

Major Chinks in Bacchiocchi's Armor

Samuele Bacchiocchi. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987). n. p.

Reviewed by Beatrice S. Neall

Women in the Church by Samuele Bacchiocchi is a forcefully written book attempting to reverse the trend in the Seventh-day Adventist church toward the ordination of women to the ministry. Though the author favors greater involvement by women in the church, he believes the pastoral role should be filled only by males. Only they can image divine leadership. Citing biblical precedents for all-male priesthood and apostleship, he expresses grave fears over reinterpreting Scripture to allow for the participation of women. He thinks that the hermeneutics that allows for the ordination of women will lead the church down a slippery path to the compromise of its doctrines and recognition of deviant lifestyles.

The book is forceful, well researched (with an extensive bibliography), and holds consistently to one position throughout. The author is familiar with most of the debate and is not likely to be caught by surprise with any new argument. He provides useful summaries of opposing positions (most of which are accurate and fair) before explaining his own. He reviews the ministry of women in the Old Testament and the New, the order of creation and redemption, and male/female roles in the home and the church. Throughout he insists on male headship and female subordination.

Bacchiocchi would like to believe that he *reaf-*

firms Scripture, whereas Christian feminists *reinter-*pret the Bible by explaining away certain texts as “culturally conditioned.” But anyone who carefully reviews the creation story, Jesus’ treatment of women, the practice of the apostolic church, and the doctrines of spiritual gifts and the priesthood of believers, is struck with the wide-open possibilities for women in the Christian church. Has the “cultural conditioning” instead been in the minds of theologians who for millenia have interpreted Scripture with a negative bias toward women? It is only in recent times that the plain meaning of Scripture has been recovered.

The difficulties for women occur mainly in “three crucial Pauline passages”—1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:33-36; and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. These passages, if taken as normative, create problems for *all* modern interpreters. Even Bacchiocchi reinterprets them. He admits that the veiling of women was a cultural practice. Bacchiocchi also acknowledges that the command for women to keep silent must be modified by Paul’s incidental mention that women did pray and prophesy in church and by his numerous references to women helpers in the church.

When a biblical passage creates tensions within Scripture there is nothing dangerous about bringing scholarship to bear on it in order to understand why it is different. Adventists have used this procedure in interpreting eternally-burning-hell texts, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and Paul’s sharp statements on predestination (e. g., Rom. 9:18-20). We certainly do not allow them to dominate our theology. It is interesting that Ellen White is silent on the “crucial” Pauline passages.¹ Apparently she did not consider them normative for the church today. Bacchiocchi, on the contrary, gives three Pauline passages control over the rest of scripture.

I will not attempt to wrestle with the intricacies of Paul in the limitations of this review. The task is being done admirably by many scholars today. I only suggest that

if Paul conformed to the culture of his day—becoming a Jew to the Jews to win the Jews (1 Cor. 9:19-23)—he would today become an American to the Americans. I cannot believe Paul would enforce archaic social patterns in our society. I strongly suspect he would take advantage of the current openness toward full participation of women in order to advance the cause of the gospel.

Bacchiocchi makes the sweeping statement, “In spite of his revolutionary treatment of women, Jesus did not choose women as apostles nor did he commission them to preach the gospel” (p. 217). It is true that the original Twelve had no women among them (also no Gentiles or slaves, though the early church ordained them), but it is likely that the Seventy had women among them, since Jesus by this time had a company of women followers (Luke 8:1-3; 10:1). The Seventy, like the Twelve, were appointed by Jesus to heal the sick and cast out devils, and could be considered as ordained (Luke 10:1, 17-20). And we know positively that the third group he empowered for service, the 120, included these same women disciples who had followed him in his ministry (Acts 1:14, 15). It appears that the gift of the Holy Spirit empowered the 120 to proclaim the gospel to all nations (Luke 24:33, 47-49; Acts 1:8). Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, indicated that the empowering of these women was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17,18, RSV).

Bacchiocchi grounds his theology of woman in the “order of creation” where he finds male headship and female subordination. He cites as evidence the priority of Adam’s creation, man’s central role in Genesis 2, the “helper” status of the woman, the naming of his wife before and after the fall, and man as the source of woman. However, the movement in Genesis 2 is not from headship to subordination, but from incompleteness to completeness. The word *helper* does not indicate subordination, since the majority of its uses in the Old Testament apply to God.

