

REVIEWS

Valid Questions?

DONALD R. McADAMS

WHY I LEFT THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

By Paul K. Freiwirth

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Paul K. Freiwirth — a professor of history at Pembroke State University, Pembroke, North Carolina, and the holder of a bachelor of theology degree from Atlantic Union College (1947), a master of arts from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (1958), and a doctor of philosophy (in modern history) from the University of Maryland (1961) — states in the preface of this small book that he had to write it because his “transiting Mars entered the 9th House and formed a conjunction with Neptune.”

Such a statement may put off many Adventist readers. Adventists take seriously the criticisms of opponents, and feel especially uncomfortable when an ex-Adventist, writing out of “love and sympathy for those who walk in the shadows,” claims to have found the light. Such attacks, however, are expected from the rationalist, the agnostic, or perhaps the member of another Protestant body. When an Adventist academic leaves the church for the charms of yoga, astrology, and graphology, one is tempted to put aside his book as the work of a crackpot who has lost all reason. To do this would be a mistake. Few readers of *SPECTRUM* will be tempted to follow in Freiwirth’s path, or even acknowledge any validity in his new faith. Yet the blocks he stumbled over may help identify and perhaps remove some of the less attractive features of Adventist teachings and practice.

Austrian by birth, and an orphan, Freiwirth was a high school student living with an uncle in New York when he enrolled in the Voice of Prophecy Bible correspondence course and subsequently joined the Seventh-day Adventist church. From there he followed the normal pattern of upward mobility common to new Adventists. He attended Atlantic Union College from January 1944 to June 1947. He was a hardworking student who labored long hours in the bindery, sold Adventist books in the summer, and lived on practically nothing. After his graduation, Freiwirth worked for five unhappy years in New York as a ministerial intern. In 1952 the conference sent him to Takoma Park, D. C., to obtain a master’s degree. Freiwirth’s interpretation of this move was that he was being fired because of his lack of productivity and was being eased into some other line of church employment.

After his year at the seminary, for five years Freiwirth worked in the editorial department of the Southern Publishing Association in Nashville, Tennessee, with particular responsibility for *These Times*. Apparently these were happy years: the job gave opportunity to read and, except for subscription drives, did not demand the

high-pressure tactics required of a successful "soul-winner." Also, Freiwirth acquired a wife. A desire for further graduate study led the Freiwirths back to Takoma Park. Here Paul studied a while for a bachelor of divinity degree before transferring to a PH.D program at the University of Maryland. By now he was having serious doubts about Adventism and was dabbling in the occult, but it was not until another decade and several jobs "outside" that he formally left the church.

Freiwirth's reasons for leaving come under three headings: disillusionment in the face of unethical practices by individuals and institutions; disenchantment with inconsistent doctrines; and the lure of the occult. Among the practices that bothered Freiwirth the most were meat-eating and coffee-drinking by some church workers (including a pastor), the color line in the South, the European junkets of editors in the line of duty, the false pretenses under which some Ingathering money was collected, the constant pressure on members and pastors for money and "souls," the deceit used to keep prospective members from discovering what church the evangelists represented, the seeming fact that a well-known conversion story (*The Marked Bible*) is fictional, and the fact (which probably few will dispute) that at the Washington Sanitarium and Hospital the doctors prescribed drugs and one dietitian was obese.

One may doubt the judgment of an intelligent and educated man who forsakes a church because some of its members or even leaders do not live up to the high standards professed. Although the church has never claimed perfection, Freiwirth usefully reminds Adventists of the influence of behavior and the importance of being scrupulously honest and Christian in all actions.

Freiwirth's theological problems are more difficult to summarize and less easy to dismiss. Most of them are a consequence of the rigid expectations he brought to Adventism. Evidently he expected to find complete truth nicely packaged and uniformly accepted. When he discovered that Adventist ministers and teachers disagreed on the meaning of Armageddon, or sometimes got caught on the wrong side of a prophecy (his two examples are on Israel and Japan, dead issues today), it disturbed him greatly. He had been taught to believe that only 6,000 years had elapsed since Creation, and then he was confronted with the evidence for an old Earth. Also he discovered what to him were real contradictions in some Adventist interpretations of the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. He may be correct in concluding that on some points the interpretations are not significantly more plausible than others. More than occasionally he catches Adventist writers making rather poor use of proof texts, and of course he rejects the inspiration of Ellen G. White as evidence in support of traditional Adventist interpretations.

Freiwirth has his reasons for denying the inspiration of Mrs. White, but none of them seem substantial. (Frequently he has followed the D. M. Canright line of thought.) He charges her with plagiarism and claims to find considerable lack of agreement of *The Great Controversy* with modern historical scholarship. These objections are not surprising for one who had been led to believe that Mrs. White was infallible. But it is hard to understand why anyone would reject the inspiration of Mrs. White because she failed to expose the evils of undistilled water or because her handwriting showed unfavorable characteristics to a graphologist.

Freiwirth's doubts about Adventists, it seems clear, were being fueled by the appeal of the occult. "The answer" Freiwirth found to fill the need for absolute certainty

came through health fanaticism (no cooked foods, no drugs, no tap water, and no sex — it debilitates the brain), astrology, and a belief in reincarnation. To be fair, one should not ridicule the beliefs of others, no matter how absurd these beliefs might seem — yet it is hard to take too seriously the criticisms of one who has rejected Adventism for fanaticism and superstition. Nevertheless, Freiwirth has raised some questions that merit consideration. Sometimes Adventist preachers and writers have claimed truth only for Adventists but error for others. Sometimes Adventists have credited Mrs. White with an infallibility she never claimed. And too often the practices of Adventists have not squared with the behavior one has a right to expect from God's remnant people, and have placed in the path stumbling blocks that weaker brothers have fallen over.

The book is not put together with the care one would expect from a scholar. Many claims are made without proper documentation; people and books are alluded to without clear identification; one note is missing; and there is no index. The book has the appearance of a memoir prepared without access to other necessary books or written records. The publishers, a vanity press, must bear some of the responsibility for not insisting on recognized standards of scholarship.

The Not-So-Brave World

LEONARD N. HARE

FUTURE SHOCK

By Alvin Toffler

New York: Random House 1970 505 pp \$8.95

Some contemporary futurists foresee a dismal tomorrow in which man will be overwhelmed by the giant institutions he has helped to create. Many look for Big Business, in its greed for larger profits, to push for increasing uniformity and standardization though it cost man his final measure of individual expression. Others anticipate that Big Government, with its insatiable lust for power, will foreclose on the remnants of personal freedom as it confines its subjects within the straightjacket of conformity.

Toffler does not agree. The message of *Future Shock* is that the Super-Industrialized Age we are now entering will be an era of diversity, innovation, and choice such as has never before been experienced. If the number of options open to individuals can be used as an index of freedom, then the people of the Super-Industrialized State will constitute the freest society the planet has ever supported!

The selection of an automobile will serve to illustrate the new freedom. There was a time when a person wishing to purchase a car would buy a Model T Ford. It came in one color — black. Today there are many manufacturers of automobiles. Each