



Ronald L. Numbers

The Historian As Heretic

New essays in the second, expanded edition of *Prophetess of Health* (1993) include this introduction, reprinted by permission of the University of Tennessee Press.

by Jonathan Butler

A Family Affair

Nothing more poignantly illustrates the conflict between the historian and the believer than the trouble it can cause within families. When Ronald L. Numbers, recently hired as a historian at the University of Wisconsin, neared the completion of his manuscript on the Seventh-day Adventist prophet Ellen G. White, his father, Raymond W. Numbers, the pastor of an Adventist church in Las Vegas, was approaching the end of his ministerial career. Pastor Numbers prayed that his son would not publish the book. After *Prophetess of Health* nevertheless appeared in print in mid-1976, a broken father, unable to write his son directly, wrote to his daughter, Carolyn. Recalling the many times their mother and he had prayed over their children's cribs to dedicate them "to the giving of the Last Message of Mercy to the World," he added, "Satan has no right to steal you or Ronnie away from what you were born for." He concluded the letter by claiming a promise in Ellen White's *Child Guidance*: "The seed sown with tears and prayers may

have seemed to be sown in vain, but their harvest is reaped with joy at last. Their children have been redeemed."¹

The publication of his son's book had been a shattering experience for Ray Numbers as a father; and, curiously enough, it was just as devastating for Pastor Numbers as a son. More than forty years before, when Ray had been a ministerial major at the Adventist college near Washington, D.C., his own father, Ernest R. Numbers, himself a minister, had abandoned his family and faith in Ellen White after being publicly exposed in a brief lapse into adultery. The fact that Ray's father had held a middle-level administrative post in the church's General Conference ensured far-slung knowledge of the scandal. For the sensitive young theology student, this shameful experience had been at once damaging and formative. He devoted his life and career to redeeming the sullied family name. But after forty years of blameless toil in the Lord's vineyard, his restoration had been undone. Ironically, the son of the apostate was now also the father of an apostate. Having spent a lifetime restoring his name,

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there was too little time to do so again. Earlier than planned the disheartened pastor retired.²

When *Prophets of Health* was first published, Adventist academics thought it chic to provide psychological explanations for Ron Numbers's slant. They spoke of unresolved conflicts with his inflexibly fundamentalist father or hostility to his father's version of the church. This tack played well among the cultivated Adventists in educational and medical centers. No thought was given, however, to the way such pop psychology could easily have been turned on the apologists themselves. Nor did the defense suggest that psychology or psychohistory might serve as a suitable tool for understanding the Adventist prophet as well as her detractors. Psychohistory only served to account for prophets of other traditions—Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy—not Ellen White.³

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Such apologetics understandably squired Numbers as a historian, who wanted his work analyzed not his life psychoanalyzed. But a rebuttal to Ron Numbers that cast reflections not only on the rebellious preacher's son but, to no small degree, on the preacher-father deeply disturbed Ray Numbers, too. He spoke plaintively to his son about it. (They had generally never had problems speaking to each other, even when speaking on opposite sides of a question.) While Pastor Numbers wondered if he had, unwittingly, prompted his son's book, his concern went deeper, to the way he might have affected his son's soul. The father wanted to know, candidly, if he had been a rigid and unreasonable authority figure at whom his son now hurled his book. Ron assured his father that he had been a wonderful, caring parent, more flexible than many of his contemporaries and, while his son had grown up to disagree with him on many points of faith, he had always respected him. Thus, whatever the strains that had been placed on father and son as believer and historian, the openness and affection between them, through it all, seemed to belie the psychological reductionism of *their* critics.⁴

The effort to explain away *Prophets of Health* by way of the psychological problems of its author was neither more dignified nor less dubious than the mere *ad hominem* attack. In fact, the intensely personal nature of responses to Numbers's book within the Adventist church smacked of a family quarrel. As something of an extended family, Adventists usually prove more generous to non-family members than errant relatives. When Numbers, at thirty, began his research on the Adventist prophet at the Ellen G. White Estate, Arthur L. White, grandson of the prophet and head of the archives, welcomed him

not only as a respected young scholar from the Loma Linda University School of Medicine but as good Adventist stock. Numbers's maternal grandfather, W. H. Branson, had been the church's General Conference president and the author of a classic apologetic answer to the charges of the church's most notorious apostate, Dudley M. Canright.⁵ For this favorite son of the church to have gone sour, then, was taken as something akin to a betrayal of the family.

Two of Numbers's uncles, husbands of his father's sisters, did what they could to rein in their nephew. Roger Wilcox, who served as General Field Secretary of the General Conference, proved less avuncular than officious in relation to Ron. Named as chair of a committee at G.C. headquarters to deal with the book, Wilcox planned strategy for minimizing its damage. Another uncle, Glenn Coon, an evangelist who headed the ABC Prayer Crusade ("Ask, Believe, Claim"), implored Ronnie not even to publish his manuscript and offered to repay him whatever expenses he had incurred in the writing of it, "whether it was a thousand or ten thousand dollars." Admitting he was not able to afford such an offer, he promised to pray for a miracle and then pay in installments. As an alternative to his nephew's manuscript, he suggested that the two of them co-author a more positive book on Ellen White. Though Coon remained Numbers's favorite uncle, his effort to abort publication of the book obviously failed. But the ABC's-of-prayer crusader consoled himself with the thought that his prayer had not failed. For, as Uncle Glenn later pointed out, he could find no Bible promise which said, "Ron will not write a book against [Sister] White."⁶

Neither of these relatives was the least bit persuasive with Numbers.

However, his cousin, Roy Branson, an ethicist at the S.D.A. Theological Seminary, had exerted an earlier influence on him when the two taught together at Andrews University in 1969-70. In that year, Branson co-wrote with Herold Weiss, a New Testament scholar, a brief, provocative essay on "Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship." Published in *Spectrum*, a new, independent journal largely for Adventist academics and professionals, for which Branson and Numbers had been among the founding fathers, the essay called for Adventists "to discover the nature of Mrs. White's relationship to other authors," "to recover the social and intellectual milieu in which she lived and wrote," and "to give close attention to the development of Ellen White's writings within her own lifetime, and also to the development of the church." Two years later, at Loma Linda University, Numbers began his study of Ellen White as a health reformer for which the Branson-Weiss essay, in general terms, could have served as a prospectus.⁷

Skeletons in the Closet

In this retrospective on *Prophetess of Health*, I hope to assess the impact of the book on Seventh-day Adventists, without overlooking its reception beyond the circle of Adventism. In a sense, this introduction echoes the book's two underlying themes: milieu and change. First, in regard to cultural and intellectual milieu, Numbers, like the subject of his study, did not write *in vacuo*. His work may be the single most important example—but by no means the extent—of a historiographical coming of age within Adventism since

1970. While the focus here is on Numbers, it is revealing to view the way in which his work fits into the larger landscape of contemporary Adventism. Second, just as the prophet and her church underwent changes in the nineteenth century, perceptions of the prophet and the church's self-understanding have undergone profound development over the past two decades, at least among educated Adventists. How did Numbers contribute to these changes and what was the nature of these changes?

Until Numbers's book on Ellen White, the Adventist prophet was among the better-kept secrets in American religious history. Seventh-day Adventists themselves seemed to hide their founding mother from the public. In his mapping of American religion, Martin E. Marty writes that ethnicity is the "framework or skeleton of religion in America; around 1960, that skeleton was taken out of the closet." For Adventists, who are at once a religion and a kind of ethnic group, Ellen White has served as a "skeleton" in the two ways Marty suggests: First, she has been the framework for the movement, holding life and limb together in every area of the church's thinking and behavior. All of Adventism stands in her debt for its understanding of the Sabbath, the Second Coming of Christ, justification and sanctification, health reform and medicine, child nurture and education. But, second, she has been a "skeleton in the closet" in that Adventists have hidden her from the non-Adventist public, as if to talk too openly about their "mother" betrays an unnatural dependence on her. Likewise, over the years, the church's ministers and teachers have concealed facts about her career from an *Adventist* public, as if the children were not mature enough to see their spiritual mother as an imperfect human being.⁸

Like other religious minorities, Adventists can be quite sensitive about their public image. In their recent historical and sociological study of the church, Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart concluded that there have been, historically, two public perceptions of Adventists: as apocalyptic fanatics and as philanthropic physicians, symbolized respectively by William Miller at the entrance to the movement and John Harvey Kellogg at its exit. Hidden from view is the complex, internal existence of the church out of which most Adventists live. Ellen White characterizes this Adventism.⁹ If she had been faceless to the public, within the movement she—not Miller or Kellogg—serves as the mirror in which Adventism sees its own face. Millerism represents something of an embarrassment, the debacle from which a now superior Seventh-day Adventism once extricated itself. And because

Within Adventism, Ellen White—not Miller or Kellogg—serves as the mirror in which Adventism sees its own face. With a self-image that combines both feelings of superiority and inferiority, Adventists display both pride and insecurity regarding public images of their prophet.

Kellogg left Adventism after growing too big for it, he imposes on the church a sense of inferiority. With a self-image that combines both feelings of superiority and inferiority, Adventists display both pride and insecurity regarding public images of their prophet. In general, they prefer no association of Ellen White with the apocalyptic fanaticism of her origins. They emphasize, instead, the universality of her health writings and medical institutions.

For Adventists, Numbers had chosen the right topic—health—in introducing their prophet to the public, but this made it all the more disappointing when he identified her with marginal aspects of health reform. Adventists had known all along of skeletons in the closet with respect to their millenarian beginnings, but they had not suspected that similar skeletons could be found in their origins as health reformers. Numbers had hauled them out. This unnerved church members who were not used to seeing their prophet through other people's eyes. They complained that where her writings appeared bizarre, White had been quoted "out of context." This was both untrue and true. It was not true that the documents had been generally misread or misinterpreted. It was true, however, for perhaps the first time, that White's statements were being handled by secular hands. That is, as a result of Numbers's work, White's life and writings were being viewed in their context, but from the perspective of *another context*. Adventists were most unsettled to find her in *Time* magazine. Indeed, they seemed as disturbed by *Time's* coverage of *Propheticess of Health* as they were by the book itself. For in its review-story, the national weekly had portrayed White to its huge readership as a visionary who, as Numbers had

shown, linked masturbation to "imbecility, dwarfed forms, crippled limbs, misshapen heads, and deformity of every description."¹⁰

Confronted by what they took to be bad press on Ellen White, some Adventists could still remain blasé. After all, the prophet had prophesied of future attempts to nullify her writings, which transformed every criticism of her into another prophetic fulfillment.¹¹ Her predictions of the future actually reflected her contemporary experience. For she had faced severe threats to her authority throughout her lifetime. The first serious challenge occurred in the 1840s and 1850s, when she and her husband, James White, co-founded Seventh-day Adventism; the next one came around the turn of the century, when the widowed matriarch sought to re-found the church in her own image.

