

Evangelical Essentials And Adventist Distinctives

Robert D. Brinsmead. *Judged by the Gospel: A Review of Adventism*. 383 pp. Fallbrook, Calif.: Verdict Publications, 1980. \$6.95 (paper).

review by Richard Rice

Robert Brinsmead's latest book examines the various aspects of Adventist faith and life that he finds incompatible with the gospel. It proclaims the end of "traditional Adventism" on the ground that none of its unique doctrines has biblical support (pp. 310-311); and it calls for a "new evangelical Adventism" committed to the supremacy of the gospel, the authority of the Bible, and the priesthood of all believers (p. 316).

Brinsmead begins his critique by analyzing the uniquely Adventist doctrines of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment. He concludes that they reflect a misguided penchant for literalistic prophetic interpretation and do not have the support of careful, consistent biblical exegesis. Moreover, he maintains, they are basically contrary to the New Testament emphasis on the eschatological character of Christ's work.

Next, Brinsmead criticizes the status Adventism traditionally accords Ellen G. White. He describes the popular views of her inerrancy, her literary independence, and her uniqueness as "legends" that are no longer credible to thinking Christians. And he finds in the traditional view of her

authority a contradiction to the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* (pp. 119, 121).

Analyzing the Adventist ethic, Brinsmead sees its strength in a strong orientation to the Old Testament, with its belief that God is a God of law and righteousness (p. 236). Its weakness, however, is its failure to go beyond the ethic of the Old Testament to that of the New. Consequently, the ethic of Adventism is a guilt-producing ethic, preoccupied with fulfilling various "blueprints" for human behavior, rather than an ethic characterized by celebration and freedom arising from confidence in divine forgiveness.

In the fifth section of the book, Brinsmead observes that the traditional Adventist concept of the church bears striking resemblances to the Roman Catholic view; the two churches have a hierarchical and authoritarian structure, are committed to insitutions, and have an exaggerated sense of their own historical importance.

Despite these extensive criticisms, as the book's final section makes clear, Brinsmead's assessment of traditional Adventism is not one of unqualified condemnation. Rather, he sees it as analogous to the position of Judaism vis-a-vis Christianity. It has many commendable features, but, as a whole, it falls short of a full appreciation of the gospel. According to Brinsmead's favorite model, traditional Adventism exhibits all the identifying features of an apocalyptic sect (p. 346). These features call into question Adventism's (or the sect's) permanent viability, but not its temporary significance. For, at crucial moments in history, apocalypticism has given rise to religiously profound developments. Christianity sprang from the matrix of Jewish apocalypticism. And medieval apocalypticism preceded the Protestant Reformation. Similarly, Brinsmead asserts, the apocalyp-

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tic character of traditional Adventism may presage a dramatic evangelical development within Christianity as a whole (p. 357). But it can achieve this end only by moving beyond its traditional concerns to a full commitment to the gospel. As a whole, then, the book is a call to Seventh-day Adventists to turn from apocalyptic infancy to evangelical maturity (cf. p. 358).

Given its basic purpose, Brinsmead's discussion gives rise to two major questions. One concerns the object of his evaluation. Just what is the "Adventism" that he scrutinizes in this book? Is it the belief of the pioneers of 100 years ago, the outlook of the average church member today, the views of contemporary Adventist theologians, or some combination of these? One is not quite sure. But there is reason to believe that Adventism is far more complex than the "traditional Adventism" of which Brinsmead speaks. Indeed, many Adventists have found the gospel in the very doctrinal matrix that he roundly criticizes.

Besides a lack of clarity on this point, one also finds some glaring omissions in what is apparently intended as a general review of Adventism. One would expect that an analysis of Adventism in light of the gospel would take a hard look at what Adventists say about it. But Brinsmead virtually ignores the various attempts of Adventists to understand the doctrine of righteousness by faith, even when some of the most influential figures in the church in recent years have consistently emphasized its importance.¹

Brinsmead's analysis of Adventism also fails to do justice to the two essential doctrines on which the denomination's name is based—The Sabbath and the Second Coming. he may feel that the Sabbath is appropriately subsumed under "ethics," and the Second Coming under "the nineteenth century prophetic schema," but this fails to appreciate the positive impact of these doctrines on our understanding and experience of the gospel.²

One also has to wonder about the "new Adventism" Brinsmead envisions will re-

place the traditional version he rejects. One thing seems clear: the Adventism he advocates would be radically discontinuous with the past. There must be new doctrinal emphases, or a different, more congregational church structure will emerge. But it is doubtful that there would be anything that is specifically Adventist about it. Is Brinsmead, therefore, calling for a transformation of Adventism, or simply its demise?

