

Sketches . . . of William Miller (1875), Francis D. Nichol's *Midnight Cry* (1944), Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy* (1950), Arthur W. Spalding's *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (1961), and Jerome L. Clark's *1844* (1968)—he adds few insights not already contained in these works. While the Review and Herald blurb states that he engaged in “an extended study” of Miller’s life, the historian will search in vain for any footnote citing Miller’s letters, diaries, or other contemporary Advent sources. Gale seems content to derive his “raw data” second-hand, and, in the case of Clark (who employed no primary sources either), third-hand. Even Bliss, whom Gale admits was Miller’s “friend and biographer,” occupies not one footnote.

If he had conducted such intense primary research, Gale might better have explained such matters as how the term Millerite first came into use; that the term for Millerite “stickers,” as he calls them, was “monitory wafers”; when and how James White became a personal friend of Miller; and when and under what circumstances James White coined the term “investigative judgment.” It is also unfortunate that Gale makes no attempt to fit Millerism into the sociocultural context of its time. He never once refers to Whitney Cross’ *The Burned-over District* (1950), nor Alice Tylor’s *Freedom’s Ferment* (1944), to mention only two significant books on the movements and reforms of Jacksonian America.

Yet, his chapter on 1844, “New Light,” does offer fresh theological insights on why God permitted the disappointment of October 22. First, Gale suggests, He desired worldwide attention be focused on His Second Advent. Second, this message could not have gone forth as urgently had its adherents understood the true nature of the Investigative Judgment. Third, their message of the first and second angels was a testing point to separate God’s people from the world. Last, the disappointment sent Adventists to their Bibles with fresh vigor, to double-check all their major doctrines and purify them of traditional interpretations. Perhaps most importantly, Gale concludes, “the disappointment of October 22, 1844, was the birth pang of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” In this respect, from Millerite despair arose the “blessed hope” of Adventism.

Church Doctrines

Review by Bruce Ronk

Into the Arena: Insight Essays on the Christian Life

Compiled by Chuck Scriven

Review and Herald, 157 pp., \$3.75.

If doctrines make up one of those spiritual skeletons we hide in the closet, and view only with a sense of fear, suspicion and doubt; if doctrines are something we studied in school and then discarded as dull or even useless, then *Into the Arena* provides a helpful look at that old collection of bones. *Arena* may not succeed in getting the doctrines entirely out of the dark, but at least if it adds some light to our beliefs, we may not be so embarrassed or even frightened by them.

A devotee of *Insight* may read this volume with a disturbing sense of *dèjà vu*, but if the demand for newness is not overpowering, he may profit from a second experience with these articles, compiled from the first three and one-half years of *Insight*. The additional benefit will come from a concentration of thought not possible in the brief individual articles week by week. This is a book you can sit down with for a Sabbath afternoon. There are 25 essays by ten authors (none female, unfortunately) who, I believe, stimulate us to rethink some of our attitudes towards the conventions of Adventism. We become aware of a depth of commitment to God and society implicit in our doctrines, something rarely spelled out so clearly in traditional denominational literature.

One problem remains in these reprints: the articles are just as short as they first were. This brevity can be unsatisfying and perhaps even confusing. Scriven’s article, “Knowing That God Is Our Maker,” is barely two pages long. He raises a useful question about creationism and takes a remarkable posture in suggesting that no one has yet shown “conclusively . . . that the earth is roughly 6,000 years old.” But after tell-

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ing the reader that he cannot have absolute faith in science, he emphatically says that he need not doubt the existence and creatorship of God. This is his conclusion: "*We can know that God is our Creator because of what He has done for us.*" (Scriven's italics.) Then in somewhat vague language he attempts to illustrate what we have seen God do for us. Given another two pages instead of two paragraphs, Scriven might have been able to help us see God's efforts in our behalf; but brevity does not permit it, and the reader closes the chapter unsatisfied. A few other articles have this problem also, but it is a small price to pay for the privilege of having one's thoughts stimulated by so many useful questions about a Christian's relationship to God, to society and to himself.

This book certainly represents a significant step in the maturity of the Adventist church. It seems quite clear (to me, at least) that such a volume could not have been published ten or 15 years ago. Any attempt to unveil the clichés and platitudes of our religious thought would never have seen the light of day in the fifties or even the sixties. One still gets a sense, however, that several *Arena* contributors stopped a little short of what they really wanted to say in order not to offend beyond publishability. Even so, the result is a book of Christian probing with more than a slight tone of iconoclasm.

Many readers will feel as though they are less of a religious anachronism after reading the frank questions and doubts raised in the book by some of the church's best thinkers, questions which many of us have felt but never expressed. Edward W. H. Vick, for example, admits that "to some questions there simply is no intellectually satisfying answer." He goes on, "I have yet to read an intellectually satisfying answer to the problem of suffering. . . . There will always be room to doubt the goodness of God."

Jonathan Butler takes an apparently lifeless doctrine, the state of the dead, and shows its vital relationship to the Christian experience. Dave Larson says that the hope of Adventists "must reach us where we are." While he does

not actually demonstrate how it does this, he does give the reader a new perspective from which to judge religious ideas.

Concerning the communion, another article, also by Butler, states, "Seventh-day Adventists who labor through Communion as though there had been no resurrection, need to treat the meal less like a funeral supper and more like a picnic on the beach with their resurrected Lord." There is a freshness of language here, and, in fact, much vigorous writing like it throughout the book. Scriven shows the need for such freshness in his own article on the Holy Spirit: "We are not contented like cows, but are capable of getting sick of things—sick of boredom, tragedy, guilt. We are capable of wanting some kind of clear and unmistakable fulfillment in life."

Perhaps the major contribution of *Arena* is its focus on the Christian's social consciousness. A true Christian conversion, Scriven feels, involves a "shattering of self-centeredness." Butler's essay, "Baptism, Ralph Nader, and the Church," is an excellent investigation into Christian ethics. He compares the true believer's entrance into the church with membership in Nader's Raiders. Nader's people serve unselfishly to secure improvement in the quality of American life. Nader himself accepts voluntary poverty (he lives in an \$80-a-month apartment and owns no car) in order to preach his gospel without the cluttering materialism that afflicts so many of us. (Butler does cop out slightly, recommending Nader social activism for the church, but not his austerity.) Joseph Battistone says, "prayer will include more than mental inventory of the blessings that have come our way; that prayer is completed by manifesting our gratitude through service to those who need help."

If your Christian life is untroubled by skeletons, this book might trouble it. But if your life is perplexed, filled with anomalies, both religious and personal, the book will be valuable. Even if you just wish to quietly meditate on the meaning of your Christianity, it belongs in your library.