In the early period, Adventists focused on the nature and authenticity of her visions as well as the relationships of her visions to the authority of the Scriptures. Her visions served as a kind of *urim* and *thummin* that endorsed various biblical interpretations of the pioneers. In Adventist orthodoxy, White assumed a modest, confirmatory role relative to the Bible, much as she subordinated herself in her marriage to her dominant husband James. The 1860s and 1870s, however, saw the visionary's influence increase as her husband's power decreased. By the time of her husband's death in 1881, White enjoyed a more expansive role in the church. Her relationship to her devoted son Willie, who came to oversee her affairs, formed the paradigm of her matriarchal leadership at the turn of the century, much as her marriage had done for early Adventism. No longer the subservient wife, she now imperiously mothered a new generation

of Adventist leaders and their followers. Her dramatic public visions had ended, but her no less dramatic literary output had replaced it. And where her authority had once been secured by merely confirming the biblical interpretations of various brethren, she now claimed divine authority for her statements on the basis of their originality. Thus, her writings shifted for Adventists from merely commentary on the Scriptures to something of a new Scriptures.¹²

Assaults on White's authority have been aimed at either the prophet as visionary or as writer. To charge that Seventh-day Adventists, despite their claims, have relied on White's visions or writings as more authoritative than the Scriptures implicates both the early and later prophet. To account for her visions in psychopathological terms, as hypnotism or hysteria for example, grapples with the trance phenomena of her early life. To debunk her as a plagiarist goes to the heart of her literary identity. Canright, an Adventist evangelist who had been a close friend of the prophet before his defection, produced the most comprehensive and sophisticated polemic against her, as he took on both the visionary and the writer. His book was, however, no more than the polemic of a disillusioned ex-believer, which limited its credibility and its public.¹³

Holy War at the White Estate

Adventist leaders initially dismissed Numbers as another Canright. In establishing and protecting its borders, the church has always found in the defector a familiar, easy, and probably necessary target. In the church's mind,

Ellen White could be viewed only in the extreme, as either prophet or fraud, divinely inspired or satanically controlled; little middle ground existed between hagiography and heresy. But in seeking “neither to defend nor to damn but simply to understand” Ellen White, Numbers confronted the church with something new, and ultimately more challenging than the polemic. He also ensured a larger reading public for his efforts. Numbers, after all, was the product not only of a complete Adventist parochial education but of the graduate degrees beyond Adventism that the church encouraged for its brightest youth before they returned, ideally, to teach in the Adventist system. He represented, then, not a failure of Adventism’s religious and educational vision but a noteworthy success. With a freshly minted Ph.D. in the history of science from the University of California, Berkeley, and teaching appointments at the two Adventist universities—first Andrews, then Loma Linda—Numbers had finished revisions of his dissertation on Laplace’s nebular hypothesis before turning to an Adventist topic. This was hardly the pinched or unschooled profile of the typical polemicist, concerned less with exploring a subject than exposing it. This is not to say that Numbers came to his study of Ellen White devoid of animus. Few intellectual Adventists can reflect honestly on their religious background without some element of anger. To those within the church or outside it, however, Numbers seemed superbly suited, by both religious background and professional training, to produce as fair a study as any of the health-minded Adventist prophet.¹⁴

His resultant monograph had an astonishing impact on Seventh-day Adventists. One Adventist religion scholar commented that *Prophetess of Health* “constitutes

the most serious criticism of the prophetic powers of E. G. White ever to appear in print.” For the sheer explosiveness of its historiographical challenge, Numbers did for White what Fawn Brodie had done for Joseph Smith.¹⁵ Indeed, nothing like it had happened among Adventists before, and probably nothing like it can happen again. The explanation for this resides largely in the fact that in his book Numbers addressed an Adventist agenda. To be sure, in making his case as a first-rate historian, he avoided both apologetic and exposé. But in his study he did not transcend the prophet-fraud framework.

What preoccupied Numbers were Adventism’s historical and scientific claims for the “prophetess of health” and how those claims held up under the scrutiny of a historian of science. At the same time, he laid aside the question of supernatural claims regarding her, as a matter for faith not historical explanation. As a throwback to a nineteenth-century Baconianism in which nature and the Bible complemented rather than contradicted one another, Seventh-day Adventists had found in White’s health teachings a “scientific” basis for belief in her divine inspiration. Two somewhat contrary models had served the church here. On the one hand, most Adventists saw White’s health writings as singularly original and well in advance of modern scientific medicine; only lately had medical research been able to confirm what Adventists had known all along from inspiration. On the other hand, even those few educated Adventists who acknowledged that their prophet had been an eclectic indebted for her health views to her context found the “proof” of her inspiration compelling: with much fallacious health science available to

her, she had always taken the correct position.¹⁶

Numbers demolished both these models of explanation. More than that, in undermining White’s own claims of intellectual independence as a health reformer, he called into question her integrity. Though he had largely concentrated his study on the scope of White’s health teachings, Numbers could not have raised more far-reaching questions in regard to the prophet’s life and charismatic leadership. Shedding light on her entrée into the health reform in the late 1860s, he illuminated the critical transition for the prophet from young visionary to middle-aged writer, marked by a shift from confirmatory to initiatory inspiration. Her claims to originality were sabotaged, of course, where Numbers pointed up cases of her literary borrowing. He stopped short

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of tagging her a plagiarist, however, because he felt that plagiarism implied the conscious intent to deceive.¹⁷

In his book, Numbers's achievement was clear. He had probed a period of White's career in which myths had been born, and he had debunked them. This was at once a strength and a limitation of the study. In favor of the approach was that it offered a long-overdue counterbalance to Adventist hagiography. Numbers had moved Ellen White from an icon within the Adventist household of faith to an accessible historical figure of more universal significance. In order to accomplish this, he had played the iconoclast. He can be faulted for the fact that to topple a venerated image, however necessary, seems by itself unsatisfying and incomplete. One non-Adventist reviewer critiqued him, for example, for "failing to convey adequately the charisma that Ellen White must

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have possessed to permit her . . . to overcome considerable opposition to her health ideas and fasten them as articles of faith upon her expanding body of disciples."¹⁸

Not surprisingly, Numbers's book occasioned a full-blown historical debate within Adventism. But before discussion of the book had reached anything close to the refinement of a debate, in fact while the "book" was still a manuscript, it provoked something akin to a hagiographical "holy war." Arthur White, as the chief guardian of his grandmother's papers, ensured that the conflict over Numbers's study would elicit this sanguinary reaction. After all, White had devoted his life to protecting the persona of the prophet, and at sixty-five, was writing the official biography of his grandmother. Like his father before him, he had operated the White Estate as a closed archives. Then in the mid-1960s, he allowed limited access to primary materials, but with formal trustee approval required for the quotation of any heretofore unreleased documents. Ostensibly, this policy was designed to protect the privacy of individuals to whom Ellen White had written personal and pointed "testimonies." In fact, however, the White Estate seemed most concerned about protecting the image of the prophet herself.¹⁹

Just two years before Numbers arrived at the White Estate for his research, Arthur White had been "burned" by an Adventist English professor, William Peterson, whose textual and historical study of an Ellen White chapter on the French Revolution marked the first instance of a modern critical study of the prophet's writings. In a brief scholarly article, Peterson found White to be a poor historian in that her use of historical materials betrayed bias and inaccuracy. But the acrimonious debate that followed im-

plied that Peterson's findings had been for Adventists less a study than a desecration.²⁰

When Numbers submitted his request for document releases, Arthur White became alarmed that the Peterson problem could repeat itself, or worse. Speaking for the White Estate board, he refused five requests of Numbers's on the following sensitive subjects: the phrenological exam of Edson and Willie White, Ellen White's two sons; John Harvey Kellogg's reference to James White as a "monomaniac in money matters"; James's mental health; Ellen White's insistence on an anti-meat pledge for the church as a whole; and the prophet's account of dining on wild duck. In a low point in relations between Arthur White and Numbers, the archivist also denied knowledge of a sensitive document that had been recently brought to his attention. By this time, White had become deeply agitated by "the Ronald Numbers matter." Before cooperating any further with the historian on his research efforts, then, White flew from Washington to Loma Linda and spent an entire afternoon grilling Numbers on his faith in Ellen White. At one point he drew from his briefcase the small booklet *Appeal to Mothers*, in which the prophet described her revelations on masturbation. White asked, "Brother Numbers, do you believe this?" Still dependent on the White Estate for materials, Numbers replied, diplomatically, that "this would be one of the most difficult documents to substantiate today."²¹

Uneasy about Numbers's work, White had assigned Ronald Graybill, a White Estate researcher in his late twenties, to aid Numbers with desired revisions. He had hoped a young historian, about to enroll as a part-time graduate student in American history at Johns Hopkins University, could represent the

Estate's interests to Numbers even better than he. Graybill had earned the respect not only of churchmen, such as White, but of lay and academic audiences within the church for his popular historical writing and speaking on Ellen White. In this position, Graybill seemed to do no wrong. In response to Peterson's article, for example, he dredged up the fact that Ellen White's use of historians had involved reliance on only a single Adventist writer who had anthologized a number of historical quotations. The fact that this exposed White to be an even worse historian than Peterson had supposed was lost on Graybill's audience; it was more important that he had undercut Peterson's research. A meticulous young scholar had used historical method to serve Ellen White rather than debunk her. As a result, within Adventism's intellectual community at least, he increasingly set the timetable for the church's new historical awakening to its prophet-founder.²²

