

reality just because they are controversial or full of mystery. On the contrary, Christian philosophy must be different. "Christian philosophy is different because of its splashing and foaming of the soul's breakers against the cliff of the divine Truth" (130). Such splashing promotes wonder and must serve as a deterrent against the New World Order of technocratic unity and dehumanizing capitalism.

It seems to me that Pieper's message for today is a dual one. On the one hand he sounds the alarm against the technological advances that seem to kill the sense of wonder by domesticating philosophy with the dual leash of productivity and capitalism—a process that dehumanizes people and as such plays the role of the antichrist. The second call of alarm is directed towards the Christian church, a call not to kill the sense of wonder and mystery within its own theologians and philosophers. If the church is to be ready to sound the apocalyptic alarm against the world, it must keep the sense of wonder and the tensions that are brought by mystery within its own rank of philosophers and theologians. These two warnings, if listened to, can perhaps help the church be ready for the great leisure time that the real New World Order of the New Jerusalem will bring to this world. The church ought to foster a sense of wonder and mystery that will be the norm in this truly New World Order, the New Jerusalem Order, a place of true leisure.

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Plantak, Zdravko. *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics*. New York: St. Martins, 1998. 288 pp. Hardcover, \$65.00.

The Silent Church is a pioneering study into Seventh-day Adventist social ethics and how the Adventist ethic affects and should affect Adventism's thought and action in the human-rights arena. Plantak, an Adventist pastor in England, undertook the topic as his doctoral research. He correctly points out that Adventism has generally been silent on social issues in the twentieth century, even though its earliest pioneers were far from silent. A case in point is "the church's silence on the issue of human rights in the 1960s" (15). Again, he points out, when the church does speak, it all too often does so defensively in an area where it has special vested interests, such as in defeating Sunday laws.

The purpose of the study was to examine Adventist history, theology, and ethics in order to discover reasons for inconsistencies in the denomination's approach to human rights. In order to accomplish that goal, the author needed to sample several issues in Adventist history. Although not formally stated as a goal in the "purpose of the research" section, the study also had a constructive aspect. It was obviously part of Plantak's objective to move beyond what he considers traditional Adventism's "pragmatic" approach to social issues and human rights to the development of a theoretical ethical/theological foundation for those concerns.

The author found himself in largely virgin territory in terms of extensive Adventist research on the topic. The closest previous study was probably Michael Pearson's *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Pearson dealt mainly with Adventist personal ethics, especially how the Adventist Church deals with moral decisions in the area of human sexuality. Plantak's study sought to widen the beachhead created by

Pearson by doing extensive research in the area of Adventist social ethics. Prior studies in the area of Adventist concerns with human rights had been limited to a very few periodical articles.

Plantak's research covered a massive territory. Part I surveyed Adventism's response to certain issues connected to human rights from the nineteenth century to the present. The second section explored in detail three major issues in Adventism as it faced human-rights issues. The topics treated were Adventism's attitude to the poor and its approach to gender and racial issues.

Part III dealt with those theological and practical circumstances that led the church to a renewed interest in social concerns in the second half of the twentieth century. The final part of the volume sought to evaluate and synthesize a contemporary Adventist theology which could be used to contribute to a more comprehensive theology and ethics of human rights.

Overall *The Silent Church* has made several significant contributions to an understanding of Adventism. Not only does it provide an argument that should wake up the church to its needs in the area of social ethics and human rights, but it presents some extremely valuable insights on the topic. In the process it traces for the record the history of Adventism in the area of social concern and particularly in such areas as poverty, gender, and race. Plantak's reference notes and bibliography are a gold mine of material on a variety of topics.

In spite of, and in some cases because of, the magnitude of Plantak's contribution, the volume has some glaring weaknesses. Those weaknesses include unequal treatment of parallel topics. For example, in his treatments of race, women, and the poor he has major sections on theological considerations for the first two but neglects that aspect of the topic in regard to the poor. Another weakness is that the book at times seems to sacrifice depth and sophistication of analysis for breadth.

More serious are problems with author bias throughout the volume. For example, when he treats the women's issue he tends to examine only those authors that agree with his position. Thus he totally neglects the contributions of P. Gerard Damsteegt, C. Raymond Holmes, and Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. The result is a one-sided picture. On another level in the realm of evidence is the fact that he seems to over-utilize such independent Adventist periodicals as *Spectrum* on various issues but neglects periodicals not in harmony with some of his themes. Now in the realm of social ethics and human rights there is indeed a reason for such a skewing of citations, since *Spectrum* is a major voice in the area. But in other areas of treatment the one-sidedness is not justifiable. A final problem with sources is that the author at times uses less than the best secondary and primary sources.

The volume's major problem, however, resides in chap. 7, where the author seeks to create a theological basis for the shift toward social ethics in the decades after the 1950s. That chapter is a caricature of Adventist theology and at the same time a prime example of author bias. For one thing the chapter treats the polarized theologies of the Standish brothers and Desmond Ford as if they were the only two options. In the process he repeatedly provides negative comment on the "old" theology of the Standish brothers but expresses a positive approach to Ford's theology as if that were the only healthy way to a future that would find Adventism more active in social ethics. Is the author unaware of the fact that the

vast majority of Adventists, both scholarly and otherwise, reside somewhere between those two extremes? Does the author hold that there are no possibilities for Adventism to maintain its theological integrity as it becomes consistently activated in the social realm, or is the either/or choice that he implicitly presents his readers with in his analysis the only alternative? To put it mildly, this chapter's excursion into Adventist historical theology is both simplistic and misleading. That sort of extreme reductionism is bad enough in itself, but to turn around and suggest that *one arm of a faulty dichotomy is the causative factor is even more untenable.*

Having said some fairly strong things about chapter seven, it is only fair to add that this chapter was the only one that was really misleading. Fortunately, the weaknesses of that chapter do not overly impact on the volume's overall validity. Each of the other chapters, even where bias is present, make major contributions to the understanding of Adventism. Not only are the historical chapters of great value but the final chapter, which deals with an Adventist basis for human rights, is especially worthy of study as Adventism takes necessary steps toward becoming more consistent in its approach to both social ethics and human rights.

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Rohls, Jan. *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology, trans. John Hoffmeyer. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998. 311 pp. Hardcover, \$35.95.

As the title of Jan Rohls's learned book already indicates, unlike Lutheran theology, where the process of confessional development basically came to a conclusion with the Formula of Concord (1577) and the Book of Concord (1580), the Reformed side of the Protestant Reformation has witnessed an "open" rather than a "closed" confessional tradition (cf. xi, 9).

Even though there are more recent Reformed confessions (cf. the 1982 edited volume by Lukas Vischer, *Reformed Witness Today: A Collection of Confessions and Statements of Faith Issued by Reformed Churches* [Berne: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene, 1982]), they appear not to have received similar status and attention. Thus Rohls has limited himself to Barmen, which delineates a decisive moment in recent Reformed confessions.

However, the title of the book is somewhat misleading, because Rohls mainly and predominantly focuses on the Old Reformed Confessional Writings and misses out on a substantive interaction with more recent Confessions, for instance, with their new perspective on biblical interpretation. Especially more recent Reformed Confessions struggle, to name but one example, over how one is to understand, read, and treat Scripture. They are trying to make room for a critical reading and interpretation of Scripture that employs historical and literary criticism as important instruments for understanding how the Bible is to be read and understood. This consolidation of a new understanding that is taking place in more recent Reformed Confessions stands in stark contrast to a position loosely identified as inerrancy, a perspective that proposes that the very words of the Bible are directly inspired by God and are not to be doubted as to their full truth, which