This brings us to the most basic question arising from this work—the relation between evangelical essentials and Adventist distinctives. Brinsmead's strategy is to set these categories in opposition to each other and to eliminate the latter. He is surely right to notice a tension between the gospel and various points in Adventist thought and experience, and Adventist scholars are currently attending to many of the doctrinal questions he raises. But his solution to the problem is not the only one available.

The recent emphasis on evangelical essentials is a positive development within Adventism. It is important to seek an interrelation between "the gospel" and other aspects of Christian faith as Adventists conceive it. But this need not lead to a loss of such distinctive concerns as the Sabbath and the present work of Christ. There is no compelling reason to regard such beliefs as inherently inimical to true evangelicalism.

Ironically, Brinsmead's critique of Adventist distinctives comes precisely at a time when many evangelicals are seeking ways to enrich their understanding of Christianity. Several recent conferences and publications contain appeals by evangelicals for such things as a richer liturgy and more attention to the spiritual life.³ In this climate, we may find non-Adventist evangelicals newly receptive to the experiential significance of the Sabbath that we have come to appreciate more deeply. It would be tragic to lose sight of the unique resources of Adventism in the attempt to bring it into closer harmony with evangelical principles.

Brinsmead's thesis is that traditional Adventism can fulfill its promise only if it

ceases to be distinctly Adventist. The times do not call for a reductionistic evangelical Adventism, but an Adventism which neither discards Adventist distinctives in its com-

mitment to evangelical essentials, nor allows its distinctive concerns to obscure the essentials of the gospel.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Brinsmead may feel that Geoffrey J. Paston has adequately discussed this question in *The Shaking of Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977). If so, it would be helpful to have him say so.

2. Brinsmead does deal with "sabbatarianism"

in a recent issue of his periodical, *Verdict*, Vol. 4, No. 4, June 1981.

3. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978-79).

Management Principles For Churches

Wilfred M. Hillock. *Involved: An Introduction to Church Participation and Management*. 155 pp., bibl. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1977. \$7.95 (paper)

review by George W. Colvin

Occasionally, among the ordinarily sterilized products of Seventh-day Adventist church presses, one may find a work that somehow retains some vigor. Not surprisingly, such bits of leaven in the dough are the Adventist publications most likely to appeal to a wider audience than the Adventist church. *Involved: An Introduction to Church Participation and Management*, written by Wilfred M. Hillock for Southern Publishing Association's noted Anvil Series, is just such a yeasty work. Indeed, *Involved's* fermenting effect on thought has moved at least two local conferences to ban it from their Adventist Book Centers.

Instead of treating churches as theological enterprises, Hillock, a professor at the School of Health at Loma Linda University and a management scholar, regards churches

as human organizations which need management; for them, therefore, management principles are profoundly relevant. His review of a management literature is sufficiently thorough that *Involved* could be useful reading even for scholars of business.

Hillock opposes top-down management, exclusive decision-making, vague goals, coerciveness, pretended unity, group administration, pastoral dominance, and the making of policies into rules—in short, many of the characteristics of church operations. Hillock proposes to sweep away all of this rubbish—and shows it to be as un-Christlike as it is ineffective. In its place he calls for church management that encourages participation by the lay member. The full effect of this revolution cannot be briefly conveyed, but some comments from *Involved* suggest its extent: "Never should we base success in the church on conformance to the personal bent of a leader or inner group." (p. 21) "A member's interest in his church program has a direct proportion to his control of his destiny." (p. 27) "One of the fundamental principles we must learn is that conflict is essential, healthy, and useful." (p. 117)

Since most members can function effectively only on the local level, Hillock's elevation of the individual lay member to a paramount position leads inevitably to congregationalism (although Hillock does not directly avow it). Wherever his approach is actually applied, this element could produce challenging results—both for

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laity accustomed to letting administrators manage their church, and for church administrators accustomed to seigniorial prerogatives.

Though Hillock's own experience has been entirely within the Adventist church system, *Involved* has general application because its positions are based on universal human characteristics. Both for this breadth of view and for its liberating effect, even in theory alone, *Involved* is a noble work.

A More Comprehensive View of Salvation

Hans K. LaRondelle. *Christ Our Salvation: What God Does For Us and in Us*. 96 pp. Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1980. \$5.95 (paper)

review by Brad Brookins

For the past few years Seventh-day Adventists have been debating the meaning, method, and implications of the doctrine of salvation. In *Christ Our Salvation*, Hans LaRondelle makes a contribution to the dialogue by openly discussing the question while wisely avoiding polemics. The book is an ambitious attempt to discuss the topics of divine election, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and glorification—and their relationships—all in 96 pages.