Graybill naturally resented any suggestion that he was the Estate's apologist-for-hire. Indeed, his major professor, Timothy L. Smith, cautioned him against becoming a "kept historian." For his part Numbers believed that when it came to the study of Ellen White, one could not indefinitely serve two masters. Not even Graybill's considerable finesse could satisfy the unyielding and, basically, contradictory demands of both historical scholarship and church diplomacy. Trying his own hand at prophecy, Numbers wrote Graybill: "You may be the White Estate's fair-haired boy today, but I'd be willing to bet you won't be tomorrow." Numbers himself had not scorned all accommodation to an Adventist audience. With his friend Vern Camer, he had founded and edited *Adventist Heritage: A Maga-*

zine of Adventist History, popularly written and illustrated to recast new historical scholarship on the church in terms palatable to Adventists. In hopes of providing still another publishing outlet for Adventist historians, he had also launched a projected multi-volume series of "Studies in Adventist History." Moreover, he had turned to his study of the Adventist prophet's health views in order to make his lectures more appealing to Loma Linda medical students. But his deepest reason for the research was less pragmatic. For him, "the ultimate cause prompting me to write what I did was, I think, to discover the truth."²³

In 1973-74 Numbers took a fellowship year at Johns Hopkins, during which he revised his White manuscript while beginning a new book. Before coming east, he sent Graybill a preliminary draft of *Prophetess of Health*. This first exposure to Numbers's work shocked Graybill. He fretted to the author about "the tone of the material, the selection and emphasis and the kinds of sources you accepted," and he foresaw in Adventism "a crisis of the first magnitude" over the book. Though differing in their approach to Ellen White, when Numbers arrived for his fellowship year the two developed a rapport based on their common interest in the prophet. Numbers invited Graybill to share his apartment in Baltimore the one night a week he stayed over. In proximity to Numbers, and a world away from the White Estate, Graybill felt the pull of single-minded historical inquiry. At times he daydreamed aloud of how, after Arthur White's departure, he could write his own critical biography of Ellen White. For now, however, Graybill allowed himself no more than a vicarious involvement in *Prophetess of Health*. But he enhanced the book's argument

by feeding Numbers provocative historical materials that the White Estate had uncovered in readying its reply to the author. This happened so often that Numbers, in the midst of the Watergate era, referred to Graybill's role at the White Estate as that of a "Deep Throat."²⁴

By the time the book was published in mid-1976, however, Graybill had assumed the role of arch-apologist on whom many in the church relied for the definitive answer to Numbers. In fact, one distinguished Adventist historian, even before a rebuttal had been prepared, expected that "Ron Graybill's indefatigable scholarship will come close to plugging the 'leaks' in White's authority caused by *Prophetess of Health*. Meanwhile Numbers, now the "apostate," had been cast into the "outer darkness" of the University of Wisconsin, with

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most no access to Adventists. Owing to the profound disparity between Graybill and Numbers in the mind of the Adventist public, one denominational editor quipped, "Two Rons don't make a White." In reality, however, their relationship had always involved a deep level of reciprocity, personifying the interdependence of orthodoxy and heresy.²⁵

Throughout the polishing of his manuscript, Numbers benefited enormously from Graybill's intense scrutiny of the work. For an Adventist historian writing on Ellen White the Seventh-day Adventist millennial metaphor of an "investigative judgment" proves applicable. In an image suggested to them by the biblical notion of the sanctuary, Adventists believe that all of heaven, at the "end of time," sits in judgment on earthlings below by recording every good deed and misdeed. In analogy to this, Numbers sensed the eyes of an invisible spiritual community on him as he wrote his book. At the White Estate this metaphor took on flesh and blood; Graybill acted as a record-

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ing angel. Because factual errors in *Prophetess of Health* were therefore significantly reduced, Graybill had been an advantage to Numbers; but the controversial historian had, in turn, helped Graybill. In taking a heretical position, Numbers had moved "left" of Graybill, and therefore created more space for him—between Numbers and Arthur White—in which to establish a new, more moderate stance. But this only worked as a symbiotic relationship so long as the two organisms, so to speak, both remained alive and mutually supportive of each other. Should Numbers become dead to the Adventist community, more moderate positions would then be the furthest left, and therefore vulnerable. In a return letter to the same historian who had looked for him to plug leaks, Graybill warned that if Numbers were not credited with having made "some genuine points, people will never see any need to adjust their concept of inspiration accordingly." He added, "We can't offer people solutions to problems that they don't have."²⁶

From Numbers's point of view, however, Graybill had often been duplicitous by exacerbating relations between the historian of science and the White Estate and, in turn, the church, in order to appear all the more indispensable in a redemptive, mediating role. Numbers came to believe that Graybill had sacrificed him to further his own interests. Historical points that Graybill seemed to have found persuasive in private conversations, he later faulted before an Adventist public. Numbers knew the White Estate researcher was internally conflicted over many of the historical issues raised by *Prophetess of Health*. He felt betrayed when Graybill projected the conflict onto an Adventist stage as a morality play in which Numbers

wore the black hat and he donned a white one.²⁷

Ironically, Graybill, the historian of religion, often saw his role in more pragmatic, less moral terms than did Numbers, the historian of science. He saw himself, if not as a hired gun, at least as the attorney representing a client. He might not have been fully convinced of the validity of all the White Estate positions, but he was willing to offer to them the best defense available. He was not just a defense attorney, however. He also had a pastoral concern for church members, whom he was trying to lead to a better understanding of their heritage without, at the same time, threatening their faith. It was not until several years later, when work on his dissertation forced him to synthesize what he knew about Ellen White into a coherent whole, that he discovered how impossible it was to deal with her life objectively without being accused of adopting a negative tone.²⁸

From Morality Play To Farce

If the strife at the White Estate over Numbers's book took on aspects of a morality play, at Loma Linda University, where the author held academic appointment from 1970 to 1974, it seemed more like a farce. During his year's leave of absence at Johns Hopkins, Numbers circulated the first draft of his manuscript, in confidence, among five colleagues. But somehow the document reached a duplicating machine, and soon purloined copies, at five dollars apiece, were making the rounds. In this stage Numbers's manuscript resonated more irreverence than the later finished product, and it still may be the case that Adventist perceptions

of the historian's work have been shaped more by the first draft than the published version. The pre-publication fallout led, by 1974, to the loss of Numbers's job at Loma Linda. It is still not clear, however, whether he resigned or was fired. In fact, both occurred about the same time. In an informal, but crucial spring meeting between the university president and the board chairman, Neal Wilson, it had been determined that the young medical historian would not be allowed to return to campus after his fellowship year in Baltimore. In the same period, too, board members of the Loma Linda University Church discussed whether he ought not be disfellowshipped. On the east coast, Numbers learned that he had become a political liability to David Hinshaw, the dean of the medical school who had hired him, and out of a sense of personal loyalty to him offered to resign if his salary could be continued through the following year. Not until later did he hear from Wilson that he had been "fired."²⁹

Incredibly, however, the issue of academic freedom relative to his case never surfaced at Loma Linda. No faculty member or administrator in the university, or elsewhere in Adventist education for that matter, publicly protested Numbers's termination. Instead, the university community became engrossed in clearing the names of faculty members accused of aiding and abetting the historian in his research and writing. Months after Numbers had left the campus, a conspiracy theory, which linked various university personnel to the book, took hold in the highest echelons of church leadership. Rumors circulated that a local pastor had filched financial records on Numbers and others at Loma Linda and delivered them at a local motel room to the church's General Conference president, Robert Pierson,

and Wilson. The pastor and a colleague sought to establish a conspiracy between Numbers and Dean Hinshaw, Carner, who taught religion at LLU, and A. Graham Maxwell, chairman of the division of religion. They charged that *Prophetess of Health* could not have been written alone; the book was too detailed, with too many footnotes. Thus they concocted a story in which the alleged co-conspirators had met together in various cities throughout the country to lay plans to destroy Ellen White and the church. In support of Numbers's research Maxwell had supposedly contributed from twenty to forty thousand dollars of his own money; and in one instance, in Chicago, plans had been made "in the presence of prostitutes."³⁰

It was ludicrous, of course, that so isolated an act as writing a book could be explained as a conspiracy. Nor did it make any sense that several colleagues in the same institution would travel to distant cities in order to meet with one another, when they were free to lunch together any day of the week in Loma Linda. Despite the far-fetched nature of these charges, however, the targets of them within the university felt themselves to be in real jeopardy. Hinshaw and Maxwell seemed to have fallen victim to vendettas, with the controversial book providing a convenient excuse to get rid of them. Though the district attorney was queried in regard to taking legal action against the accusers, because of the circumstantial nature of the case no charges were brought. But if nothing reached a court of law, the episode did reach the court of public opinion. Because analogies to Watergate abounded, the affair was termed a "stained-glass window Watergate." After all, there had been, allegedly, a "break-in" and a pilfering of documents. A chief executive

of the church had been implicated. A "cover-up" had ensued, followed by a full-scale investigation and exposure. As a result, a fatuous conspiracy theory had been laid bare by evidence of a real conspiracy.³¹

After moving to Madison in the summer of 1974 to join the department of the history of medicine at the University of Wisconsin, Numbers found that the Adventist hysteria over his projected volume, though largely out of sight, was not out of mind. The White Estate enlisted the support of Rene Noorbergen, once a writer for *The National Enquirer* who had recently published popular and sympathetic biographies of "psychics" Jeane Dixon and Ellen White, to investigate Numbers's motives for writing his study. Noorbergen planned to question Numbers by telephone about his book while surreptitiously recording his responses with a sophisticated polygraph. But Numbers had been forewarned (by Graybill) of the chicanery and rebuffed Noorbergen

Adventist scholars felt that Numbers's iconoclastic study forced them to choose between endorsing him and losing their jobs, or exaggerating the distance between themselves and him and losing a piece of their souls.

when he called. The White Estate also sent a staff member, Robert Olson, to the Madison Adventist church for a weekend series on the prophet in order to counteract any negative influence the historian might have on the local membership. He urged church members to ostracize Numbers. By this time the historian was philosophically estranged from Adventism but still hoped to remain tied to the church as a cultural Adventist. Once Olson had alerted local Adventists to him, however, he saw no point in returning to the Madison church.³²

