

A Strong Showing

June Strong, *A Little Journey* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1984). 126 pp. \$5.95 (paper); *Mindy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1977). 272 pp. \$9.95 (paper); *Journal of a Happy Woman* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1973). 160 pp. \$5.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Peggy Corbett

The winsomeness of honest telling, which not only sells books but also touches lives, begins with a giving of self: someone giving time, ideas, and especially, words. June Strong is an author who has set out several times to share a part of her life with others, and therein lies much of the success of her work. Its dismal title notwithstanding, *Journal of a Happy Woman* stands as one of Strong's early gifts to her fellow women. Speaking as a mother who knows to what ends of frustration two children can drive me, I embrace the words of a woman—mother of six—who can admit with candor her own frustrations in child and home handling. Even more important, Strong's words seem especially welcome in an Adventist religious atmosphere that too often touts discouragement as sin.

Taking each month of the year, Strong shares observations, dreams, and advice that reflect the ebb and flow of a year's varied moods. Her discovery of a need for art; her desire for friendship and its answer in a spontaneous invitation; her fears over a child's illness; and her sharing of a favorite easy recipe can easily add up to just so much chitchat. But Strong's facility with language transforms "gossipy" information into creative prose with flashes of poetic vision, such as her image of "horses running through a storm of apple-blossom snow" (p. 117). In speaking of March, she refers to winter as a "goddess who does not yield her lover easily" (p. 82), words that

may not set well with some members of her Adventist audience, yet words, like much of her writing, that evoke a picture rich with the fullness of life.

Though Strong pulls her reader through the pages with gentle humor and an exclusive peek here and there into her special places in home, yard, and heart, she at times seems too reader-aware to be truly "letting us in on" her journal. The pages regularly sport quotations from Ellen G. White, which seek to instruct us and justify Strong's viewpoints on such topics as holiday observance, dress, and interior decorating. At one point her discussion of Brother Lawrence's *Practices of the Presence of God* leads her to completely throw off restraint and challenge her reader to join her in "this" walk with God. But such evangelistic fervor belies the general spirit of the book, which provides us with a quiet look at life, not a call to action.

More typically, she contrasts the traditional life of an Adventist woman, a whirl with household devotion, with her wish for some atypical Adventist traditions, such as an appreciation for art outside of Harry Anderson and the verbal wizardry of Robert Frost. Also refreshing, Strong emphasizes continual adherence to rules of principle rather than to rote rules of behavior—generally much easier to keep tabs on—in raising children and governing her own actions (p. 154).

And what is a fortyish woman doing backpacking up the coast of Maine to "find herself"? Why the need to even search? Surely an Adventist woman knows who she is? Yet here again, in *A Little Journey*, Strong admits the rabble into her closet thoughts. Traditional Adventism does not seem to allow nor approve of much self-examination beyond the "filthy rags." But Strong comes to middle age with a life full of the successes and failures of family and all the trappings of an up-and-down Christian life and wonders if her life could not be better or at least different. So she sets out with a bright orange packsack and her husband's (?) Master Charge for a few blessed days of aloneness, walking up the coast of Maine. Her honest admissions to fearing the loss of her-

self in her marriage and the loss of her marriage to her obsession with the children poignantly captures the fears of many contemporary American women who have been told that they can “have it all.”

Through her journey she sheds not only familiar surroundings and comfort, but also those scales we all develop to protect us from the people we love the most—the ones who can hurt us the most. She struggles with loneliness (something she had thought would be welcome) and even fear, yet these also press her to the questions she has come to ask; and she finds that her isolation—and a flower—nudge her back to God and the understanding that enables a person to live fully even with the questions.

Her discovery that her family would be most happy for her return “because [she] was so useful” echoes, I fear, an often typical reality that I have shared. But I also have shared Strong’s joyful exhilaration with life outside of the family.