But the breadth of LaRondelle's approach, while it may appear overly ambitious for so few pages, is an expression

of the book's thesis; for from the author's perspective, salvation is inclusive of everything God has done, is doing, and will do to reclaim the human race. On the one hand, he gently chides those who limit salvation to the legal implications of Jesus's death, but on the other hand, he questions those who emphasize the "born again experience" at the expense of the objective aspect of God's redemptive work. LaRondelle advocates a more comprehensive approach that views salvation as "a faith experience that redeems our past, fills the present with joy, and looks forward with hope to the glorious future" (p. 6).

Christ Our Salvation was written, the author says, for two types of people: those who are unclear on the essentials of the gospel and those who desire guidelines for meditations on the gospel. Thus, the book is something of a hybrid and for that reason may prove frustrating to its readers. By freely using, but not carefully defining, theological terms such as "election" and "justification," LaRondelle may fail to clear up the misconceptions of readers who have not been exposed to the language of theology. In contrast to the difficulty such readers may have, those acquainted with the language probably will not find much in this book to challenge their thinking. One can only hope that such readers will agree with J.R. Spangler, *Ministry* editor, who generously notes in his forward that "some of the concepts may not be new, but it is vital to review them" (p. 3).

Although the book breaks little new ground, it does present the thinking of a respected teacher and theologian on a topic central to our faith as Christians and brings a refreshing balance to a discussion that has tended for too long to divide Seventh-day Adventists.

Brad Brookins, a pastor in northern Wisconsin, holds a master of divinity degree from Andrews University.

Responses

Spectrum Promotes Adventist Triumphalism

To the Editors: Man has always delighted in designing his own god. While SPECTRUM has sometimes asked embarrassing questions, its central thrust has been to promote and cater to Adventist triumphalism and desire for uniqueness. I am sure the editorial policy of SPECTRUM is to seek truth wherever it may be found. However, this dedication to truth seems to be limited within the confines of certain strictures. These are: (1) the basic rightness of Adventist theology, (2) Adventist triumphalism, and (3) the inspiration of Ellen White (in some modified form).

The rich young ruler trusted wealth and position to give him favor with God. Christ recommended that he abandon all of this and find salvation. Adventists will never rejoice in their salvation until they consider their life-style and imagined uniqueness as dung. They must confess that they know nothing for certain except that Christ is Lord and that even this awareness comes only as a revelation of the Spirit. The impoverishment of the Adventist system that has become evident in recent years in the areas of theology, economics, and prophetic authority, can all be traced to the ongoing effort to devise one's own god and prescribe his activities.

Adventists should confront the reality that by and large they are theologically illiterate, their posture of uniqueness is absurd, and that their special doctrines are merely heresies that obscure the Gospel.

R. B. Maddox
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More Comments on SDA's & Homosexuality

To the Editors: Your article "Growing up Gay Adventist" (Vol. 12, No. 13), proved to be credibly stated, as illustrated by the use of primary sources—the gays spoke to us.

While the orientation of gays is not to be denied, it seems plausible that the orientation need not be excused for gay manifestations. Adventist gays, practicing or nonpracticing, face the possibility of censure and ostracism upon identification. A key issue them seems to be "homosexual as against practising homosexual."

The Seventh-day Adventist college campus allows little room for greyness on this matter. It can be debated that "being gay" and practising gayness" is similar to being sinful by nature and practising sin. Church society excuses the former, but surely not the latter.

Perhaps the article points up the need for gay awareness and approach on the Seventh-day Adventist college campus. I do not believe that gays are locked in—I believe it may yet be possible to separate "being gay" (nature) from behaving gay (actions). The orientation is insufficient excuse for the act, although some will argue that insanity arises from an insane nature, thus absolving the individual. The Seventh-day Adventist administrator will very likely follow the most practical and expedient policy whenever gayness surfaces on his campus for an attitude of greyness will be interpreted as "softness" and will bring a swift retort from the Seventh-day Adventist community.

Perhaps someone would like to do an article about "Gays on SDA College Campuses."

Sylvan Lashley
Dean of Students
West Indies College

To the Editors: A few weeks ago you published ten testimonies of SDA persons that find themselves in homosexuality. I felt very touched by their stories and the struggles with which they are dealing.

