

## BOOK REVIEWS

Arasola, Kai J. *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*. [Uppsala]: Kai J. Arasola, 1990. 226 pp. \$14.00.

*The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament* is a book with an intriguing title. The revised edition of an earlier mimeographed dissertation submitted to the theological faculty of the University of Uppsala, it is a historical-critical study of Millerism, and in particular of William Miller and his evidences for the Second Advent in 1843. This book is one of the latest in a series of similar studies by Millerite scholars such as David T. Arthur (1970), Ingemar Linden (1971), David L. Rowe (1974), Ronald Numbers (1976), and Jonathan L. Butler (1987).

The book begins with a short historical background of Miller and his movement. It is followed by a section on the context of historicism. The major part of the book discusses the formation of Miller's views on prophecy, hermeneutics, and exegesis, both chronological and nonchronological. It concludes with date-setting, topological interpretation, and the climax of the revival.

Arasola views the Millerite movement as a turning point in the history of prophetic exegesis. He sees it as a watershed in the history of millennialist exegesis because it brought the end of historicism—the well-established historical method of prophetic exposition of time. It is from this perspective that Arasola tries to discover Miller's exegesis, focusing especially on prophetic chronologies related to 1843 and 1844.

On the roots of Miller's hermeneutic, Arasola departs from the majority of Adventist scholars, who see it as being in harmony with the Reformation hermeneutic. Arasola shows discontinuity between Reformation exegesis and that of Miller. The context of Miller's view is historicism, which he identifies as a by-product of Biblicism which replaced the Reformation hermeneutic of Luther and Calvin during the post-Reformation era. Historicism is defined as "the method of prophetic interpretation which dominated British and American exegesis from the late seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century" (p. 28). Because some elements of this method go back to the Reformation and even to the early church, the author points out that historicism must not be viewed as a new invention but as an integration of separate ideas into a "coherent Biblist system" (p. 29). Miller united all these elements into a chronological prophetic system of interpretation.

Although much of the book's subject matter does not enlarge the horizons of those acquainted with the literature, Arasola makes a contribution when he describes Miller's fifteen ways of calculating prophetic time. While

many scholars have commented on various aspects of Miller's time prophecies pertaining to 1843, they had no burden to go into all details of Miller's expositions because these were not relevant to their research. Arasola's burden, however, is to look closely at every detail of the time prophecies, whether or not they have any relevance for today.

The author states that he would not make an appraisal of Millerite prophetic chronology by "today's exegetical criteria" because "one could easily find reason to criticize his use of the Bible and his conclusions." No attempt, therefore, would be made to evaluate Miller's conclusions as sound or unsound but "simply to describe the evidence that the Millerites gave for their prophetic time table." He stresses that any evaluation of Miller's exegesis "must be done by the historicist criteria" (p. 86).

Subsequent discussion reveals that the author's methodological objectives are not realized. Time and time again he departs from his descriptive task and reverts to an evaluation of Miller's exegesis from a historical-critical perspective.

With the disappointment in 1844, Arasola sees that Millerism and the continuous historical interpretation of prophecy came to an end, being replaced by futurism and preterism. The remnants of Miller's historicist approach, Arasola notes, survive only among Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

This conclusion has not been supported by the facts. The author seems totally unaware of Samuel Nuñez's doctoral research (*The Vision of Daniel 8* [Andrews University Press, 1987]). His findings on Daniel 8 clearly demonstrated that although from 1850 to 1900 the historicist school lost ground, the majority of commentators continued to hold to the pre-1844 historicist view of the little horn (Nuñez, 392). This therefore invalidates Arasola's thesis on the end of historicism.

Careful reading of the book reveals a number of inaccuracies that could have been avoided. Among the most serious are the following: a) Both S. Snow and G. Storrs are credited with advocating topological solutions to the time calculations from February 1844 onward. There is evidence which shows that Storrs did not come into the picture until the summer of 1844 with the exposition of Matt. 25:1-10; b) P. G. Damsteegt is referred to as one who fails to distinguish the Seventh-Month movement (p. 16, n. 51), while in fact its theological implications are discussed in more than 40 pages! (*Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* [Eerdmans, 1977], pp. 93-135); c) Arasola favors the 1840 edition of Miller's rules over later edited versions. Unfortunately, in the 1840 edition, rules IV, V, and XII are incorrectly copied. One of them misses a whole sentence, together with all the textual evidence (pp. 51-53).

One of the most useful aspects of the book are its extensive bibliography and appendix. Unfortunately its lack of an index limits its practical usage.