

BOOK REVIEWS

From American Export to Global Product

A review of *Seeking A Sanctuary* by Bull and Lockhart | BY HERBERT E. DOUGLASS

Seventh-day Adventism has long been one of the best-kept secrets of American religion," according to British authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart. In this second edition of their fast-paced tour through the history and culture of Adventism, they see the march of Adventism throughout the world paralleling the growth of the United States as a global hegemony. Furthermore, they note that the original white American constituency is diminishing as world growth of members of color outstrips that in the United States.

In their final analysis, they suggest that "of all religious groups in the United States, Adventism is perhaps closest to being a microcosm of the nation." As such, the denomination offers "a fascinating study in the way a set of beliefs and practices might be transformed from a successful American export into a truly global cultural product."

Bull and Lockhart work through their thesis in three parts: (1) the development of Adventist theology, especially since the watershed publication of *Questions on Doctrine* (QOD); (2) the organization and financial structure of the Adventist Church, with special focus on its evangelistic programs, the character of its offshoots, its attitude toward health, the state, and the world; and (3) a keen analysis of the Adventist subculture, including gender, race, ministry, medicine, education, and the self-supporting movements.

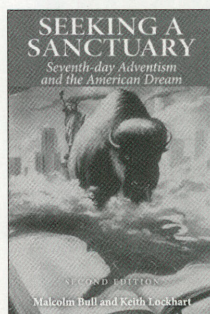
This is an enormous agenda—but the authors unfold their argument with an objecti-

ty that surpasses any other historical/theological study that I have ever read. In fact, it is impossible merely to scan these pages because their unvarnished objectivity and probing for truth kept me glued, page after page, right from the beginning in the colorful introduction on the Adventist public image (or lack thereof).

Part One: Adventist Theology

Part One's focus on Adventist theology reveals remarkable insight. The central issue lies in the tug between those who accept Ellen G. White's assertion that "God has promised to give visions in the 'last days;' not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth" (*Early Writings*, 78), in comparison to those who (1) emphasized that White also made clear that the Church could expect "new light"; and (2) that truth can best be discovered by empirical investigation. Bull and Lockhart observe that "reason, prophecy, and Scripture are constantly battling each other for priority."

The chapter titled "End of the World" is priceless. The authors take note of various writers and evangelists who have seen in the highs and dips of world events suggestions that "the end was near." Bull and Lockhart insightfully recognize that the clearer understanding of the delay in Christ's return commenced after the Second World War, when Ellen White's many references to the "reason for the delay" were published in *Evangelism*. This renewed emphasis on the reasons for the delay "became the church's most accepted explanation of the



Seeking A Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream.

2d ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), by Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart.

delay," that the "timing of the Second Advent is understood to be in the control of the movement called upon to await it."

In a chapter on the human condition, the authors properly highlight the 1957 book *Questions on Doctrine*, in which so much divisiveness entered the Adventist Church (as George Knight argues in an annotated edition of QOD [2003]): "To the end of the century, the atonement, the incarnation, and the nature of salvation were the subject of constant debate within the Adventist church."

Bull and Lockhart believe that Walter Martin, representing the Calvinist Evangelicals, "misjudged the measure of agreement within Adventism," and "on the Adventist side, the dialogue... was viewed as an exercise in public relations. There was little attempt to give full weight to Adventist history, still less to consult the existing membership."

The authors conclude that QOD "reinterpreted" the sanctuary doctrine, a "cosmetic change that ended up disturbing the equilibrium of the entire Adventist theological system." They saw a similar pattern in QOD's attempt to assure Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse that Adventists believed in the incarnation "in common with all true Christians." That is, "in his human nature Christ was perfect and sinless," being "exempt from the inherited passions and pollution that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam."

Veteran Adventist theologian M. L. Andreasen objected both to the rewriting of Adventist theology of the sanctuary and the misstatements regarding traditional Adventist thinking on Christ's humanity. In contrast, QOD's focus on the cross "was taken further by Adventist theologian Edward Heppenstall. His solution to Andreasen's objections was to argue "that perfection was neither necessary nor possible."

Bull and Lockhart see that this radical response was due partly to Heppenstall's understanding of original sin, "a concept that had not been much in evidence in Adventism until this

time." Robert Brinsmead and Desmond Ford, two brilliant Australians, took up Heppenstall's position, becoming significant divisive leaders in decades to follow. Heppenstall was soon regarded as "the church's most influential theologian."

Bull and Lockhart summarize the issues well: "If the atonement was completed on the cross, then the sanctuary can only mediate its benefits to humanity. If Christ did not have a fallen human nature, then there is no precedent for the [moral] perfection of humans."

The authors drill further into these most central issues in Adventist theology. They pick up the Adventist emphasis on preparing for translation (if Jesus was to return in "our" day, who would be translated? would be a logical question). Their understanding of Christ's work in the sanctuary paralleled what he wanted to do in the believer's life. Many Ellen White statements emphasized, one way or another, that this life is "the fitting up place" for heaven, for "the character would remain unchanged at the Second Advent."

