader in America’s eugenics movement, in retrospect a dubious honor achieved in part by his sponsorship of three national Race Betterment Conferences. The first (1914) and third (1928) of these conferences were held at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, whereas the second (1915) was held at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. All three conferences drew hundreds of registrants and featured talks by prominent scientists, scientific racists, nutritionists, anti-immigrant proponents, breeders, and sterilization advocates. Each was well publicized in the media. At the 1914 conference Kellogg presented a talk entitled, “Needed—A New Human Race,” in which he declared, “We possess knowledge enough of eugenics [improvement of living conditions] and eugenics to create a new race within a century if the known principles of healthful living and scientific breeding were put into actual practice” (157, 158). To foster this lofty goal, Kellogg encouraged creation of a national eugenics registry “‘to accomplish for human beings, the same marvelous transformations, and, to evolve the same betterments that have been and still [are] being accomplished for pigs and cattle’” (158). By the following year this goal became reality with the establishment of the Eugenics Registry at the Eugenics Record Office, Cold Spring Harbor, New York. “The world needs a new aristocracy . . . made up of Apollos and Venuses and their fortunate progeny,” opined Kellogg. “Eugenics, race hygiene as suggested by [Sir Francis] Galton, and eugenics, individual hygiene, must be made a religion, or rather a supplement to all other religions” (162).

A lecture at the Third Race Betterment Conference by Kellogg’s friend, Dr. Aldred Scott Warthin, director of the University of Michigan’s Pathology Laboratory, claimed that “if



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there is anything divine in this Universe,” it was living “protoplasm.” Sin, Warthin argued, was anything that prevented transmission of the best germ plasm. “[O]ld faiths, old superstitions, old beliefs, old emotions must then pass away” and be replaced “by a new faith, a new biology” (163). By this point in his life, Kellogg could not have agreed more.

Over the course of his 91 years, Kellogg’s Seventh-day Adventism had morphed into a faith in pseudoscience. Wilson tells the story of this transition, having probed deeply into Kellogg’s personality, writings, institutions, and erstwhile church affiliation—56 of the 240 pages of the book are devoted to notes and references. The writing is smart, engaging, continually pulling the reader forward. Neither hagiography nor exposé, this work shapes a fascinating and well-documented tale of the evolving beliefs and activities of a forceful American personality whom readers will find alternately admirable and exasperating. Kellogg’s drive, vision, and determination attract

Kellogg → continued on page 80...

cite Micah's admonition to "do justice, and to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Isaiah 58 is cited repeatedly. An important message of *Do Justice* is that prophets did not just look to the future; they deliberately provoked their own societies to help the orphan, the widow, and the immigrant *now* (a triad that appears 14 times in Scripture). If Adventism is a prophetic movement, true to the role of the Old Testament prophets, it will call the society within which it dwells to reform its ways. If Adventism is a prophetic movement it will call itself and the larger community surrounding it to embody the just and joyful society described in the glorious poetry of Isaiah and others of the prophets.

The authors of *Do Justice* also provide a silhouette of which Adventist teachings place justice at the core of the church's mission. These Adventist thinkers do not plunge into discussions of grace and works. Creation and the nature of humanity receive scant attention. The relevance of the Second Coming to justice is barely noted. In this book, the doctrine most often related to justice is the Sabbath. Even more than the weekly Sabbath, the authors demonstrate how the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee are celebrations of liberation and justice, requiring rest for the land, freedom for slaves, and forgiveness of debts.

Do Justice suggests that a growing appreciation of justice and human rights as a part of Adventism's mission has coincided with our church's expanding understanding of the Sabbath. The achievement of Nathan Brown and Joanna Darby underscores the work that remains. How do Seventh-day Adventists relate the power and scope of the last word in our name to the urgent challenges of social justice? How does the remnant understand itself as God's prophetic avant-garde in the healing of the nations? ■

Roy Branson, a professor of religion at Loma Linda University, is director



of its Center for Christian Bioethics. He conceived of *Spectrum* and was its immediate past editor for more than 20 years. As well as previously being a member of the faculty of the SDA Theological Seminary, Georgetown University, and Washington Adventist University,

Dr. Branson founded and directed such national advocacy groups as the Coalition for the Protection of Vietnamese Boat People and the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking or Health.

Kellogg → continued from page 75...

tremendous respect, whereas his supersized ego, "go-it-alone" independence, and quirky commitments invite bemusement or disdain.

"Most people who know anything about Dr. Kellogg," writes Wilson, "are apt to associate him either with his most famous invention, the cornflake, or with T. C. Boyle's 1993 comic novel, *The Road to Wellville*,^[5] in which he was portrayed as a megalomaniacal quack." One of Wilson's goals "is to correct this caricature." Kellogg, Wilson opines, "emerges as less a quack and more an extraordinarily energetic innovator and activist . . . one of the precursors of today's 'health gurus' such as Deepak Chopra and Andrew Weil" (xii). In contrast to Chopra and Weil, however, Kellogg's views were shaped by the dual forces of 19th-century Christian physiology and Millerism, blended into an all-consuming, body-centric religion that, for Kellogg, evolved into the pseudoscience of race betterment. Few who have grown up in the Adventist tradition, however, have escaped the long reach of this indomitable high priest of "biologic living." ■

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References

1. Brian C. Wilson, *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the Religion of Biologic Living* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2014).
2. The buildings that once housed the Battle Creek Sanitarium continue to dominate the Battle Creek landscape. Unable to survive the depression, the Battle Creek Sanitarium entered receivership in 1933. Eventually the physical plant was purchased by the federal government and today houses the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center.
3. Richard W. Schwartz, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.: Pioneering Health Reformer* (Hagerstown, MD, Review and Herald, 2006).
4. On page 72, Wilson notes that "critics insisted on calling Kellogg's new theological position pantheism, that is, God and nature are one. Later, more precise critics would correctly label his position immanent theism or the doctrine of divine immanence (that is, God and nature are separate, but God is present in all of nature)."
5. T. Coraghessan Boyle, *The Road to Wellville* (New York: Viking, 1993).