Creation’s order, is from low to high, woman being the crowning work. Woman was to be a leader; literally, in the Hebrew, a helper “in front of” the man. Eve’s creation from the rib of Adam was of nobler origin than Adam’s creation from “the clods” (Hebrew) of the earth. Adam did not name the woman before the fall, but merely stated (with a “divine passive”) “She shall be called woman”—a designation already given her by God (2:22). And the man’s cleaving to his wife (instead of the wife’s cleaving to the man) shows her equality.

God has never been limited by an accident of birth. . . . He can even put a woman at the head of his work. Bacchiocchi, I fear, is encumbering the Spirit with needless restrictions.

Ellen White repeatedly insisted that woman was created the equal of man and should retain her pre-Fall status.³ She would not agree with Bacchiocchi’s formula “equal in personhood, but subordinate in function.” In her view the work of the mother is the highest work entrusted to human beings.⁴

While I would not discount the predominately masculine qualities of strength, aggressiveness, and logical reasoning, which guarantee a preponderance of male leadership in this world, I believe the Creation account teaches complementarity and partnership. Male and female together constitute the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27). God commanded both male and female to have dominion over sea, sky, and earth. For either to rule alone would mar his plan. The man by himself is not good (2:18)—the masculine must always be balanced by the feminine. (Genesis 3 suggests that woman acting independently is also not good.) Since God created the woman to be a helper suitable for the man, she ought to be a copartner in all the activities of life. To exclude her from involvement in any area is to go contrary to the plan of God.

Paul’s own paradigm that the husband is the head of the wife as God is the head of Christ (1

Cor. 11:3) suggests partnership at all levels. Though there appears to be an eternal hierarchy in the Godhead (1 Cor. 15:28), God and Christ work together in all they do (John 5:17), whether creation (Heb. 1:2,3), redemption (2 Cor. 5:19), or revelation (Rev. 1:1). Whenever one is working, the other is supporting and cooperating. Father and Son even exchange roles, the Father turning over the rule of this world to the Son until he delivers it back to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Headship implies the delegation of powers and support for the one who executes them. It allows full participation. It never implies exclusion or restriction.

Doesn't the creation model of woman as helper teach us that male and female together should lead the church?

It is this concept of full participation and equal partnership that Bacchiocchi misses. Yet it is an idea rich with possibilities for the leadership of the church. Bacchiocchi likes the idea of the male as father of the church, but rejects the idea of the female as mother of the church. Doesn't the creation model of woman as a helper suitable for the man teach us that male and female together should lead the church? Single-parent families having only a father or a mother are not ideal. Men alone cannot adequately pastor today's congregations with their complex problems, neither can women alone. Team pastorates would be ideal, either by husband-wife couples or by a church staff made up of male and female pastors. Whether the man or woman is senior pastor would depend upon the unique gifts of each. There are many times in history when men have been leaders, but there have also been times when a Deborah heads the troops, a Priscilla leads the Bible study, and an Ellen is God's mouthpiece.

God has never been limited by an accident of birth. If he wants he can choose the youngest and call him the firstborn (Ps. 89:20, 27). He can astonish Peter by pouring out his Spirit on uncircumcised Gentiles. He can speak through children and donkeys and stones. He can even put a

woman at the head of his work. Bacchiocchi, I fear, is encumbering the Spirit with needless restrictions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This can be seen by checking the scriptural index to her writings. There is a reference to 1 Corinthians 11:7 in which she modifies Paul's statement to say that Adam *and* Eve were created to be the image and glory of God. [Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903)], p. 20.

2. The "naming formula"—"he called the name" is not present in Genesis 2.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assoc., 1952) pp. 25, 115, 231.

4. *The Adventist Home*, pp. 231, 233, 237.

Beatrice Neall, associate professor of religion at Union College, received her Ph.D. from Andrews University. Prior to joining the Union faculty, she taught religion at Southeast Asia Union College in Singapore.

Selected Contemporary Works on Feminism

Collected and Annotated by
Carol L. Richardson

Recent inquiries into women's role in the church such as that appearing in *Spectrum* (Vol. 17, No. 2), can be helpfully expanded by more careful attention to the growing body of work in Christian feminism. Serious scholars continue to discuss women's issues and the Christian response to them.