Both of these journals show a woman—dare I say ordinary?—who has admittedly driven herself deep into the typical role of homemaker but, she shockingly discovers, to the detriment as well as the benefit of herself and her family. Her bare admission in *A Little Journey* that her family would be most happy for her return “because [she] was so useful” (p. 126) echoes, I fear, an often typical reality that I have shared. But I also have shared Strong’s joyful exhilaration with life outside of the family (and the church), and when I share in that life, both my family and I become richer.

There remains, then, that other part of us and of Strong that affects most strongly: our ancestry. A person’s upbringing, so beyond one’s control and yet so powerful an influence, seems often viewed by us as liability. Yet Strong has taken circumstances that anyone would view as devastating and turned them into catalysts for growth. In her

most popular work, *Mindy*, we read a largely autobiographical account of Strong’s early life with her grandparents. Her grandmother, Mindy, has married the handsome Carl against the loving advice of her father, who warns of heartache from a marriage religiously divided. Mindy is a Seventh-day Adventist and Carl professes no religion, only belief in God. Yet from this tale, which would at first glance be just another warning against the “unequal yoke,” comes a startling revelation: the staunch adherence to faith that seems so admirable and praiseworthy is the very act that also drives the people we love away from us. Here we find the trap that everyone finds sooner or later—we hurt both ourselves and others whether we “do” or whether we “don’t.” Living with dilemmas makes up the stuff of life; we all can remember a few “I-wish-I-had’s” or “I’m-glad-I-did’s.” Each decision made—by grandma, by me, by baby—affects the other, adding another ripple to the pool. God can see the whole, while Mindy, June, Carl, and I seem to bob from one experience to the next.

Through *A Little Journey* we learn to what extent Mindy’s choices affected Strong—her crisis with identity, seemingly sure of one person’s love and yet always striving for another’s. With the realization that we have little control over many circumstances that shape us; that our “cage” may be of our own making as well; and that even the great constant of love can repel as well as attract, one could tumble to the cry of the child’s nursery rhyme:

“Oh, you’ll agree with me ‘twill be
the world turned upside down.”

Strong’s consent to record some of her upsides and her journey toward reconciliation with God serves to stay some of my bobbing, and I’ll wager that others find themselves steadied in the business of living.

Something lies buried in everyone that urges a body to keep quiet. To be sure, people have that urge in varying degrees, yet to hug one’s soul to self and enjoy privacy too often prevails. Despite the comfort and safety gained from this distance from others, I admire those able to retain a dignity born of restraint while sharing themselves with others. It is this “letting out” of one’s self that

often attracts others to listen—and read. How does a book become someone's favorite, to be pulled from the shelf and paged through time and again? No answer is definitive, but June Strong's books point to some of the answers.

Peggy Corbett is *Spectrum's* coeditor for book reviews.

Rice's *Reign of God*: An SDA Theology for the Masses?

Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology From a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs, Mi.: Andrews University Press, 1985). 404 pp. \$23.95.

Reviewed by Clark H. Pinnock

Richard Rice, professor of theology at Loma Linda University, has written an effective college-level textbook on Christian theology from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective that ought to meet the needs of the classroom. Underlying the clear exposition of *The Reign of God* lies a profound understanding of what is involved in each topic, and all of the 16 chapters are generously furnished with study questions, footnotes, and bibliography from both Adventist and non-Adventist literature.

As the title reveals, Rice employs the kingdom of God as a theme to unify the whole, and presents the usual doctrinal themes in the traditional order, with the exception of the last chapter, which is given over to the doctrine of the Sabbath. Writing self-consciously as a church theologian, the author avoids pressing specific convictions of his own but presents the material in a fair and non-polarizing way. Knowing his position on divine omniscience, for example, I naturally turned to his presentation of God's attributes, and only noted his view hidden modestly among the range of opinion on the subject, accompanied by no at-

tempt to prove it right. The book is of the highest quality and exactly what it claims to be: an informed and balanced introductory survey of doctrinal theology.