“Outing” the Adventist Historians

Numbers's first months in Madison marked a dark period for him. Not only was he spent physically and emotionally, but he was alone. Alienated from Adventists, he had not yet adjusted to life beyond Adventism. Moreover, his marriage was ending, and his wife's betrayal at the root of the breakup seemed emblematic of the way his Adventist colleagues had betrayed him. Though expecting his work on Ellen White to be controversial among the Adventist rank and file, he counted on Adventist historians to rally to his defense. But with the circulation of his manuscript Numbers had become a pariah. Despite the fact that this had resulted from their colleague's historical research in his area of specialty, Adventist historians (with a few exceptions) had been no more supportive of him than were Adventist academics in general. Loma Linda University had not only dropped him from its staff but, in the following year, had dumped him from the masthead of *Adventist Heritage*, the journal he had founded, without a single public outcry from his

historian colleagues.³³

If Numbers saw himself as betrayed by his fellow scholars, they could interpret his iconoclastic study as a betrayal of them, though the explanation for this is somewhat oblique. In recent years an increasingly sophisticated class of academics had joined the ranks of Adventist higher education. Brandishing Ph.D.'s from big-name, secular universities, this new breed of Adventist professor had often found itself at odds with the vast majority of conservative church members, who supported the colleges and universities. The only way to survive in so precarious a position was by way of complete discretion. Almost anything could be said in private. But Adventist academics who publicly dared to break the informal code of silence on controversial issues did so on their own. Numbers certainly had his silent partners. From time to time colleagues quietly voiced their

Adventist historians adhered to the secular canons of historiography, except with regard to Ellen White. Numbers tore apart the last veil, historiographically speaking, between the holy and most holy places. He entered the innersanctum of the prophet's life, not as a believer, but as a historian.

personal approval of his work. But none of them wanted to be driven from cover by their more outspoken colleague. In a sense, Numbers had betrayed *them* by forcing them into a difficult position. Either they endorsed him and lost their jobs, or they exaggerated the distance between themselves and him and lost a piece of their souls.³⁴

Concern for job security at Adventist colleges no doubt had been a factor in the lack of support for Numbers on the part of disingenuous colleagues. But Adventist historians also had genuine reservations about Numbers's study. The church's historians had not resolved their own distinctive version of the believer-historian conflict. They complained about the tone of Numbers's writing. One senior historian commented, for example, that he could accept everything about the book but the disrespectful conclusion to the reform dress story where Numbers wrote, "Journeying to California, Mrs. White discreetly left her pants behind."³⁵ But their concerns ran deeper than literary packaging to the very basis of the argument.

Adventist historians adhered to the secular canons of historiography, except with regard to Ellen White. She occupied a supernaturalist preserve off-limits to naturalist history. In teaching or writing history on any other topic, Adventist historians generally would find it naive to evoke "the hand of God" as a cause. Notwithstanding the occasional old-guard historian who saw evidence of angels at the Battle of Bull Run (and only there because Ellen White had said so), virtually all of them explained the American Revolution or the Civil War, Women's Suffrage or the New Deal as other historians did. But the historical study of Ellen White was a different matter. Because Adventist historians ruled out ex-

ploring the visionary's life with the same methods that governed their study of an Abigail Adams or an Elizabeth Cady Stanton, they chose *qua* historians to ignore her altogether. They often brushed close to the prophet with studies of other figures or events in Adventist history that served, indirectly, to humanize her. But Numbers, unforgivably, had gone in where angels had feared to tread. To draw again upon Adventist metaphor, he had torn apart the last veil, historiographically speaking, between the holy and most holy places. He had entered the inner sanctum of the prophet's life, not as a believer but as a historian.³⁶

The Estate Strikes Back

Numbers saw the equivocal posture of Adventist historians as far less tolerable than the straightforward opposition of the White Estate's churchmen. By temperament, he favored total candor. He saw the issues in the same stark terms that Arthur White did: he simply found himself at odds with him. But relations between Numbers and the Estate's administrative personnel remained civil, if not cordial. This made sense to both parties. Numbers, after all, needed approval from the archives to quote its sources in his manuscript, and the White Estate staff hoped that a good rapport between them and the historian would ensure a book more favorable to the prophet. It became all the clearer that a book was actually in the offing when, in May of 1974, Numbers signed a contract to publish his manuscript through Harper and Row. Numbers had arranged with the White Estate to critique his work in manuscript, and now Clayton Carlson,

head of Harper and Row's religious books department, looked forward to the Estate's comments as well, if only to minimize factual errors in the book.³⁷

Once Numbers had produced his revised manuscript in the fall, however, it was not always clear that Arthur White saw the Estate's critique as a means of improving the future publication. Rather, he seemed bent on so discrediting Numbers with Harper and Row that the publisher would abort the project altogether. To this end, White flew to New York in January of 1975 and spent a day with Carlson poring over a notebook full of documents. In several months of preparing its formal response to Numbers, the White Estate staff had divided the labor as follows: White on dress, Olson on sex, and Graybill on phrenology. These three then went on to New York in February with a 223-page reply for

One remarkable aspect of these Madison discussions deserves notice. In a report to his White Estate colleagues, Graybill stated, "On virtually every occasion where Dr. Schwarz and I felt the evidence was strong and clear, Dr. Numbers agreed to change his manuscript."

Carlson's eyes only. By this time, relations between Numbers and the White Estate had deteriorated to the point that some at the Estate now believed Satan had "gained control" of the historian. Arthur White did not want Numbers to have access to the response because it would only provide "grist for his mill." But there was another reason to keep him from seeing it; the document was riddled with *ad hominem* barbs that were bound to offend him. Carlson, however, flatly refused to accept the White Estate response if the person most able to make use of it were not allowed to see it. So, White gathered up the manuscript and returned with it to Washington, D.C.³⁸

By the end of the month, however, he had changed his stance and forwarded a copy of the Estate's reply to Numbers. Graybill then called the historian and asked to meet with him. On a weekend in early March, Graybill and Richard Schwarz, chair of the history department at Andrews University, traveled to Madison for extensive discussions with Numbers about his manuscript. Numbers was still on good terms with Graybill, and he counted Schwarz a close friend. The senior Adventist historian had hired him out of graduate school and still called him "Ronnie." If Graybill was fast becoming the church's leading authority in Ellen White, Schwarz was its premier denominational historian. The threesome planned a three-day working weekend at a hotel in Madison. They moved a six-foot banquet table into Graybill's room. Schwarz had brought a microfiche reader and a box of Ellen White's books and the works of denominational historians. They also had an IBM typewriter.

At the outset of the weekend, Numbers complained that in places the critique was too weak to

be useful; he also found it insulting. Graybill admitted its shortcomings, apologizing especially for personal attacks. On their weekend together, however, the three men found a good deal of common ground. They combed through every scintilla of Numbers's manuscript, and the author agreed to change both factual and interpretive points. Single words that carried emotional or negative connotations were exchanged for more agreeable terms. Numbers also solicited help in finding more heartwarming episodes in the prophet's life in order to build empathy for her as a historical figure. No one ended the weekend under the illusion that his book was anything less than a major revision of the traditional Adventist view of Ellen White. Numbers had accounted for the visionary's life in strictly naturalistic terms; the average Adventist would find this shocking.

Ernest Sandeen, a noted church historian from a fundamentalist background, saw Numbers's book as more than simply "a valuable work of social history"; it was also a "moving personal document and a report on the state of one American denomination's soul."

But given the firestorm of criticism that Numbers would face for his book, one remarkable aspect of these Madison discussions deserves notice. In a report to his White Estate colleagues, Graybill stated, "On virtually every occasion where Dr. Schwarz and I felt the evidence was strong and clear, Dr. Numbers agreed to change his manuscript." Or where one of them sided with him, Numbers stuck with his original interpretation. The subsequent published criticisms of *Prophetess of Health*, then, even those of Graybill or Schwarz, more than likely faulted not just Numbers but one or the other of his companions on that Madison weekend.³⁹

The 258-page book appeared in print in May of 1976. The even longer White Estate critique of it came out in the fall. Just prior to the publication of his book, Numbers and the White Estate blamed each other for many of the same sins. The Estate believed that the historian had mishandled the prophet by way of sweeping generalizations, a sneering attitude, quotations taken out of context and, most importantly, dishonesty. Numbers thought the Estate had treated him in much the same way. If the two had sometimes mirrored each other, in an ironic twist, Numbers found himself, in the late spring, in a similar position to the White Estate in regard to releasing materials. To people who were "misrepresenting" her, the Estate had always refused permission to quote the prophet. But when it came to publishing their reply to Numbers, which copiously quoted his book, the Estate needed the historian's permission. It would be necessary for him, of course, to judge whether he had been misrepresented in its document. Numbers may have never had any intention of finally declining the White Estate request, but he did let the matter hang for a while. Arthur White wrote several solicitous letters to the author beginning

in late April. After seeing the critique, however, Numbers caustically responded that he found it to be "grossly unfair." As late as mid June he still withheld permission, for he had expected the Estate staff to be as fair in evaluating his work as they wanted him to be in evaluating Ellen White. "But apparently," he concluded, "we have a double standard."⁴⁰

The State of the Church's Soul

Spectrum provided the most important public forum within the church for evaluating the published book. Roy Branson, as editor, had invited a review by noted church historian Ernest Sandeen. Himself from a fundamentalist background, Sandeen understood the torturous conflict between believer and historian, especially when they inhabited the same person. But he also knew that, as if by some historiographical law, the skeptical believer produces the best historical scholarship. Though it had obviously been a deeply painful experience for the young historian, Numbers had made an invaluable contribution to his church and to the scholarly world beyond it. If Seventh-day Adventists were not too defensive to come to terms with Numbers's view of Ellen White (and, in this regard, Sandeen had every confidence in Adventists), they would avoid the pitfall of Christian Scientists, who had rejected historical scrutiny of Mary Baker Eddy. Thus, Sandeen saw Numbers's essay as more than simply "a valuable work of social history"; it was also "a moving personal document and a report on the state of one American denomination's soul." Upon reading the review in manuscript, Bran-

son thought it would be good for his cousin's soul to hear it, so he called him and read it to him over the phone. For more than two years, Numbers had faced almost nothing but criticism for his work on Ellen White. This essay, from a historian he greatly respected, expressed profound gratitude for his efforts. He broke down and sobbed.⁴¹