Christian feminist writings are not only serious and numerous, they are varied. From the conservative hermeneutics of Letty Russell to the radical alternatives of Mary Daly, Christian feminism is no ideological monolith. The books I have included in this bibliography reflect this diversity.

The inclusion of any work here does not imply an endorsement nor do I expect any of my comments to be the final words on the matter. However, I do hope this list will stimulate your own reading and discussion of the vital issues of gender facing the church in particular and society in general.

I. Seventh-day Adventist Works

Daily, Steven Gerald. *The Irony of Adventism: The Role of Ellen White and Other Adventist Women in Nineteenth Century America.* Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1985.

This doctoral dissertation examines the apparent discrepancy of a church that relies on its founding mother as an authority, while at the same time developing an organizational hierarchy largely impenetrable by and unsympathetic to sixty percent of its membership.

Basically a study in context, *Irony* provides a historic backdrop for the persistence of Adventist sexism. Nineteenth-century Victorianism is largely the culprit for the subordinate position women can expect in Adventism: popular notions of sexuality, domesticity, and segregated "spheres" in which a woman might properly inhabit all worked to exclude women from active participation then, as it does now.

Ellen White is not so much an antagonist to feminism as a Victorian bourgeoisie whose own opinions and prejudices were indistinguishable from those of her cultural milieu.

McLeod, Merikay. *Betrayal.* Loma Linda, CA: Mars Hill Publications, 1985.

Betrayal documents, diary-style, the pilgrimage from innocence to experience of its author, then Merikay Silver, in her celebrated challenge for equal pay while employed at Pacific Press. What starts out as a prosaic, if naive, request for head-of-household pay snowballs into a class-action suit against the press under the Title VII provisions outlawing sexual discrimination in the workplace.

The psychic toll of the trial is vividly recounted: friends suffer, employers hector, co-workers fulminate, church officials dissemble, and finally her husband leaves, a casualty of the litigious fray.

Vicarious revenge is no small part of the delicious jolt that comes from reading the scoop about people you know. Here's every bully in polyester who has mixed employment and menace judged

in a court of law to have acted unfairly, even illegally. It is Merikay's victory, but it is a victory for women too.

Spectrum 15:4 December, 1984

This issue of *Spectrum* addresses some of the feminist concerns facing the Adventist church. Of the five items in the special section on Women in the Church, four mull over the church's past history, full of female leadership, contrasting it with the present day absence of women from positions of influence. Especially moving is Otilie Stafford's piece which tempers anger with sadness at an organization indifferent to its self-destructive policies. The final piece is a bit of theology by James Londis in which he reflects on the value of considering highest divinity as female.

What these items all share is the sense of dismay that a group whose heritage was largely forged by women seems now so insistent on excluding them from any positions of influence and power.

Spectrum 17:2 December, 1986

Spectrum reproduces a number of articles stemming from Andrews' Pioneer Memorial Church's consideration of ordaining women elders. While those outside of Pioneer Memorial Church might have thought this issue had been settled long ago, opponents of the measure rightly suspected that if no ideological barrier existed to prevent the ordination of female elders, there could likely be no logical objection to the ordination of women into the ministry.

The two chief spokesmen opposing ordination are Samuele Bacchiochi and Bryan Ball, who both reject any sociological explanation for biblical sexism, such as patriarchy, insisting rather that women's secondary status is God-ordained. Theology aside, Bacchiochi wonders how a woman minister could keep a husband happy, while Ball suggests a woman hearing God's call to the ministry has, you know, some gender identification problems.

A variety of professors take these outbursts seriously enough to answer them with a careful exegesis of scripture. Margaret Davis' witty

parody of Bacchiochi's essay is more to the point, though, revealing his arguments as more bigotry than substance.

II. Church, Worship, and Ministry

Diehl, Judith Ruhe. *A Woman's Place: Equal Partnership in Daily Ministry.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

Beware lest anyone should assume from the title that this book has anything to do with women clergy. In fact, this little book is a pep talk for conservative Christian wives and mothers who really believe that they're "only" a housewife or "only" a mother. It does not question the patriarchal status quo that treats wives and mothers with flagging self-esteem but rather seeks to boost morale by a few semantic quick fixes: You don't just raise kids, you negotiate and arbitrate when they quarrel, you diagnose when they're ill, you organize and manage housework; why, look at all those executive skills!