Since I am a non-Adventist evangelical, the reader will appreciate why I notice the things that I do in my review. I confess to have known about Seventh-day Adventist beliefs hitherto largely from secondhand and not always complimentary sources. Therefore, in reading the book I had the experience of running through many quite familiar subjects and then bumping into what for me were new and even quite extraordinary concepts. I admit that I enjoyed it and benefited tremendously from it, but the reader will want to take account of my background. Let me tell you what caught my eye as I moved through the book.

Given the inerrancy debate among evangelicals, I was surprised to learn that biblical inerrancy is not so much of a problem for Adventists (pp. 31-34). To you I would only say, be thankful. The debate has not done us much good, I assure you. It has sapped our energies, created needless divisions, and deflected attention from more important problems.

As I remarked earlier, Rice presents the doctrine of God in a gentle, open manner, indicating the existence of opinions about omnipotence and eternity that represent revisions of classical theism, but not putting them forward in any disturbing or polarizing way. His own views on the divine attributes have already been expounded in *The Openness of God* (Review and Herald, 1980), and he does not permit them to intrude into this presentation, which is as it should be, given the nature of this book as a college textbook.

On the doctrine of humanity I was a little surprised to find evolution dismissed more decisively than it would be by quite a number of evangelicals. This must be the habit of Adventists. I also took note of the holistic anthropology behind the Adventist view of death and their conditionalist view of immortality. Personally, I agree with the interpretation of hell as the destruction of the wicked, though I am not so sure the intermediate state can be ruled out (see, for example, Revelation 6:9-11).

The really exciting issues did not arise for me

until well on into the book. These were, as you might guess, the distinctive Seventh-day Adventist beliefs that begin to appear in the two chapters on the church (Chapters 9-10). The reader will not be surprised to learn what these issues are, for they are doubtless the subjects of endless discussion among yourselves and polemics with outsiders like myself.

The first one was the gift of prophecy and the ministry of Ellen G. White (Chapter 9). Here I was, innocently reading along in the book, eager to hear about the gifts of prophecy and healing as they might be exercised in the local congregation (I support the charismatic renewal), when all of a

Do all Adventists agree with Rice that Ellen G. White's writings are not infallible nor her authority above the Bible's?

sudden to my surprise and fascination I found myself in the middle of a presentation of the unique prophetic inspiration of Mrs. White. Since I believe in the gift of prophecy as a present possibility in the church, I had no difficulty entertaining the idea she may have been one, even an outstanding one. The only hesitation arose out of the question whether or not Adventists consider her infallible, which would place her authority alongside if not above the Bible's. Rice assured me he did not (p. 201). Do all Adventists agree with him in this?

The second provocative issue for me was the matter of the true remnant church, though there were two other hot topics in the same chapter that I cannot resist touching (Chapter 10). I was amazed (and delighted) to find a discussion of the salvation of the unevangelised, such an idea being still quite avant garde and daring among evangelicals (pp. 213-216). Also, although I was familiar with the debate over the ordination of women, I was interested in the place Mrs. White plays in it for Adventists (pp. 224-226). As for the remnant church idea, I appreciated Rice's presentation very much. He told me that Adventists have a special role to play in this era, but that they also

wish to maintain fellowship and positive relations with other Christian groups, especially evangelicals. Given the Adventist view of Sunday worship as it is presented in the last chapter (the "mark of the beast" issue, p. 366), I consider this a charitable approach for Adventists to take toward us, and welcome it with gratitude. I can only suppose though, that Rice may again be taking a more liberal line in this matter than other Adventists might.

The third big issue concerned the doctrine of justification and salvation by grace (Chapter 11). As one who believes that the law of God is meant to be obeyed by the justified sinner and not an antinomian, I found what Rice said to be edifying and true. It did not sound like Galatian legalism to me as some of your critics doubtless charge. Your observance of the Sabbath is surely obedience in response to grace, as you understand it, and not works-salvation. More important would be the meaning Adventists attach to the concept of investigative judgment. Does it suggest salvation by works?

