

REVIEWS

Social Science and Religion

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SECT IDEOLOGIES AND SOCIAL STATUS

By Gary Schwartz

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It is questionable just how much of a contribution Gary Schwartz, an anthropologist by training, has made to American scholarship in *Sect Ideologies and Social Status*. A published version of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, this book represents an effort to study "the religious ideology of two sectarian groups in American society — the Pentecostals and the Seventh-day Adventists" (p. 1). Either religious body would have been a more than adequate source for doctoral research. That Schwartz put the two together — to show how "dissatisfaction with the social order in sacred guise" provides adherents with a total frame of reference and a world perspective that orders even the minor affairs of life — is a most formidable research task, to say the least!

The discussion of the sect in general as a phenomenon of social science is both interesting and stimulating. If sect affiliation, as is often asserted, is related to status deprivation — that is, if persons feel they lack the esteem due them and seek to rectify this lack by joining a sectarian group that promises future rewards — why do some persons with feelings of insignificance turn to a sectarian solution while others turn to psychiatric help? Schwartz concedes that knowledge has not progressed to a full understanding of this question. Both the psychological makeup of the person and the sociological perspectives of available alternatives in the community no doubt play a part in determining whether a secular or a sacred solution is sought. Perhaps other variables are involved. His analysis here is good.

The author's biases are not difficult to locate, even by only a cursory survey of the book. He uses the standard clichés of "social marginality," "status deprivation," and "resentment over the skewed distribution of social privileges" to justify his categorization of Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists as sectarian bodies. He has obviously read the literature. But then he uses other phrases and words that reveal something of his own perspectives. He writes about "bizarre" religious doctrines (p. 30), and about "exotic" customs and "esoteric" beliefs (pp. 240, 241) in describing the groups he has undertaken to study. Perhaps he had in mind the Adventist communion service or the Pentecostal speaking in tongues by some believers. These are subjective impres-

sions expressed in a rather negative fashion, however, and can hardly be considered the evaluations of the trained objectivity that doctoral research is expected to entail.

The lack of rigorous methodology would seem to me to be very much open to question. Participation-observation techniques used as one method of gathering information have their limitations. Schwartz is well aware of the problems posed by his regular attendance at religious services of the groups, but his resistance to encouragement, at the same time, to make some kind of commitment. When pressed, he referred to his Jewish background to explain his lack of interest in personal Christian salvation. One must question whether or not this explanation was sufficient to enable him to establish the rapport essential to elicit honest and forthright answers to the questions he asked after about six months of attending services. To be a participant-observer would be more successful in settings other than one where continued attendance presupposes some sort of interest. To what degree can one maintain closeness for greater insights while maintaining distance for greater objectivity?

Schwartz seems to have gathered his firsthand information about Seventh-day Adventists from one congregation only. His informants were only those whom he had come to know "reasonably well" (p. 241). Were they loyal Seventh-day Adventists? Were they new Seventh-day Adventists? Were they Seventh-day Adventists who tried to straddle the fence, so to speak? He does not identify who these members were or how many respondents he had. While one can secure information only from informants who will talk, the problem lies in translating such information, from a few church members toward whom one may feel the warmth of friendship, to generalizations about Seventh-day Adventists — and this Schwartz has done.

A second source of information was notes made on the sermons of the church pastor and notes on the teaching in Sabbath school classes he attended. Again, his methodology seems weak indeed.

To his credit, Schwartz did use bonafide Adventist publications as a third source of information. Quotations found in his discussion of Adventist teachings are from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*; Arthur E. Lickey, *Highways to Truth*; Arthur S. Maxwell, *Courage for the Crisis*; George E. Vandeman, *Planet in Rebellion*; Charles L. Paddock, *Highways to Happiness*; *The Sabbath School Quarterly* (1963); and *The Youth's Instructor*. He confesses to not having read all of the literature; but his citations give the appearance of fair scholarship, although random checking reveals the wrong page documentation for some of the statements cited.

Seventh-day Adventist teachings are clearly perceived in some cases, murky in some, and just plain wrong in others. For instance, in discussing events at the end of the thousand years of Revelation 20, he writes about *both* the righteous dead and the wicked dead being resurrected. His overall picture of Adventists seems to be that of a legalistic group concerned with scrupulous observance of minute details of religion in life. Perhaps some Adventists portray a sense of legal obligation to that which is truth.

As to status concerns, Schwartz suggests that Seventh-day Adventist ideology is characterized by a dominant *fear* and a dominant *hope* (pp. 134, 135). The fear is primarily a fear of falling in the status system by not staying out of trouble. According to Schwartz, Adventists stress injunctions to stay out of trouble — to avoid drinking, adultery, and other patterns of what are perceived as a "lower" mode of life. The

hope is the converse, namely, that if one does good, works hard at his job, and is careful in expenditure and life, the prospects are bright for upward mobility and the achievement of the success image that he suggests underlies Adventist thinking. This interpretation of Adventist thinking may indeed be the motivational force behind the religiosity of some Adventists, but undoubtedly many have found a better motivational basis.

Not being fully familiar with Pentecostal belief and practice, I make no attempt here to evaluate Schwartz's treatment of that group.

As Glock and Stark suggest in *Religion and Society in Tension*, it may very well be that the conflict between science and religion peaked in the well-known Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, as far as biology is concerned, but that the emerging conflict is in the social sciences. If that is the case, this work by Schwartz, with all of its methodological and theological weaknesses, might be a book with which Adventist scholars should become acquainted.

LETTERS

My hearty appreciation to Herold Weiss (SPECTRUM Spring 1972) for the penetratingly true way in which he deals with Seventh-day Adventists as Protestants. All of our advanced Bible teachers should read this and ponder it well, especially his observations on Ellen White's stance on doctrines. Hermeneutically we must give the Bible the *first* place in any exegesis of Scripture.

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Ronald Graybill has added another chapter to the discussion of Ellen White's use of historical sources initiated in the pages of SPECTRUM two years ago by William S. Peterson.¹ The latest contribution is justified by the assertion that "some interesting evidence has come to light which can hardly be overlooked." The 1911 revision of *The Great Controversy* was undertaken, in part, to "identify historical sources in which material quoted in *The Great Controversy* could be found by those who wished to verify the quotations." According to Graybill, "an examination of the correspondence and other documents dealing with this revision has turned up significant data with a direct bearing on Ellen White's use of the historical sources appearing in chapter fifteen."

The "significant data" are marginal notations made by Clarence C. Crisler on certain "torn-out pages of chapter fifteen of the 1888 edition," indicating that Mrs. White "drew the quotations entirely from Uriah Smith's work." That is, Smith quoted