This kind of approach is finally doomed to perpetuate guilt and depression because it does not challenge that androcentric society which devalues the rhythms of nature that include childbirth and nurture.

Emswiler, Sharon Neuffer and Thomas Neuffer. *Women and Worship: A Guide to Non-Sexist Hymns, Prayers, and Liturgies*, rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984.

The first edition of *Women and Worship* (1974) was for many the book that opened the door to the topic of worship that transcends its masculine bondage. In the ten years between editions, many churches have begun to realize the seriousness of how a male-centered language distorts our religion.

Recognizing the volatility of the subject of gender inclusiveness in language, the authors begin with a careful explanation of how words affect thought, how male metaphors for God, or even the "generic" *he* or *man* functions to exclude women from participation in that religion, and reinforces the notion of male superiority.

Appendices contain specific recommendations for nonsexist hymns, liturgies, and vocabulary.

Jewett, Paul King. *The Ordination of Women.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Paul Jewett's *Ordination of Women* is a theological defense, in contrast, say, to the sociological Lehman work reviewed below. Jewett's direct, powerful argument is simply stated: the biblical view holds women as equals and partners with men, sharing in all of life's privileges and responsibilities, which includes the ministry.

Then, one by one, he dismantles the arguments of those who pose that the nature of women disqualifies them from ordination; that the nature of the office demands a man, that God's masculinity excludes women as "his" representative, and so on.

Having coolly unraveled the opposition, he avers that indeed the problem of women's exclusion to ordination lies neither with scripture nor logic, but with a system of gender privilege that has largely gone unchallenged throughout history.

Lehman, Edward C., Jr. *Women Clergy: Breaking Through Gender Barriers.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1985.

Essentially a sociological survey, *Women Clergy* reports statistically what has happened to congregations over the past several years who actually have had women pastors. The churches' anticipated problems and impressions are reported, and are compared to what actually transpired. Nearly all churches were apprehensive about receiving a woman, even provisionally. Most expected attendance to drop, donations to drop, and membership to drop.

What in fact happened was virtually indistinguishable from what happens with the arrival of a male minister: there was that initial period of settling in, and then the church resumed its normal functioning. In many cases attendance and membership realized modest gains. The dire problems predicted simply did not materialize. In every case members' contact with the actual minister served to dispel stereotypes and assumptions.

In light of our own church's aversion to even discussing this issue, it is astonishing to note that this book surveys attitudes of the past *quarter century*, when most mainline denominations endorsed the ordination of women as clergy.

Watkins, Keith. *Faithful and Fair: Transcending Sexist Language in Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.

Like the Emswiler book, *Faithful and Fair* begins with a cautious catechism on language and its ability to mold our thoughts. And, like the aforementioned book, it contains specific suggestions on how to initiate a change to nonsexist language for congregations who might see the issues trivial or even blasphemous.

The dilemma facing every feminist who also loves words is that much as we recognize the necessity for nonsexist language, it is also painfully obvious that "faith of our parents" has lost something more than its gender.

III. Biblical/Theological

Daly, Mary. *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon, 1984.

All but the most intrepid of Mary Daly fans will find *Pure Lust* rough sledding. With every successive book beginning with *The Church and the Second Sex*, she has become more idiosyncratic and less accessible. Those wishing to glimpse the quintessential post-Christian feminist at her best should stick with her masterwork (mistress-work?) *Beyond God the Father*.

Pure Lust is an unabashed polemic which alternates intellectually provocative passages with strident barrages. Daly, perhaps more than any other feminist philosopher, is aiming at creating an alternative to Christianity, which she considers to be irredeemably patriarchal and damaging to women. Rich in difficult, even alienating word-play, *Pure Lust* not only explores and analyzes patriarchy's abuse of lust and other deadly sins, but goes further in affirming feminist "life-lust" and vision. A demanding, difficult book.

Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schüssler. *Bread, Not*

Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation. Boston: Beacon, 1984.