The investigative judgment received full attention in one of the two chapters on eschatology (Chapters 14-15). There I learned about William Miller and the rise of the Advent movement, the Great Disappointment, and the doctrine of the investigative judgment. To me, of course, it had the ring of a rationalization that softened the blow of a miscalculation in date setting. But as I listened for what Adventists intend by the doctrine, I was not shocked by it. After all, as an evangelical I believe in the judgment seat of Christ where we will receive good or evil, according to what we have done in our bodies, and I have never heard that called "works salvation" (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). At the same time I must say I find the doctrine curious and inventive, a Seventh-day Adventist distinctive less likely to appeal to other evangelicals.

The final issue is of course the doctrine of the Sabbath, which has the last chapter given over to it (Chapter 16). I agree with Rice that non-Adventist Christians just take it for granted that the Sunday worship tradition they follow is valid and cannot put up much of an argument for it from the Scriptures when they are pressed. They are not

even agreed whether there is a Sabbath, much less whether Sunday is it. The key issue, I reckon, is whether the Sabbath was meant to be a universal ordinance or something to mark Israel's distinctive mission, a special characteristic of Jewish life. I think I see some indication in Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10 that the Sabbath may have had only a dispensational significance, but I also consider the Adventist case a very powerful one. I certainly do not think the New Testament changed the day of the Sabbath to Sunday. Early Christians worshipped on the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, but they did not regard it as a Christian Sabbath. The only question for me is whether Sabbath observance as such belongs to the Christian church or just to Israel. I must confess that reading Adventists like Rice and others on the meaning they find in Sabbath observance gives me the feeling the rest of us have lost something precious. I also see implications in it for our dialogue with the Jews, who would appreciate the Adventist conviction very much. I am less impressed with the Adventist idea of Sabbath observance being the "seal" of faithful Christians and Sunday worship being the "mark of the beast." I think you are reading it into the Revelation.

Let me say in closing that I think Dr. Rice has written an excellent introduction to Christian theology that ought to enjoy wide use. I have greatly enjoyed reading it; it made me think, and I am the richer for it.

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The Reign of God: Innovative, Helpful, Discreet

Reviewed by Charles Scriven

This is a cautious, handy, and unprecedented book. Consider first the ways in which Richard Rice, professor of theology at Loma Linda University, has broken new ground with this Seventh-day Adventist in-

roduction to Christian doctrine. Although he disclaims having produced a full systematic theology, Rice has attempted to treat the major themes of Christian conviction in a well-organized, fairly comprehensive manner. He follows the outline of topics—revelation, God, "man," etc.—that one would find in conventional works of systematic theology, and tries to tie the whole together by means of a dominant motif, the reign of God. This is the first time a Seventh-day Adventist writer has ever done this.

It's true, as Rice himself points out, that surveys of Adventist doctrine have already appeared—most famously, I suppose, T. H. Jemison's *Christian Beliefs*, familiar to a generation and more of Adventist college students. But Rice's is the first comprehensive work to show the clear impact of modern, systematic theology.

How is the book extraordinarily handy? Rice has written it for the Adventist college classroom and it clearly deserves to be used, I believe, for this purpose. But *The Reign of God* would assist other thoughtful readers as well. The writing and organization of chapters is clear. One might wish for a livelier style, it is true; the sentences are merely workmanlike. But the points come through easily, and at the end of each chapter Rice provides very helpful questions for review and discussion, together with suggestions for further Bible study and theological reading. In the suggestions for additional reading he includes non-Adventist as well as Adventist writers and often recommends essays from *Spectrum*. At the beginning of each chapter, moreover, Rice lists 15 to 20 biblical passages that bear on the chapter topic. This is useful not just to students but also to teachers and pastors, whether for making lectures and sermons or for shaping Bible studies.

