

REVIEWS

Assurance of Salvation?

JAMES E. HOOPER

LET ME ASSURE YOU

By Edward W. H. Vick

Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1968

176 pp paperback (Dimension) \$1.95

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The question "Will I be saved?" perplexes too many Adventists. This conviction grew on me as I led discussions, counseled old and young people, and compared notes with pastors and teachers. It was confirmed by a survey of urban Adventist academy students who had experienced a revival. The twenty questions asked included such questions as "How can I get along better with my parents?" "What occupation should I choose?" "What is the meaning of life?" The student was asked to indicate whether he thought about each question often or seldom. The only questions nearly everyone answered "often" were the six variants of the question "Will I be saved?"

To accept assurance of salvation often comes hard for Adventists because of the emphasis on keeping the law. By cautioning against falling off the narrow path on the side of antinomianism, occasionally the church backs off the other side into legalism in the process. Avoiding both at the same time is difficult.

The difficulty is not peculiar to Adventism, of course. The perplexity in Christian life is that one's assurance of salvation is contradicted by his experience. Guilt feelings confirm his fears that he must be lost, not saved. Although legalism, the belief that one has to earn his salvation by something that he does, makes the sense of the assurance of salvation impossible, it is much more acceptable to human nature than acceptance of righteousness by faith, which does give one assurance.

If Vick's title, *Let Me Assure You*, leads one to think that his book is a study on the doctrine of assurance, the table of contents may be puzzling. The topics there appear to be those suitable for a systematic theology, without doctrines of God, Christ, or revelation. The choice of chapters — Grace, the Atonement, the Experience of Salvation, Law and Covenants, the Church, and Eschatology — can be explained by the purpose of the book indicated in its title. Chapter three is the core of the book: the Christian would not write theology unless he had experienced salvation. The chapters on grace and the atonement describe God's initiative, which the man of faith knows to have been prior to his faith. The last three chapters describe the way of life that results from the adoption of the stance of faith. The topics are selected and arranged in a way to help the reader accept the assurance of salvation, with all that that makes possible and all that it implies.

This is a book of pastoral theology, written to nourish Christian life in the church. An academic theologian who looks to the book for discussions of contemporary theological options will be disappointed. The book is full of biblical references, expositions of passages, and studies of biblical words and concepts. A reader who dips into

it anywhere will get some new insight into a biblical idea. See, for example, the explanation of Matthew 16:18-19 on Peter as the rock (p. 126), or the resolution of the apparent contradictions between Paul and James (pp. 65-69).

The author is especially adept at word studies. His discussion of "law" is a good example. It is often hard to tell what the word means in New Testament passages, but Vick lays out the range of meanings clearly. Careful attention to this section of the book (pp. 113-124) would help to clear up confusion about how the law is related to salvation. Here and there in the text aphorisms express insights beautifully; for example, "prayer is a way of getting what God wants us to have" (p. 96), or "righteousness is not something you can work up — it is something that God must send down" (p. 51).

There are almost no technical theological terms, and the author's philosophical competence does not show through. The sentences are short; difficult ideas are expressed in more than one way. This book in pastoral style is one to read and study and ponder. The occasional footnotes and additional notes are highly valuable. Most of them are references to the history of an idea in Christian theology, and all are concise and lucid. The exposition would have gone further toward filling the need for an Adventist doctrine of assurance had the author referred to the teachings of Ellen White. Nevertheless, this is a book rich with insight for the Christian life, and as such, deserves a wide and careful readership.

Contraband

STANTON B. MAY

GOD'S SMUGGLER

By Brother Andres (with John and Elizabeth Sherrill)

London: Hodder and Stoughton 1968

New York: New American Library 1970 224 pp \$.75

"Lord, in my luggage I have Scriptures that I want to take to your children across this border. When you were on earth, you made blind eyes see. Now I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see these things you do not want them to see."

Brother Andres (a pseudonym) prayed, and the guards allowed his car bulging with Bibles to cross the Yugoslav border in 1957. He began his mission to bring the Word to worshippers cut off from their religion. It was a mission fraught with peril and pathos, financed by faith, supported by miracles.

This paperback tells the thrilling story of a young Dutchman, his World War II life in occupied Holland, his tough army service in Indonesia, and his most unlikely conversion. His life is one of complete dedication, complete dependence on God for even the minutiae of daily living — most refreshing in this age of skepticism.

He starts smuggling Bibles after attending Communist youth congresses behind the Iron Curtain, where he sought out Christians and saw that they needed Bibles