Fiorenza, like Daly and Ruether, goes beyond biblical pronouncements as she develops the notion of experience as authoritative to women, as distinct for scripture. Unlike the evangelical authors who at times seem intent on making feminist purses out of patriarchal ears, Fiorenza frankly acknowledges scripture as a complex resource that has, on the one hand, been used in the oppression of women, while on the other has been a source of refuge and comfort for women.

This collection of articulate essays attempts to reclaim scripture and religion as a source for feminist nurture. She opens up new intellectual territory; use this book as a compass.

Mickelson, Alvera, ed. *Women, Authority and the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986.

Women, Authority and the Bible is a collection of essays by conservative evangelicals who are grappling with feminist concerns while at the same time struggling to retain the authority of the Bible. Since scripture addresses feminist concerns only indirectly, if at all, the successful interfacing of these two strands varies with the skill of the essayist.

The task of justifying feminism biblically is basically hermeneutical, so the focus of the essays is on textual exegesis and historical, contextual backgrounds. Responses to this task range from the "it-isn't-in-the-Bible" rejection of feminism to the elaborate "thoughts-we-doubt-ever-got-thought" category of what Paul *really* meant to say. How helpful you find these scholars depends on how valuable an enterprise you regard hermeneutical ventriloquism to be.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.

The Divine Feminine takes to task the assumption that all biblical imagery of God is male; that *He* is only *Father, Husband* and *King*. To be sure, the bulk of it is just that. But there are plenty of instances wherein all three members of the Trinity are spoken of as women: as women in labor, nurs-

ing mothers, homemakers, and midwives.

Whether the inclusion of any female God-language represents a lapse into repressed goddess-worship or intimations of an androgynous or genderless ideal, or whether its paucity merely reflects a cultural bias or reveals the bankrupt condition of Judeo-Christianity, comes down, I suppose, to the half-empty, half-full quandry.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon, 1983.

Rosemary Radford Ruether indicts nothing less than the entire religious history of Western civilization in *Sexism and God-Talk* as she traces the socio-religious origins of women's oppression, from mythic, pre-Hebrew religions through the modern, post-Christian era. The results of men's powermongering through the ages have left women nameless, the masses huddled, and the earth at risk.

The very sweep of Ruether's catalog of woes brought on by the masculinization of the religious impulse is its chief strength. Chapter by chapter, era by era, Ruether details the development of doctrine and dogma, orthodox and heretical, tracing the damage done by the miscegenation of maleness and religious authority.

The results of these horrors, Ruether contends, have put all of humanity, including men, profoundly at odds with nature. At peril is nothing less than the world's very existence. In men's lust for conquest and power, they have become adversaries to women, to children, to the poor, to animals, to nature, to peace. They have used religion to legitimate their rampage, and no mere replacement of "he's" for "she's" can mend the damage.

Russell, Letty M., ed. *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985.

A smorgasbord of essays ranging from a reconsideration of the importunate Gentile woman to the use of the Bible with battered women. The unifying principle in this diverse collection is that the Bible, liberated from its patriarchal bias, can be a valuable resource for all oppressed groups.

While history and methodology make up most of the volume, several fine essays illustrate how a feminist approach can illuminate biblical texts by drawing on feminist historical analysis and modern women's personal experience.

Storkey, Elaine. *What's Right With Feminism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

What's Right With Feminism is, for the most part, a balanced analysis of secular feminist concerns, concerns that Storkey urges Christians not to dismiss out of hand. Storkey is at her best when explaining the origins and issues of secular feminism to her Christian audience. Marxist feminists have some valid criticism about how capitalism reduces human relationships to economic exchanges. Liberal feminists have traditionally lobbied for legislative reform. Radical feminists have challenged entrenched sex role notions that perpetuate a onesided, male-is-normative world.

She is less successful when she criticizes these movements simply because they are not Christian, and when she suggests that homosexuality is a chosen preference. Despite these shortcomings, the book is valuable as a primer on the different groups within the feminist movement.

Trible, Phyllis. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978.

The book is feminist hermeneutics at work. Tribble takes three Old Testament stories—the creation of Adam and Eve, Ruth, and the Song of Songs—uncovering in each literary devices and poetic associations that male-oriented exegesis has missed.