The caution I have mentioned is something Rice himself concedes. Near the beginning he says the book is not a "truly contemporary theology," by which he means that it does not really address such issues as modern biblical criticism, religious pluralism, and Western secularity. He denies further that the book is a major "constructive effort," a major effort, that is, to suggest a fresh interpretation of the Adventist perspective. Rice has written an "introduction," a description

of Adventist belief that includes only bits and pieces of reassessment. In discussing God Rice does spend an entire chapter on a “constructive proposal,” one similar to that advanced in his well-known *The Openness of God* (reprinted as *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*). But this is the exception, not the rule.

The title theme, “reign of God,” does not provide a basis for rethinking all the doctrines but appears, usually briefly and at the end of chapters, as a “familiar reference point.” If Rice had actually made this theme the crux of all he says, he would surely have been more provocative. As things stand, though, he has said little that is controversial; when he deals with issues that could arouse controversy he often rides the fence. Rice broaches the subject of theistic evolution, for example, but settles the matter by saying Adventists “typically reject” it. He mentions divorce and remarriage but advances no view of his own. Nor does he state his own position concerning the ordination of women, the investigative judgment, and the bearing of arms in war, though he makes reference to all these topics.

If such wariness is disappointing, we must remember that it is within the framework of the author’s expressed intentions. *The Reign of God* sets out to be innovative, helpful, and discreet. On all three counts, the book succeeds.

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Early SDA Education: Conflict & Conviction

George R. Knight, ed. *Early Adventist Educators*. (Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 1983). 250 pp., n.p.

Reviewed by David Pendleton

Seventh-day Adventists are proud of their church, and they have good reason to be if growth in membership is any

indication. The church has rapidly grown in just a century from a fledgling community of believers to an organized denomination, which today boasts a world-wide ministry and a membership numbering in the millions. With this growth in size and influence in mind one can see why Adventist scholars have endeavored to write its history. Yet, however diligent their efforts may have been, at least one key component of the Adventist heritage has been somewhat neglected: the history of its schooling.

George R. Knight, historian and philosopher of education at Andrews University, has brought to our attention the need for a serious, scholarly understanding of the history of Adventist education by editing *Early Adventist Educators*. In this volume the authors, using the social and cultural world of America in the late 1800s and early 1900s as the historical backdrop, have painted a picture of a church in conflict with itself, torn between what its members believed to be two mutually exclusive educational viewpoints. On the one hand there were the traditionalists who felt that the intellect should be the primary concern and beneficiary of a formal education, and that the classics were the proper texts. On the other hand were the reform-minded Adventists who were deeply convicted that an education rooted in “practical” and religious training was God’s ideal. These opposing philosophies, and the resulting tension within the church that “became a major problem for Adventist educators for the duration of the century” (p. 3), constitutes the common theme that unifies this work.

To document and analyze the changes that occurred in the educational philosophy of the early Adventists the editor and the contributing authors have employed both history and biography. In order to reconstruct those formative years with sensitivity to both social and cultural context and individual perspective, they sought to comprehend the events of the day from the points of view of major actors such as Ellen G. White, Edward A. Sutherland, and Frederick Griggs.

Initially, one might label the authors’ approach simplistic, for it offers few novel arguments and its history is written with only a minimum of interpretation. But after a more careful reading, I

believe that this book is only deceptively simplistic; there is more between its covers than just a chronicle of the activities of Adventist educators; more than just the story of conflict over curriculum between the “reformers” and “traditionalists” that finally “gave more room to the Bible and history . . . while maintaining a classical core” (p. 38). This book can remind one of the hand God had in the development of the Adventist educational system.

The tensions of those formative years, however, are not over yet; struggles between differing educational philosophies continue even today. Perhaps the present controversy raging over the

proposed consolidation of the two Loma Linda University campuses is but a reflection of the difficulties past; or maybe a shadow of the difficulties to come. In any case, I agree with Knight’s suggestion that “the lessons of past struggles, when understood, are instructive to those who are still seeking to implement the Christian ideal of a balanced education” (p. 4). That is why I recommend *Early Adventist Educators* to both professional educators and educated laypersons.

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