I was baptized at the age of 14. I went to an SDA college majoring in theology, and was pastor of the student association. I was also a student missionary for a year and later worked as a student chaplain in a major SDA hospital. But I never entered the ministry. I had doubts about my call because of feelings of sexual attraction to men. I would sometimes go into a depression lasting for days, even weeks. It was at those times that I just didn't see how I could claim to be a child of God, let alone a minister of His word.

When, in my early twenties, I had my first real sexual encounter with a man, my faith began to decline. I stopped going to church. I stopped associating with my Christian friends. My life got deeper and deeper into the "gay" lifestyle—bars, baths and discos.

I did look for a way out of my homosexual problem. I've lived in a Buddhist zendo to learn freedom from Zen meditation, traveled to Nevada to seek guidance from a Shoshone Indian shaman named Rolling Thunder, looked into faith healing, toyed with some occult practices, and, of course, tried the more popular route of psychiatrist (3 of them) and psychologist (4 of them). They all left a lot to

be desired. And if prayer alone could remove homosexuality then I would have been healed many years ago as I have spent many nights in prayer, pleading with God to take my burden away. I even went the way of trying to accept my homosexuality, telling myself that it was really all right to be homosexual. I found, after a few years, that I was only deluding myself. I knew in my heart it was not right.

Ten months ago my life changed for the better. I came to Reading, Pennsylvania hoping to find a solution to my homosexual problem at a place called Quest. Since that day I have found at Quest the real meaning of the grace of God. I have seen an actual shift in my sexual orientation. To me Quest has meant total freedom from the power of lust and temptation. To some of us at Quest who had almost given up entirely it means life itself—a new life in Christ.

I would personally invite anyone who feels trapped by homosexuality to come to Quest for one day to evaluate the program for themselves. I don't think anyone can come away from such a place, after hearing the stories of victory in the individual lives, and not see how God is working. Because I am now returning to the faith I once held so dear, I hope at some point to rejoin the Seventh-day Adventist church as a member in good standing.

Dan Roberts
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The Sabbath and the International Date Line

To the Editors: Discussions of the Sabbath by Robert Brinsmead and Desmond in recent issues of SPECTRUM have been enlightening, but they failed to address an important problem; the international date line. Seventh-day Adventists have usually said that the Seventh-day Sabbath that they keep within a weekly cycle is the very day upon which God rested at the conclusion of creation. Actually, the day we call Sabbath is dependent upon an arbitrary, man-made date line.

Few Adventists have a clear understanding of the function and necessity of the date line. In 1884 an international congress decided for time-keeping purposes to divide the earth from pole to pole by meridians. At that

time England was the world's greatest sea power and obtained the declaration that zero meridian passed through Greenwich, England. The congress also decided that the international date line would generally follow the 180th meridian. The date line could have been established anywhere down the Atlantic Ocean, or between the place you live and the next town.

When the eastern half of the earth is light from Greenwich to the 180th meridian, at that instant during a 24-hour period, and at that instant only, the whole earth is at one day (say Saturday). As the earth turns the 180th meridian into the darkness, the portion of the earth between where the sun is now set and the 180th meridian is Sunday. The rest of the earth is still Saturday. In other words, the 180th meridian carries Sunday around the globe driving Saturday into the sunset, until the whole earth is Sunday at the instant the 180th meridian is again at sunset. Except for that instant, there is always one day difference on either side of the date line. Problems arise for Sabbath keepers, with the sun high in the sky over the Pacific, it can be Saturday on the Samoa Islands and Sunday on the nearby Fiji Islands.

At the first day of creation, when light first shone on one-half of the globe, God created a date line. However, we do not know its location. It could be argued that Christ kept the proper day when he was on earth. Unfortunately, that does not help us once we leave the limited locale in which He lived. God's date line may have been a few degrees east or west of that area, or anywhere else around the earth. If God's date line were between Israel and what is now the United States, we are keeping the wrong day for Sabbath in the United States.

Some questions arise. Is a flat earth assumed in the Bible since a flat earth would mean the sun rotated around it eliminating any dateline problem? Was the Sabbath logical only for the Jews inhabiting a limited portion of the earth? Was the date line providentially located? Amazingly, this position was taken by Uriah Smith in 1889 (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 1, p. 61) and by R. L. Odom in 1946 who stated it should be in the Pacific because Noah's descendants, spreading eastward and westward from Ararat met there (*The Lord's Day on a Round World*: Southern Publishing Association, 1946).

Finally, to what extent does our obligation to keep the seventh-day Sabbath imply faith in a man-made, 180th meridian date line?

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