Female motifs in the prophetic descriptions appear in God's compassion (womb) for Israel and in the labor and nursing of "his" child. Tribble's extended commentary of Genesis 2 and 3 dispels any impression that Eve was in any way subordinate to Adam. And both Ruth and the Song of Songs reflect strikingly unsterotypical roles for women.

IV. Contemporary Feminism

Astrachan, Anthony. *How Men Feel: Their Response to Women's Demands for Equality and*

Power. Garden City, New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1986.

The flip side of the feminist coin, *How Men Feel* expresses men's reactions towards feminism. Are men basically privileged brutes who see women's demands for equality as threatening male perquisites? Closer to the truth, Astrachan contends, is that most men, like most women, are themselves powerless; they are victims of lock-step jobs, congealed in bureaucracy, and have little of the influence women deem them to have. Men in general have acted defensively precisely because they fear their own weakness will be found out.

Best about this book is its sympathetic treatment of the complexities of both male and female aspirations. It reminds us that man himself is not the enemy. Just as feminists are not nympho-lesbo-tramps, men are not sado-rapist-abusers. All of us are caught up in the destructive whorl of gender caste, and it is to the good of both men and women that it be eliminated.

French, Marilyn. *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. New York: Summit, 1985.

While a book decrying the global oppression of women, a book that looks toward a better future, is always welcome, it is disheartening to read one that is bound to be criticized for its simplistic, too-general history and too-optimistic future. I doubt that goddess worship ever brought with it a golden era; I doubt that primitive peoples live in a loving, nurturing utopia; I doubt that every mean-spirited action by a man is yet another manifestation of patriarchy; I doubt that a society run by women would cure the world's ills.

The issues French raises are vital. The notion that an unacknowledged male ideology exists is not frivolous. Men's impulse to power, control, and aggression needs examination. And if this book initiates concern and discussion, then perhaps its many flaws can be overlooked.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1982.

Gilligan questions theories of psychological

development, all of which proceed from the male-norm model. Women, in fact, develop differently, which is not to say abnormally. Women view moral problems, for example, largely in terms of relationships between people, while men see them in terms of gains and losses. Whether this is from social conditioning or is partly innate is subject to discussion.

Most of Gilligan's ideas aren't new, and you might find much of the generalized psych-speak trite and uninteresting. What is interesting, however, is the actual account of each person interviewed. Whether you are comfortable with a psychological explanation as the basis for the development of moral sense I leave to you.

Carol Richardson received her B.A. and M.A. in English from Loma Linda University and an M.S.L.S. from the University of Southern California. She is currently the public information officer for the city of Brea, California.

Inside the Outsider's Experience

R. Laurence Moore. *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). 235 pp. n.p.

Reviewed by Douglas Morgan

This work should be of interest to Seventh-day Adventists for two reasons. First, it devotes several pages to historical analysis of Adventism in America, focusing on the political implications of Adventist eschatology. Second, it illumines the religious landscape in which Adventism arose. Combining rich detail and insightful generalizations in his skillful essays, R. Laurence Moore captures much of the essence of a wide variety of groups that, along with Adventism, flourish on the American scene.

What ties the diverse groups in the book together is "outsider" identity. Mormons, Catholics, Jews, Christian Scientists, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and blacks all established religious identities

that fed on distinctions between themselves and the “insider,” mainline Protestants in American religious history. Especially up until the last three decades, mainline Protestants (Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists, for example), have dominated the nation’s political and social institutions, and thus historians of American religion have until recently seen their story as the true center of American religious history.

But Moore, professor of history at Cornell University, challenges the concept that mainline Protestantism represents what is normal and central in American religion, while other groups are aberrational and peripheral. He persuasively argues that outsider identity and the language of

Based on the Adventist experience Moore concludes that apocalyptic symbols, which once conveyed a politically radical message and supported a powerful sense of outsiderhood, are now used to express a flag-waving, anti-communist patriotism, and have a right-of-center political thrust.

dissent are typical features of American religion. The sheer vastness of the number of Americans who have had religious outsider identities supports the point. But Moore also shows how outsider groups, particularly ones indigenous to America, embodied traits and attitudes that were widely diffused throughout the culture rather than foreign to it.

Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science illustrate the latter point. Christian Science in itself was unusual, but its central concerns for healing and positive use of mental forces was not. Movements such as theosophy, spiritualism, or New Thought advanced similar concerns, and many Americans took an interest in some of these notions while remaining “mainline” Protestants.

Paradoxes abound that are difficult to summarize in a short review, but Moore deftly handles

them. For example, outsider groups tended gradually to mute their rhetoric of opposition to or separateness from the mainstream, and yet still maintain the distinct identity required for a *raison d’être*. Outsiders move toward the inside, simultaneously taking on some insider characteristics and, by their success, changing what it means to be an insider.

Mormons, for example, by the twentieth century became known as superpatriots, quintessential Americans, hardly outsiders; yet in a sense they remained a separate nation within the nation. Catholics, Jews, and blacks struggled with the complex issue of assimilation (becoming American by becoming more like the Protestant mainstream) vs. pluralism (claiming status as Americans while perpetuating ethnic and cultural distinctiveness). That they pursued both ends at the same time makes questions of outsider and insider in America all the more complicated and interesting.

Moore discusses Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Pentecostals together in a chapter exploring the political implications of premillennial eschatology. He argues that such implications have changed over time even while the theological content of a particular group’s premillennialism remains essentially the same. In other words, “premillennialists in different historical contexts have attached different significance to their doctrines” (p. 131).

Drawing on the work of Adventist historians Ronald Graybill and Jonathan Butler, Moore points out that while early Adventists used apocalyptic symbols to express a radically negative outlook on the American republic and were sympathetic to Radical Republican politics, their successors came to view the nation in a more favorable and conservative light. Evangelistic depictions of the beast symbolizing the United States changed from a ferocious carnivore in the mid-19th century to something resembling the “tame creature that followed Mary to school” by the mid-twentieth century. “The eventual almost complete accommodation of Adventism to the ‘American way of life,’” says Moore, “required

‘American way of life,’” says Moore, “required the obliteration of the opposite tendency that marked its early history” (p. 136).

Based on the Adventist experience, as well as that of other premillennial groups, Moore concludes that apocalyptic symbols, which once conveyed a politically radical message and supported a powerful sense of outsiderhood, are now used to express a flag-waving, anti-communist patriotism, and have a right-of-center political thrust.

A difficulty with Moore’s thesis in this chapter is that neither Adventists nor Jehovah’s Witnesses really support his point. As Moore himself says, the Witnesses are impossible to categorize politically and have not become pro-American in their premillennialism. The political perspective predominant in Adventism has unquestionably shifted in the direction Moore indicates. But Adventism, at least as defined by its leaders and official publications, has sharply distanced itself from Moral Majority-type crusades. Despite changes in tone and emphasis, Adventist premillennialism (the idea that Christ’s second coming precedes the millennium) remains too distrustful of America to join in the superpatriotism of the religious right. While Pentecostals and fundamentalists do generally seem to sustain Moore’s basic point, Adventists do so less fully and, in some ways, along with Jehovah’s Witnesses, contradict it.

If Moore fails to do justice to the nuances of Adventist belief and by implication gives a distorted view of the denomination’s present orientation, his analysis contains enough truth to war-

rant careful consideration of the issues raised. Exactly how has the political outlook of American Adventism developed in the past century? What accounts for these changes? What role has eschatology played, and to what extent has it been influenced by political and social change? Has the rhetoric of Adventist leaders accurately represented the sentiments prevailing among the membership? And beyond such historical questions, of course, are the theological and ethical ones concerning the shape Adventist eschatology and political outlook ought to take today.

Finally, some general criticisms of the book. Moore interprets religion primarily in functional, sociological terms, which may (as in the case of Adventism) lead him to unduly downplay the significance of the substance of religious beliefs. Moreover, while he gives outsider groups new historical status as typical Americans, no longer to be judged from the perspective of the Protestant mainstream, he judges them from the perspective of progressive politics. The latter point of view may skew the evidence just as much as the former.

Whatever its limitations, Moore’s work offers a fresh and thoroughly stimulating depiction of the mosaic that is American religion. It is well worthwhile for Adventists interested in how their tradition has interacted with the wider society and how other American groups have grappled with the same problem.

Douglas Morgan, a graduate of Union College and former editor of *College People*, is a graduate student in the history of Christianity at the University of Chicago.