The Adventist commentators in *Spectrum*, for the most part, took a dimmer view of Numbers's book than Sandeen expected of them. Only one Adventist historian, Numbers's predecessor in the history of medicine at Loma Linda, W. Frederick Norwood, embraced the book. He insisted that it would disturb only those who had exalted Ellen White "to a pedestal of innerrancy and infallibility, a position she did not claim for herself or even for the Bible writers." But two other Adventist scholars rebutted the book with finely spun apologetics. Warning readers that Numbers wrote history from an entirely naturalistic slant, Schwarz argued that the raw historical facts called for a supernaturalistic explanation. He admitted that White may have borrowed from other health reformers, but he suggested that both the prophet and her secular informants may have been inspired by the same Spirit. He contended, too, that Numbers had obtained his facts from unreliable, hostile witnesses, such as Canright and Kellogg. Fritz Guy, an Adventist theologian, faulted the book for its unbalanced view of White, its naturalistic approach to her, and its skepticism with regard to her integrity. But he regarded all this as a negative virtue. For a limited or faulty perspective on the prophet might spur further investigation of her and also provide an opportunity to correct theological misperceptions among Adventists regard-

ing inspiration.⁴²

Numbers believed that Schwarz's comments on the writing of history tended to "caricature rather than clarify the art." With reference to Schwarz's defense of multiple revelations, Numbers professed to admire such "valiant efforts to rescue Mrs. White from embarrassing situations." But he pointed out that if the church accepted these explanations, "its doctrine of inspiration [would] never be the same." The criticism that he had lent too much credence to Adventist defectors Numbers found potentially the most damaging. He counted roughly 1,185 citations in his book, however, and found that nearly two-thirds came from pro-Ellen White materials, while a mere 3.9 percent were from those hostile to the visionary. The differences between Schwarz and Numbers, as it turned out, were more apparent in the pages of *Spectrum* than they were in reality. For Schwarz, incredibly, had based at least some of his critique on an earlier draft of Numbers's manuscript, not the published book. When he later read the book, Schwarz apologized to him for rebutting "errors" that had been changed in the final version, in part at Schwarz's own urging. Guy, presumably, had read the book, but to make his key historical points, in Numbers's view, he had drawn uncritically on the White Estate's reply.⁴³

Under the title "A Biased, Disappointing Book," the White Estate presented in this same issue of *Spectrum* a synopsis of its longer response to Numbers. The fundamental difference between the White Estate and the historian (and perhaps, finally, their *only* difference) was that the Estate believed Ellen White's divine inspiration could be historically proven; Numbers insisted it could not. The Estate asked: "Did Ellen White receive her health message from the Lord or from

earthly sources?" Arguing that the prophet, prior to her health vision of 1863, had no more than a limited, fragmentary knowledge of health reform, the Estate said that White's intellectual independence implied her supernatural inspiration. But in establishing White's independence, the Estate hurt its case at one point by proving too much. When the Whites' son Henry was stricken in December 1863 with a fatal illness, it recounted, the frantic parents called a local physician instead of employing Dr. Jackson's system of water cure. This argument proved an embarrassment, however, because the prophet had received a divine endorsement of the water-cure system six months prior to this in her health vision of June 5. In its zeal to prove White's obliviousness to earthly sources, then, the Estate had inadvertently suggested that the prophet ignored her heavenly source as well. Numbers, of course, had made his case for the deriva-

It is an important commentary on the nature of Seventh-day Adventism, however, that its intellectuals and its clerical leadership remain keenly aware of each other. Numbers could not be dismissed out of hand; he had to be dealt with.

tive nature of White's health writings by showing how knowledgeable early Adventist leaders were of the health-reform movement and by citing close literary parallels between White's and that of other health reformers. But Numbers added, "Even if Mrs. White were unique, it would add no *historical* evidence to her claim of inspiration."⁴⁴

In every aspect of the debate between the Estate and Numbers, it seemed clear that they resided in separate universes. Given the gaping void between them, it is surprising that the two parties remained in close enough proximity to carry on such an extended quarrel. It is an important commentary on the nature of Seventh-day Adventism, however, that its intellectuals and its clerical leadership remain keenly aware of each other. Numbers could not be dismissed out of hand; he had to be dealt with. But church officials were miffed that the *Spectrum* issue devoted to Numbers had, by and large, taken his work seriously. And an article written by another of its guest reviewers had, in their view, gone too far. Fawn Brodie, best known to Adventists for her highly regarded biography of Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, contributed perhaps the most provocative reflections on White's life that Adventists had ever read. Noting that Numbers had left a psychobiographical analysis of the visionary to future writers, Brodie proceeded to highlight material in the narrative that could inform such a clinical study. Church leaders were enraged. They threatened to censure or shut down *Spectrum*. General Conference executives, including President Pierson and Vice-President Wilson, along with White Estate officials, met in an emotionally charged meeting in Philadelphia with members of *Spectrum's*

editorial board. The session's most riveting moment captured the depth of feeling with regard to the Brodie essay. A White Estate official silenced the room with the following vivid remark: "It's as if Mrs. White had been stripped naked, stripped naked!"⁴⁵

Throughout the year of its publication, church officials orchestrated a concerted campaign against *Prophetess of Health*. Along with its twenty-four-page reply and full-length *Critique*, the church highly promoted an inexpensive paperback edition of *The Story of Our Health Message*, a sympathetic study by Dores E. Robinson, a secretary and grandson-in-law to the prophet. Study aids designed to answer questions raised by Numbers now accompanied this book. Other apologetic books on Adventism and health followed. In reactionary fashion, these did not so much respond to *Prophetess of Health* as retell the Adventist health story as if Numbers's book had never been written. But in a series of Prophetic

Non-Adventist scholars exerted an influence on Adventist academics. For the first time Adventists saw Ellen White as an object of historical interest to scholars in the fields of American social, medical, church, and women's history.

Guidance Workshops, each conducted for two weeks on four Adventist college campuses, Robert Olson and other White Estate officials sharply denounced specific points in the book. *Time's* review of it in August, entitled "Prophet or Plagiarist?" called for a rejoinder in the workshops. At Andrews University in southern Michigan, the weekend after the article hit the newsstands, Olson reported that not a *Time* could be had within fifty miles of the campus. Numbers's book itself could not be conveniently obtained at Andrews. The university bookstore would not display it, but did sell it on request. The book was treated as contraband, carefully wrapped in plain paper, so customers could leave the store with it undetected.⁴⁶

This atmosphere throughout the church made it difficult for Adventist historians to come to terms with Numbers's book in their own way. But gradually they did. An important early step in this process was a review in *Spectrum* by Gary Land, a historian at Andrews University, of the White Estate's full-length *Critique*. With some trepidation, as "a denominational employee, whose job may depend on adhering to orthodoxy," Land underscored numerous examples of "how the White Estate's adoption in practice, although not in theory, of the inerrancy approach to inspiration has led it to make arguments that do not fit the facts." But, for generations, the church lived with the "practice" of Mrs. White's inerrancy. And Adventist historians felt a duty to integrate the new historical thinking with the old faith in such a way that Adventism might be transformed without being destroyed. In 1979, one young Adventist historian, Benjamin McArthur, questioned whether the church's revolution of historical consciousness, especially with regard to its prophet, might not irreparably damage the

tradition, much as historical criticism had done to Judaism a century before. In a presidential address to the Association of Western Adventist Historians in the same year, Eric Anderson commented that McArthur may have been too pessimistic. But Anderson agreed that Adventist historians had to deal with the theological implications of their work. Failing to do so invited comparisons to the World War II scientist lampooned in Tom Lehrer's ditty:

Once da rockets are up
Who kares where dey come down?
Dat's not my department
Says Verner Von Braun.⁴⁷

An Historical Revolution

Non-Adventist scholars faced none of these concerns, of course. But their largely enthusiastic reception of Numbers's study, evident in the raft of favorable reviews, exerted influence on Adventist academics. For the first time, Adventists saw Ellen White as an object of historical interest to a wider community of scholars in the fields of American social, medical, church, and women's history.⁴⁸ And the "gentiles" brought their different perspectives to the monograph. Adventists, for example, had thought of Numbers as utterly secular and naturalistic. But outsiders to the community, such as Martin E. Marty, saw him as "half-in, half-out of the Adventist church." If he was "in transit from Adventism," he had still presented an "empathetic and fair story of her life." Another reviewer felt that the book reflected Numbers's "conflict between historical objectivity and commitment to religion."⁴⁹

Close to the publication of *Prophetess of Health*, Adventists certainly found no humor in, and

therefore did not appreciate, the tongue-in-cheek tone of James C. Whorton, who wrote, "Numbers' 'attack' on White is subtle even by satanic standards, for he takes great care to be objective, and if his judgement errs it is on the side of charity." Whorton continued in a humorous vein in his later book on the history of American health reformers: "Although Numbers's case is convincing," he wrote, after summarizing his argument, "White perhaps did receive genuine revelations, and conceivably outraged Adventists are correct in seeing his book as a Satanic 'deception.'" If Adventists could not realistically expect outsiders to share their religious sensibilities about the book, they would have preferred a wider scope to the Adventist health story Numbers told in order to dilute revelations about their prophet. But Whorton favored the way Numbers had displayed only enough of the larger Adventist health story to tantalize readers. In doing this, it was as if he had followed the standard advise of health reformers: "to avoid gluttony, end each meal while a bit of appetite remains. One finishes *Prophetess of Health* with a feeling of satisfaction, not satiety, and a relish for future samples of related items."⁵⁰

Adventists had complained that Numbers had been too interpretive, too biased. But some of the non-Adventists found it the sparest of narratives, understated, and lacking in an interpretive framework, for which they either lauded or faulted him. In the developing area of women's history, for example, Numbers proved potentially as controversial as he was anywhere beyond Adventist circles. Gerald Grob appreciated his narrative history as a valuable building block but complained that he had not done more to analyze White against a backdrop of the changing roles of women

in the nineteenth century. Another reviewer seemed piqued by the interpretation she found in the book of "an ignorant, hysterical, hypochondriacal female, almost without redeeming qualities, and manipulated by a few clever men." For the most part, however, as a result of Numbers's effort, the Adventist visionary took her rightful place in the emergent historiography on both women and health reform. Moreover, more general and interpretive studies of American religion, society, and culture added the Ellen White of Numbers's narrative (without alterations of their own) to the historical pantheon of women religious leaders and health reformers.⁵¹

