

Tarling, Lowell. *The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism*. Barragga Bay, N.S.W., Australia: Galilee Publications, 1981. 249 pp. A\$10.95 (+ A\$2.95 shipping).

The major premise of this book is that much may be discerned about the nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by observing its various fringe movements. In introducing this study of these fringe movements, the author also proposes to chronicle the maturation of Adventism from the rank of sect to that of denomination. His aim is to do this in an objective manner. Incidentally, the author does not mention whether he is or has been an Adventist. Nor does he indicate what are his specific qualifications for doing this study.

After the introductory chapter, the author does little to draw conclusions about the Adventist mind-set. Neither does he comment extensively on the maturation of the Seventh-day Adventist sectarianism into denominationalism. These he seems to leave to the reader, and contents himself with a descriptive analysis of the fringe movements under study. Though this book is easily one of the more objective works on the subject, yet Tarling leaves the reader with the distinct impression that he favors the maturity of denominationalism over the fervor of the sect.

Following the introduction are three sections classifying the fringe movements according to type. In the first section, Tarling chronicles the development of such parallel movements as the other three Advent movements which arose along with Seventh-day Adventism from among the Millerites in the 1840s. He also includes the various Churches of God, favoring the idea that the first of these Churches of God (Marion, Iowa) was a parallel movement and not an offshoot.

In the second section, Tarling chronicles such reform movements as the "Holy Flesh Movement," the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, and the Shepherd's Rod fragments (the "Davidians"). In the third section, he treats the salvation controversy from 1888 to the present. In the back of the book, an eight-page appendix of illustrations follows the index.

The book has no conclusion, leaving the reader with the question, "Where do we go from here?" Perhaps this is the very question which Tarling wishes to leave, particularly with his Seventh-day Adventist readers.

Tarling's presentation has certain positives and negatives, to which I would now call attention. First of all, if nothing else, this book is an excellent sourcebook for factual information. Important though these fringe movements have been to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, most church members (and pastors) know these groups only from hearsay. (The study is not exhaustive, but it is amazing how much information can be squeezed

into such a short readable book.) Second, it is also refreshing to see a work which tries to be sympathetic with all points of view, and yet to do so without hiding any blemishes. Finally, the book does indeed give the reader a better understanding of the Adventist mind-set.

On the other hand, the greatest lack in this volume, as I see it, is a problem of ideology that begins with the Introduction to the book. Though favoring denominationalism over sectarianism (the former as being more "mature"), Tarling fails to recognize that the church of the NT period had most of the attributes which he sees as characteristic of sects—loose organization with minimal bureaucracy, charismatic leaders with little theological training, the image of being a radical movement, the adding of authoritative writings to the existing Scriptures, etc. Given this sort of NT church-image, later movements (if they consider the NT at all normative) must deal with the problem of which attributes of the apostolic church should be preserved. Thus today, in an effort to make such an assessment, Bible-churches and Bible-institutions flourish outside the denominational establishments. And indeed, before any sect moves toward becoming a denomination, it must wrestle with which attributes of the denomination are acceptable or desirable. May not the very fact that many extra-denominational movements are flourishing suggest that some characteristics of the sect are needed and must be retained in the denominations if the denominations themselves are to stay alive?

The chapter headings of this book are illustrated with chessboard drawings related to the subject matter. In some cases they are intriguing and humorous. Often they seem to have no meaning.

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