

cedes there is a problem and makes an appeal for more study of the topic. But the overall result is to bring into question Ellen White's counsel.

The most disturbing aspect of the book is the author's penchant for making statements without giving support from other literature. One example is the discussion of sexual differences between men and women. Men, according to Wittschiebe, more easily detach sex from love, desire it more often (and in unusual places and at unconventional hours), and seemingly are more given to animal passions. Women are supposedly lower-g geared in sex, adjust to marriage easier, are less often tempted to abandon their children, and generally less sexually aberrant. References for these observations would have been useful since they seem to be contradicted by some recent research. Examples of other questionable statements are his assertion that men who beat their wives were spoiled when they were children, always getting their own way, and that children almost always do better when they have at least one brother or sister as they grow up.

There are other troubling things about his book, such as the stories of almost miraculous cures of serious marital problems after a single counseling session. Nevertheless, we can be grateful for a book that cautions against either embracing a too-liberal standard or retreating into a puritanical stance that denies any place for sexuality in the life of a Christian.

## Here-and-Now

Review by Charles Scriven

*Calculated Goodness*

by Sakae Kubo

Southern Publishing Assn., 128 pp., \$3.95

**I**n this book (another in the Southern Publishing Association's Anvil Series) the writer offers brief, readable meditations on 16 Bible passages. The book has an ethical tone—as suggested by the

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title—though it is by no means a treatise in ethics, nor even limited to that field. This is a collection of pieces, an anthology whose unifying element is not a subject matter so much as a form: each chapter begins with a New Testament text, then explains, in simple, nontechnical prose its meaning for today.

The author of the book succeeds just where (for Adventists) it is so easy to fail: in relating the Gospel to the here-and-now as well as to the then-and-there. Perhaps the best evidence of this is chapter six, entitled "In Christ There Is No East or West." Here Sakae Kubo, who is seminary librarian and professor of New Testament at Andrews University, ventures into largely uncharted territory. I mean largely uncharted by us: with remarks on "the equality of the races" he strays into social ethics, an area of Judaeo-Christian thought we are usually admonished to stay away from.

What Kubo says specifically about race belongs to what tradition we do have in this field: from our denomination's beginnings there have been some (including Ellen White) who opposed racism and slavery from the conviction that all are one in Christ. But in developing the theme of the chapter, Kubo finds it necessary to ruminate on the broader subject of the role of the church in society. Hence these sentences, which, for a book produced by a denominational publisher, are, it seems to me, striking:

"The church must serve as the conscience of society and the nation."

"How sad that the church cannot speak out boldly on the Biblical message of love and brotherhood for fear it might be political!"

"If the gospel does not deal with social relationships, then it is an emasculated gospel."

I take these sentences to be a call for "prophecy" in the classical Hebrew sense, that is, for religious criticism of those values and institutions that perpetuate suffering and oppression in the world. In America, where the praise of flag and ruler is practically required etiquette, it is infinitely easy to pass over such sentences without even noticing what they say. It will be too bad if readers of Kubo's book do this, since the "spirit of prophecy"—what we feel proud to possess—must surely become a style of life among us, not just a memory of Ellen White. The ancient prophets thundered against commonplace injustices and pain, and in the fine, long chapter

on race you see a small, but significant, recovery of this spirit in a contemporary Adventist writer.

The chapter on race is by far the longest, and one of the best, in the book. Of the other chapters, the weakest is the second, in which the author deals with the New Testament assertion that Jesus was “tempted as we are, yet without sinning.” I am baffled, as I believe most people are, by the mysteries that attend this subject. And I have to say that one mystery Kubo tries to clear up in this chapter is as baffling now as it was before I read his book. Having quoted Ellen White’s statement that Jesus lacked “the propensities of sin,” he asks, “If Christ did not have inherent sinful propensities such as you and I, the descendants of Adam, have, how can Hebrews 4:15 maintain that He was tempted in all points like as we are?”

Then, following a writer named A. B. Bruce, Kubo distinguishes a temptation that may arise from “inherent sinful nature” from one that may come from “an external cause.” An example of the former is the temptation to forsake one’s true calling based on vanity and ambition. An example of the latter is the temptation to forsake one’s true calling based on the clear perception that the way will be “rough, thorny and steep.” But how could such a perception bring temptation to someone who had no “inherent propensity” to cowardice? I don’t think it could. And so Kubo’s question, it seems to me, remains unanswered.

My point is that some mysteries had best be acknowledged to be just that, mysteries. Our energies are better spent figuring out the *meaning for life* of Bible theology than trying to explain the (from the human perspective) unexplainable. How does Hebrews 4:15 express hope for humanity? That is what matters most, and the chapter would have succeeded had it

stayed with this question and steered away from the obscure theologizing.

The 15 other chapters are very helpful, even a joy to read. In all of them there is a sensitivity to human problems, a simplicity of style, and an appeal to heart that leave the reader with the sense of having had a genuinely devotional experience. (The essays might well be shared aloud with the adult members of your family, though they would not be suited to children.)

An attractive feature of the book is the author’s use of illustration. Twice in “I Am the Way,” a chapter marking Christianity as a relationship with the divine, not adherence to intellectual truths, Kubo uses the kind of empty, apocryphal-sounding stories you find in books of sermon illustrations. But mainly the illustrations make their points in a telling way, and are often drawn from the great works of literature. Among the writers quoted are Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Maupassant, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Dickens and Somerset Maugham. It is really quite refreshing.

The chapter entitled “Law for Man, Not Man for the Law,” distinguishes the person-centered ethics of Jesus from the legalistic ethics that puts persons in the background. This is another example of the ethical tone of many of the chapters. In some chapters as in the one on the temptations, the author veers away from the ethical to the theological. In “God Is for Us,” for example, he talks about the meaning of God’s grace, and in “The Peace of Christ” he reflects on the experience of salvation.

As a collection of meditations, the book is good, very worth reading, and I happily recommend it. More than this, it is another of the recent signs of hope that Adventist publishers are trying to break away from business-as-usual, and that, too, is something to be happy about.