All of this impressed Adventist historians. Numbers, after all, was a success story. He had pulled himself up from the Adventist "ghetto" and had "made good." And if he still projected something of a diabolical persona for the average Adventist in the pew, Adventist academics found more and more to admire in him as a historian. Indeed, because secular historians had seen Ellen White as interesting and significant, a generation of Adventist historians began to view her, for the first time, as a legitimate object for their own scholarly inquiry. In this way, Numbers had inspired an escalating revolution in Adventist scholarship on the prophet. He himself had gone on to a full and productive academic life beyond Adventism. But from his lofty perch at the University of Wisconsin, he served, quite unintentionally, as a kind of conscience for Adventist historians; they were more likely to take on tough issues with candor because they felt him looking over their shoulder. They kept him apprised of developments within the church, sending him manuscripts for comment, kibitzing with him at scholarly meetings, even inviting him occasionally to

Adventist campuses for clandestine discussions of his earlier work. A key indicator of his rehabilitation came in 1980, when west coast Adventist historians invited Numbers to speak to them at Walla Walla College. Many of them now envied his experience with the Ellen White book—to have wrestled with the angel, to have passed through dark nights, to have felt so alive. But none of them would quite reproduce it. Much of their later historical writing confirmed Numbers's findings in other aspects of the prophet's life. Some of it went far beyond his work in radically reassessing her. None of it, however, would reach the public beyond Adventism with the impact and notoriety that Numbers had achieved. Nor would any of it create the scandal within Adventism that Numbers did. Evidently, Adventism could lose its innocence only once.

In the decade following the publication of *Prophetess of Health*,

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historiographical developments on Ellen White focused on her, as they had in the past, as both a visionary and a writer. Her literary identity had been first to occupy contemporary Adventist scholars, and revelations in regard to the prophet dramatically increased over time. Numbers's own modest discoveries of literary parallels between Ellen White and Larkin B. Coles, which filled no more than a page in his endnotes, soon utterly paled beside other literary finds. Donald McAdams, then a historian at Andrews University, examined a chapter on John Hus in White's revered classic, *The Great Controversy*, and found her writing to be the "selective abridgements and adaptation of historians." To his amazement, he learned that she was not just borrowing the occasional paragraph which she had run across in her reading, but was "in fact following the historians page after page, leaving out much material, but using their sequence, some of their ideas, and often their words." Indeed, the only truly original part of White's chapter in manuscript, astonishingly, had been excised by editors from the published text.⁵²

For Adventists, however, McAdams's literary findings (along with those of Peterson and Numbers) were only a harbinger of worse things to come. Walter Rea, an Adventist pastor in California, had once believed that the Bible and Ellen White's writings should be the extent of a good Adventist's reading material. Indeed, he had committed vast portions of White's writings to memory. In time, though, he ranged beyond this limited reading list, deciding that it must be permissible to read books that White herself had read. But when he gained access to her library, he came upon a startling number of literary parallels between an author he had thought inspired and original and

the writers she had read. He then spent twenty years corroborating this discovery. Drawing especially from her books *Prophets and Kings* and *The Desire of Ages* and a contemporaneous writer, Alfred Edersheim, Rea amassed a huge number of literary exhibits which he later published in a book provocatively entitled *The White Lie*. When he first presented his findings to a General Conference-appointed committee of scholars and churchmen, the committee objected to his sloppy methodology and acerbic tone, but conceded that "Ellen White, in her writing, used various sources more extensively than we had previously believed." Churchmen hoped to educate lay Adventists in regard to these troubling facts, but Rea's story reached the *Los Angeles Times* before much could be done, and the church revoked his ministerial credentials.⁵³

Literary analysis of Ellen White's writings quickly gave way to even more controversial and far-reaching biblical, historical, and theological studies of her. Joseph J. Battistone, a New Testament scholar, undercut the usual Adventist use of the prophet as an authoritative biblical commentator. Suggesting that her writings were unreliable exegetically, he saw them as primarily homiletical in nature. No part of White's commentary on the Bible mattered more than her interpretation of "last day events." My own article entitled "The World of E.G. White and the End of the World," which I wrote while teaching at Loma Linda University, placed White's understanding of eschatology within the context of nineteenth-century society and culture. I argued that White's scenario on the end of time, deeply formative for the Adventist identity, had been culturally conditioned. The political, social, and cultural events to which Adventists still looked in the

future to signal the end of the world more properly fit conditions of her nineteenth-century world than that of the late twentieth century. In short, Adventism was an anachronism.⁵⁴

Another key to the Adventist identity was the church's doctrine of the sanctuary and investigative judgment. For Adventists, the sanctuary served as a symbol of their special role as God's remnant at the close of human history. But an evangelical Adventist theologian, Desmond Ford, came to the conclusion that Adventism's understanding of the sanctuary was both poor exegesis and unchristian. And because Ellen White's role had been so significant in establishing the doctrine—as it had been with all basic Adventist beliefs—Ford's call for a radical overhaul of the sanctuary teaching challenged White's authority among Adventists. Indeed, in any Adventist theological debate, Ellen White's views provided the hidden agenda. Adventists preferred to place themselves, at least in theory, in the Protestant lineage of "Scripture alone," not as a non-evangelical sect based on the visions of a prophet. But, practically speaking, they were more likely defined as a group that spoke only when White spoke and were silent where she was silent. Ford's declarations on the sanctuary identified a central tenet of Adventism as rooted in White's writings rather than the Scriptures, as sectarian rather than evangelically Protestant, and, most important, as wrong rather than right. For this reason, Ford concluded that White's legacy should be seen as "pastoral" rather than "canonical." Though, at a conference in Glacier View, Colorado, church leaders moved considerably in Ford's direction on the sanctuary doctrine, they—almost simultaneously—stripped him of

his ministerial credentials.⁵⁵

All of these developments in Ellen White studies dealt with the prophet's writings and how they related either to the Bible or her own literary and cultural context. Another line of investigation has cut through her writings to the person behind them. Still in an initial yet promising stage, this scholarship examines the personal and social circumstances that account for White's emergence as a visionary. In writing his book on the prophet, Numbers had "consciously shied away from extended analyses of her mental health and psychic abilities." Sixteen years later, however, he and his present wife, Janet S. Numbers, a clinical psychologist, have addressed the matter of the prophet's mental health.⁵⁶

Further inquiry on White as a visionary has widened to include the enthusiastic social environment that produced her. Graybill completed his doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins on Ellen White as a charismatic religious founder, and he devoted a chapter of it to her trance-visionary period in the context of an enthusiastic community. Probing her visions from both psychological and anthropological perspectives, he described the way the prophet had served as an expression of the ecstatic impulses of early Adventism. But as her community changed, she changed. Order replaced enthusiasm, and White as a more conventional religious leader took over for the trance figure. In making his case, Graybill assumed the naturalistic posture for which Numbers had been excoriated less than a decade before, and he lost his job of thirteen years at the White Estate. Shortly thereafter, an even clearer picture of the ecstatic character of early Adventism emerged with a spectacular documentary discovery by a historian at Loma Linda University. Frederick Hoyt came

upon court transcripts that included testimony placing James White and Ellen Harmon, along with other Adventists, in the midst of tumultuous expressions of enthusiasm. Though Ellen White later disavowed the more bizarre aspects of this phenomena as fanaticism, and had suppressed evidence of her own part in it, the court records told a different story.⁵⁷

Looking back on Adventism in the 1970s and 80s, we see that the church had matured in regard to its understanding of Ellen White as both visionary and writer. And in the middle of this ferment, another astonishing primary source surfaced that went right to the heart of Adventism's spiritual agony over its prophet's authority. Shortly after White's death in 1915, Adventist Bible and history teachers met with churchmen to discuss the role of her writings in Adventist theology, education, and practice. These meetings in 1919 proved so candid

In the middle of the ferment of the 1970s, an astonishing primary source surfaced in Spectrum—transcripts of meetings in 1919 on Ellen White's role in the church. Discussion at these conferences proved so candid, church leaders kept the lacity in the dark.

and open, that church leaders saw to it that a more conservative laity was kept in the dark as to what had been discussed. Sixty years later, however, transcripts of the meetings were dredged up and found compellingly relevant to the church's contemporary problems on Ellen White. What made these transcripts so remarkable was that key leaders in the church, including the General Conference president, Arthur G. Daniells, not marginal figures, were seen struggling over questions regarding the prophet. Alongside the churchmen of this earlier time the Adventist academics of the 1970s seemed far less heretical. Bemoaning the fact that Ellen White's writings had assumed canonical status among Adventists and that their new Scriptures were also held to be "verbally inerrant," one delegate insisted, to the contrary, that the value of her writing resided in "the spiritual light it throws into our own hearts and lives [more] than in the intellectual accuracy in historical and theological matters." Another delegate offered this prescient remark: "Is it well to let our people in general go on holding to the verbal inspiration of [White's] Testimonies? When we do that, aren't we preparing for a crisis that will be very serious some day?"⁵⁸

Owing in part to the failure of nerve among the leaders in 1919, Adventist academics faced a spiritual and vocational crisis in the 1970s without the benefit of knowing that at one time the movement's mainstream had experienced a similar turmoil. As a result, they had been forced into an unnecessarily peripheral and isolated position. But contemporary Adventism had undergone a real change, and profoundly altered perceptions of Ellen White lay at the heart of it. The new scholarship had established that the prophet was neither original nor inerrant, neither changeless

nor timeless. To what degree this historical revolution has spread from the academic elite to the rank and file is not altogether clear. Nor is it known to what extent the vast majority of Adventists in the Third World would recognize this "new" Ellen White from North America. What has become obvious, however, is the fact that this historical consciousness-raising, unlike that of the early twentieth century, has reached a wide public, both inside and outside the church. This increases the likelihood that it will last and spread. Indeed, a survey of Adventist opinion after the revelations on White shows that fewer and fewer members equate their faith with belief in her as a prophet. Ellen White's writings can no longer be imposed as a litmus test of orthodoxy with quite the self-assurance they once were. Not even the White Estate projects the defensive posture that it did under

Numbers' father, after poring over the 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, finally understood his son—and proudly displayed his book. On his deathbed he crowed to visitors about his boy, the "author," who had just been awarded a prestigious "Guggenheimer" Fellowship.

the prophet's grandson. Since Arthur White's retirement, the Estate has steadily adopted more open policies on its holdings. In regard to critical transitions in the prophet's role among Adventists, Arthur White's passing from the scene may prove as significant as two previous events: Ellen White's death and her husband's death before hers.⁵⁹

But if, with the changing perceptions of Ellen White among Adventists, heresy has been the mother of orthodoxy, the heretics themselves have been largely lost to the community. A review of many of the names identified with advances in Ellen White studies—William Peterson, Roy Branson, Herold Weiss, Ronald Numbers, Donald McAdams, Ron Graybill, Jonathan Butler, Desmond Ford, Walter Rea—reveals that none of them is now employed by the church (with the exception of Graybill who was forced to change jobs within it), and most of them are no longer active church members. Within Adventism, the prophet had been lethally radioactive to many of those who have handled her. Numbers is neither a believing nor a practicing Adventist, but, because friends have urged him to, he allows his name to remain on the books of his former church at Loma Linda University. And from time to time, its pastor (under pressure from the church board) has written to him with inquires about the disposition of his membership. Numbers also maintains a place among the consulting editors of *Spectrum*. Given his limited editorial contributions to the journal of late, he recently asked his cousin, Roy, to drop his name from the list of editors. Branson pleaded with him, however, "*Spectrum* is your one link to the church; don't make me take your name off the masthead."⁶⁰

His father could not let him go

either. As Ray Numbers read the 1919 Bible Conference transcripts, they changed his view of Ellen White in a way that his son's book could not do on its own. The testimony of past General Conference officials, as they searched their souls over prophetic authority, gave the father permission to reach out to his son. Because he never questioned the boy's honesty, yet he knew he could not be telling the truth about Ellen White, he had concluded that Satan had taken possession of Ron's mind.

Embarrassed by his son's apostasy, he refused for years to be seen in his company if Adventists were around. Shortly after the publication of *Prophetess of Health*, Ron had chided him for sequestering his complimentary copy of the book out of sight. But after poring over the 1919 record, he finally understood his son—and proudly displayed his book in the living room. On his deathbed, he crowed to visitors about his boy "the author," who had just been awarded a prestigious "Guggenheimer" Fellow-

ship. He was still far from seeing eye to eye with his son on the prophet. But, for the first time in his life, he had acknowledged her problems. Just days before his death in 1983, he said, "Ronnie, I want you to know that I believed everything I taught you about Mrs. White. As for the mistakes in her writings and the influences on her, I recognize now that there are some problems. But *then*, I told you what I believed." With these words, a historian and a believer had never been closer.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

This study relies on both the "outer" history found in key published sources and the "inner" history uncovered in personal letters, memoranda of conversations, reports, oral tapes, and transcriptions of lectures. These latter unpublished materials were generously provided to me by Ronald L. Numbers from his own extensive collection. Unless otherwise designated below, the unpublished sources may be found among his papers in Madison, Wisconsin. The personal conversations between Numbers and others are reported in memos by Numbers. In addition to drawing on these materials, I also interviewed several of the principals. My most important and extensive interviews were of Numbers himself, February 26, March 5, and April 19-21, 1990. But I benefited as well from conversations with Eric Anderson, Roy Branson, Vern Carner, and Ronald Graybill.

1. R. W. Numbers to Carolyn [Numbers] Remmers, July 20, 1976.

2. Interview of Ronald L. Numbers, March 5, 1990; R. W. Numbers to Charles Houck, May 13, 1979.

3. Jack Provonsha, an ethicist, and Brian Bull, a pathologist, discussed *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976) in taped Sabbath School classes at Loma Linda University in the spring of 1976, in which they attributed flaws in the book to the

personal and theological inadequacies of its author. General reference to such responses, itself critical of them, is found in Fritz Guy, "What Should We Expect from a Prophet?" *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), 22.

4. Interview of Ronald Numbers, February 26, 1990.

5. Canright lambasted Adventism and its prophet in two works: *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1889); and *Life of Mrs. E. G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1919). Branson's refutation was *Reply to Canright: The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1933).

6. Glenn and Ethel Coon to Ronald and Diane Numbers, January 28, 1975; Ronald Numbers to Glenn and Ethel Coon, February 15, 1975; Glenn and Ethel Coon to Raymond and Lois Numbers, December 13, 1976; Roger A. Wilcox to R. W. Numbers, June 15, 1976.

7. *Spectrum*, II (Autumn, 1970), 30-33.

8. In encyclopedia entries on Seventh-day Adventists, the earlier generation of Adventist apologists ignored or played down Ellen White's role in the church. The prophet is not mentioned in the following encyclopedia articles: *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 1960,

ed., s.v. "Seventh-day Adventists," by LeRoy E. Froom; *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Seventh-day Adventists," also by Froom; and *Merit Student's Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Seventh-day Adventists," by Francis D. Nichol. For another entry in which Ellen White is noted but not as a prophet, see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Seventh-day Adventists," by Nichol. For his comments on ethnic religion, see Martin E. Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 158-77; quotation on p. 160; I first applied Marty's view of ethnicity to Ellen White and the Adventists in Jonathan Butler, "Reporting on Ellen White," *The View*, I (Winter, 1981), 1, 11.

9. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), p. 268.

10. The book was reviewed in "Prophet or Plagiarist?" *Time* CVIII (August 26, 1976), 43; a three-part response to *Time* by Kenneth H. Wood appeared in *Adventism's* official church organ *R&H*, CLIII (August 19, 1976), 2-3; (August 26, 1976), 2, 11-16; and (September 2, 1976), 2, 13-14.

11. See, for example, EGW, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1958), I, pp. 41-42.

12. Both White's domestic life and

her public career are dealt with in Ronald Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., John Hopkins University, 1983); see also Steven Daily, "The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth Century America" (D.Min. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1985).

13. Canright's *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* prompted a systematic rebuttal from the church's best-known apologist more than three decades later in F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1951).

14. Kenneth Wood believed that the church's answer to Numbers had been already rendered in its answer to Canright a quarter of a century earlier, *R&H*, CLIII (August 19, 1976), 3; Numbers's expressed intent to write non-polemical history appeared in his preface to *Prophetess of Health*, p. xi; Numbers's three books were not published in the order they had been written: *Prophetess of Health* appeared first, in 1976; the dissertation, which had been written earlier, was released as *Creation by Natural Law: Laplace's Nebular Hypothesis in American Thought* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977); his third book, begun on a fellowship at Johns Hopkins while revising the Ellen White book, was entitled *Almost Persuaded: American Physicians and Compulsory Health Insurance, 1912-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). The quick succession of two scholarly books after *Prophetess of Health* made it difficult for Adventists to categorize Numbers as an in-house polemicist.

15. Jerry Gladson, then an assistant professor of religion at Southern Missionary College, Numbers's alma mater, remarked on the book in *Unlock Your Potential*, XI (October-December, 1976), 6; Numbers provoked a more systematic response to his study from within Adventism than Fawn M. Brodie did from Mormons for her *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (2nd ed.; New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1971).

16. Prior to Numbers's book, the latter view remained largely the unexpressed opinion of a handful of hereti-

cal Adventist academics. The former view, of a prophet ahead of her times, was the openly orthodox position offered to the Adventist public; see *Medical Science and the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1971).

17. In an interview after the book's publication, Numbers conjectured that White may have copied other writers and denied it due to mental problems; *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 31, 1976.

18. From the review of *Prophetess of Health* by James Harvey Young in *American Historical Review*, LXXXII (April, 1977), 464.

19. For Arthur White's discussion of the custody of Ellen White's writings, see his *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1969), pp. 68-98; the entire episode of Numbers coming up against the White Estate is reminiscent of Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

20. Peterson's study, which appeared in the same issue of *Spectrum* as the Branson-Weiss article, proved so controversial that it eclipsed an important theoretical discussion of Ellen White and revelation, also in that issue, by Frederick E. J. Harder, "Divine Revelation: A Review of Some of Ellen White's Concepts," II (Autumn, 1970), 35-56. For Peterson's article and the various replies and counter-replies in *Spectrum*, see Peterson, "A Textual and Historical Study of Ellen White's Account of the French Revolution," II (Autumn, 1970), 57-69; W. Paul Bradley, "Ellen White and Her Writings," III (Spring, 1971), 43-64; Peterson, "An Imaginary Conversation on Ellen G. White: A One-Act Play for Seventh-day Adventists," III (Summer, 1971), 85-91; John W. Wood, Jr., "The Bible and the French Revolution: An Answer," III (Autumn, 1971), 55-72.

21. For Numbers's account of these events, see the transcript of his San Bernardino County Museum lecture, May 29, 1976; see also Arthur L. White, "A Review of the Ron Numbers Matter" (unpublished typescript, Ellen G. White Estate, n. d.); White to Numbers, July 3, 1973; and Numbers to White, July 15, 1973.

22. Graybill's response to Peterson appeared in "How Did Ellen White

Choose and Use Historical Sources? The French Revolution Chapter of *Great Controversy*," *Spectrum*, IV (Summer, 1972), 49-53; Graybill ingratiated himself to Arthur White, and earned a position at the White Estate, with his sympathetic treatment of *E. G. White and Church Race Relations* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1970).

23. Numbers's memo of conversations with Graybill, July 26, June 28, and September 29, 1976; Numbers to Graybill, May 11, 1976; the first volume of "Studies in Adventist History" belatedly appeared as Gary Land, ed., *Adventism in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986); Numbers gave his reasons for writing the book in his lecture of May 29, 1976.

24. Graybill to Numbers, June 10, 1973; Numbers's memos of conversations with Graybill, January 22, and February 10, 1975; and June 9, 1976.

25. Walter C. Utt, "Utt Critiques New E. G. White Book," *Campus Chronicle*, LII (May 20, 1976), 3; Judy Rittenhouse made the comment about the "two Rons" in conversation with the author in 1974.

26. Graybill to Walter C. Utt, July 7, 1976.

27. Numbers's memo of conversation with Graybill, February 10, 1975.

28. See note 57 below.

29. Joe Willey to Numbers, n. d.; "Three Elder's Report" (Society of Concerned Adventists Nonrestricted and International, n. d.), p. 14; Numbers's memo of conversation with Neal Wilson, July 4, 1974.

30. This entire squalid if by now somewhat humorous episode is detailed in "The Three Elder's Report"; a meeting called by Neal Wilson on August 31, 1976, with most of the principals was summarized in "Notes of Harvey Elder"; a conversation among Gary Stanhiser, Arnold Trujillo, J. W. Lehman, and A. Graham Maxwell may be found in a synopsis by David R. Larson.

31. In addition to "The Three Elder's Report," the story was covered by Mike Quinn in "Book Criticizing Adventist Founder Fires Controversy at Loma Linda," *Riverside Press Enterprise* (September 19, 1976), B-1, B-4. See also memo of conversation between Num-

bers and Bruce Branson, November 2, 1976; and Bruce Branson to Numbers, February 15, 1977.

32. Rene Noorbergen, *Jeane Dixon: My Life and Prophecies* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969), and *Prophet of Destiny* (Canaan, Conn.: Keats Publishing Co., 1972); memo of conversation between Roy Branson and Numbers, November 4, 1974; memo of conversation between Numbers and Noorbergen, November 7, 1974; memo on discussion between Numbers and Robert Olson, October 26, 1974.

33. Note 14 above recounts when Numbers wrote his three books, Numbers to Jonathan Butler, June 10, 1975; James R. Nix to Numbers, July 9, 1975.

34. Bull and Lockhart describe the vocational conflicts of an Adventist educator in *Seeking a Sanctuary*, pp. 230-43; on the criticisms of Numbers by his fellow academics, see p. 237.

35. Godfrey T. Anderson registered this criticism to me and to Numbers on separate occasions; the infamous line appears in *Prophetess of Health*, p. 146.

36. To counter this mindset among his colleagues as well as church members at large, a junior historian argued, in the year Numbers published *Prophetess of Health*, that historical and theological explanations of a phenomenon, even with reference to a prophet, need not exclude one another; Gary Land, "Providence and Earthly Affairs: The Christian and the Study of History," *Spectrum*, VII (April, 1976), 2-6.

37. Numbers describes this aspect of his relationship with the White Estate in his lecture of May 29, 1976.

38. Numbers's memo of conversation with Graybill, December 29, 1974; two letters crisscrossed in the mail from Arthur White to Clayton Carlson, February 6, 1975; and Carlson to White, February 6, 1975.

39. The Madison weekend is described in a memo from Graybill to Arthur White and the White Estate Board of Trustees, May 11, 1975, see also Numbers's lecture of May 29, 1976; Schwarz to Pastor and Mrs. Raymond W. Numbers, March 11, 1975.

40. Longer in words, not pages, the reply of the Ellen G. White Estate appeared as *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health* (Washington: Ellen G. White Estate, 1976); for the ex-

changes on permission to cite Numbers's book, see Arthur White to Numbers, April 21, 1976; White to Numbers, April 29, 1976; Numbers to White, May 6, 1976; White to Numbers May 24, 1976; and Numbers to White, June 18, 1976.

41. Ernest R. Sandeen, "The State of a Church's Soul," *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), 15-16.

42. W. Frederick Norwood, "The Prophet and Her Contemporaries," *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), pp. 2-4; R. W. Schwarz, "On Writing and Reading History," *ibid.*, 20-27.

43. Ronald L. Numbers, "An Author Replies to His Critics," *ibid.*, esp. 34-36; and memo of conversation among Numbers, Schwarz, and Gary Land, September 17, 1977.

44. The Estate's summary comment appears in *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), 4-13; it condenses a 24-page document entitled "A Discussion and Review of *Prophetess of Health*," as well as its longer study, *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health*. For Numbers's comment, see *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), 29.

45. Fawn M. Brodie, "Ellen White's Emotional Life," *ibid.*, 13-15. *Spectrum* continued as an independent journal within Adventism, but its editor, Roy Branson, on leave from the SDA Theological Seminary at the Kennedy Center for Bioethics, subsequently lost his seminary appointment and his ministerial credentials.

46. D. E. Robinson, *The Story of Our Health Message* (3rd ed.; Nashville: Southern Publishing Assn., 1965); Ellen G. White Estate, "Twelve Outline Studies for *The Story of Our Health Message*" (Nashville: Southern Publishing Assn., 1976). For traditional Adventist studies of health after Numbers's book, see Richard A. Schafer, *Legacy: The Heritage of a Unique International Medical Outreach* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1977), and George W. Reid, *A Sound of Trumpets: Americans Adventists and Health Reform* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1982). Coverage of the Prophetic Guidance Workshop at Andrews University appears in *Andrews University Focus*, XII (August-September, 1976), 9,11; the *Time* citation is in note 10 above.

47. Gary Land, "Faith, History and

Ellen White," *Spectrum*, IX (March, 1978), 51-55; Benjamin McArthur, "Where Are Historians Taking the Church?" *Spectrum*, (November, 1979), 11-14; Eric Anderson, "1979 Presidential Address, AWAH" (unpublished paper).

48. A general sampling of favorable reviews of the book may be found in *The Zetetic*, I (Spring-Summer, 1977), 100; *Christian Century*, XCIV (February 16, 1977), 157; *Isis*, LXIX (1978), 147; *Church History*, XLVII (June, 1978), 243.

49. Martin E. Marty, in *Context* (December 15, 1977), 2, and *Journal of Religion*, LVIII (1978), 340; Martin Kaufman, *Journal of American History*, LXIV (June, 1977), 179-80.

50. James C. Whorton's review appeared in *Journal of the History of Medicine*, XXXIV (1979), 239-40; he further elaborates on the book in *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 201-2.

51. For the reviews, see Gerald N. Grob, *New England Quarterly*, L (June, 1977), 361-63; John B. Blake, *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, LX (Spring, 1977), 250-51; Henry D. Shapiro, *Reviews in American History*, V (June, 1977), 242-48. Examples of books that draw upon Numbers are Jane B. Donegan, "Hydropathic Highway to Health": *Women and the Water-Cure in Antebellum America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), esp. ch. 7; Susan Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 115-17; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 125; Martin E. Marty *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984), pp. 321-24; Norman Gevitz, ed. *Other Healers: Unorthodox Medicine in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 26, 69-70, 80; Robert C. Fuller, *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 33-34; Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986);

Catherine L. Albanese, *American Religions and Religion* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 146-47; Martin E. Marty, *The Irony of It All, 1893-1919*, vol. 1 of *Modern American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 256-57.

52. Numbers's parallel columns appear in *Prophetess of Health*, p. 232, n. 15; McAdams wrote a 250-page document on his discoveries, which remains unpublished and housed at the Estate. Eric Anderson provides a synopsis of his manuscript in "Ellen White and Reformation Historians," *Spectrum*, IX (July, 1978), 23-26.

53. Rea couched his literary analysis in a provocative book entitled *The White Lie* (Turlock, Calif.: M & R Publications, 1982); his story appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (October 23, 1980), sec. 1, pp. 1 ff. For scholarly responses to Rea, see Jonathan Butler, "Prophet or Plagiarist: A False Dichotomy," *Spectrum*, XII (June, 1982), 44-48; and Alden Thompson, "The Imperfect Speech of Inspiration," *ibid.*, pp. 48-55. The church appointed Fred Veltman, a New Testament expert in textual criticism, to do further literary analysis of Ellen White; a summary of his work may be found in Veltman, "The Desire of Ages Project: The Data," *Ministry*, LXII (October, 1990), 4-7; and "The Desire of Ages Project: The Conclusions," *Ministry*, LXII (December, 1990), 11-15; see also Robert Olson, "Ellen White's Denials," *Ministry*, LXIII

(February, 1991), 15-18.

54. Joseph Battistone, "Ellen White's Authority as Bible Commentator," *Spectrum*, VIII (January, 1977), 37-40; Butler, *Spectrum*, X (August, 1979), 2-13.

55. On the Ford controversy, see Walter Utt, "Desmond Ford Raises the Sanctuary Question," *Spectrum*, X (March, 1980), 4-5; Edward E. Plowman, "The Shaking Up of Adventism?" *Christianity Today*, XXIV (February 8, 1980), 64-67.

56. For their discussion, see "Ellen White on the Mind and the Mind of Ellen White," in Ronald L. Numbers and Janet S. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*, 2nd Ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 202.

57. See Ronald Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss. Johns Hopkins University, 1983), esp. pp. 84-112. See also Bonnie L. Casey, "Graybill's Exit: Turning Point at the White Estate?" *Spectrum*, XIV (March, 1984), 2-8; the Hoyt material appears in Frederick Hoyt, ed., "Trial of Elder I. Dammon: Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*," *Spectrum*, XVII (August, 1987), 29-36. See also Rennie Schoepflin, ed., "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial," *ibid.*, 37-50; White's early years as a visionary within an enthusiastic context are dealt with in Butler, "Prophecy, Gender, and Culture: Ellen Gould Harmon [White] and the Roots of Seventh-day Adventism," *Religion and*

American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation, I (Winter, 1991), 3-29.

58. The published version of the minutes may be found in two sections: "The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History," and "Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible," *Spectrum*, X (May, 1979), 23-57.

59. Donald R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen White Studies in the 1970s," *Spectrum*, X (March, 1980), 27-41; and McAdams, "The Scope of Ellen White's Authority," *Spectrum*, XVI (August, 1985), 2-7; Herold Weiss, "Formative Authority, Yes; Canonization, No," *ibid.*, 8-13. Adventists have been polled through the Valuegenesis Research Project, described in general terms in V. Bailey Gillespie, "Nurturing Our Next Generation," *Adventist Review*, CLXVII (January 3, 1991), 5-11. See also Gary Land, "Coping with Change 1961-1980," in Gary Land, ed., *Adventism in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 219-23. For changes in White Estate policy, see Ronald Graybill, "From Z File to Compact Disk: The Democratization of Ellen White Sources," unpublished paper, 1988. Arthur White stepped down as head of the White Estate in 1978; he died on January 12, 1991.

60. Numerous letters to Numbers from successive pastors at the University Church were written between February 20, 1975, and June 23, 1983.

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