Thus, as Bull and Lockhart see Adventist beliefs, "the criteria of salvation were thus elaborated to include not just correct belief and obedience to the law but also a completely self-disciplined body and character." They continue: "This emphasis on the conscious control of every habit as a means of transforming the entire person was appropriate to the Adventist understanding of human nature as a unified whole."

How was all this to be accomplished? It involved more than human will power. The authors recognize Ellen White's contention that "spiritual perfection" would be "achieved through Jesus' presence within the believer." But they keenly observe that "this kind of perfection was less easily obtained than the behavioral perfection on which the Adventists had focused on earlier" in the nineteenth century.

Bull and Lockhart note that Ellen White's theology transcended the conventional Protestant friction between the salvific values of justification and sanctification: "White made no absolute distinction between justification and

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sanctification and saw both as a part of a single process that culminated in [moral] perfection prior to translation. Her understanding was eschatological rather than ontological." Nowhere in Adventist literature has this point been made any clearer!

Bull and Lockhart opine that Heppenstall's emphasis on a theology of justification begun in the 1960s "can be viewed as a way of compensating for a decline in an imminent Second Coming" His understanding of justification enabled "believers to be made righteous immediately rather than at the end of the world."

The authors observe that "Heppenstall rarely mentioned the prospect of translation and never discussed the character of the last generation. Heppenstall broke the connection between Adventist soteriology and Adventist eschatology, and Ford abandoned the theory of Christ's heavenly sanctuary because he perceived no need for the blotting out of sins in preparation for an imminent translation."

In 1980, the new series of Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs significantly reversed "the thirty-year tide in Adventist soteriology," which seemed reflected in surveys of Adventists conducted in 1991 and 1997 in which the percentage of those who believed in Christ's heavenly ministry rose from 44 to 61 percent.

After this shift back to pre-1957 views of the sanctuary, Bull and Lockhart discern the Church's "return to its pre-QOD position on Christ's human nature." But they also see how "the denomination's leading academics took opposing sides, and Adventist leaders, responding to different pressures, sent out conflicting messages on the way back." No truer analysis has ever been made!

In a chapter titled "The Development of Adventist Theology," Bull and Lockhart confront the difficulty of "finding" Adventist theology. Would it be in the ideas preached from the pulpit, published by the press, or discussed in academic halls and classrooms? They sense that new converts get more information about last-day events than is discussed in theological circles.

The authors suggest that Adventist theological history falls into at least four historical divisions. (1) Adventist radicalism from Millerism to the death of Ellen White; (2) Adventist fundamentalism, rising in the 1880s, dominant in the 1920s, surviving in some conservative camps today; (3) Adventist evangelicalism, rising to prominence in the 1950s; and (4) the revival of certain elements of funda-

mentalism in a conscious effort to "preserve Adventism's distinctiveness and unity."

The fourth stage appears to relax Adventist taboos and introduce more expressive styles of worship. Although the theological authority of Ellen White has been reaffirmed, fewer Adventists follow "her lifestyle advice." The decline of Adventist evangelicalism (not evangelism) has been due, in part, to the growing globalization of the Church and its limited enthusiasm for American-style evangelicalism—the preferred traditional Adventist orthodoxy.

Bull and Lockhart conclude that the Adventist Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century stands more or less where it stood before *Questions on Doctrine*.

Part Two: The Adventist Experience and the American Dream

Bull and Lockhart give a delightful review of the expansion of the Adventist Church from its earliest years, creeping across the United States; leaping into Europe, South Africa, and Australia; and then spreading throughout the rest of the world. They note the times of greatest growth as well as slower periods, with reasons outlined for both. They see the Ford-Rea theology controversies and the Davenport financial scandal contributing to the increase of apostasies, and they analyze various sections of the United States, comparing both the concentration of Adventists and monetary income per capita.

The authors make another analysis by comparing Adventists according to social and financial group and looking at those groups from which Adventist evangelism tends to draw. Comparing surveys, Bull and Lockhart note that those most attracted to the Adventist Church are drawn by "the truth and beauty of its teachings." They conclude that the Church's belief system obviously helps "those who want to make sense of their lives."

In a profound analysis of Adventism in relation to American society, Bull and Lockhart point out that Adventism does not define itself against individual denominations but against the mainstream of Protestant—especially in its understanding of how to relate to the American dream. The well-being of Adventism is not in a redeemed America. Just as early Americans viewed their new country as a refuge or sanctuary from the Old World, so Adventists have sought their sanctuary in heaven.

The authors see that "the Sabbath is the key to under-

standing the Adventist's relation with America." Thus, as time went on, America's sense of an earthly millennium was tied to a loyalty with the Sunday Sabbath, whereas Adventists accepted the seventh-day Sabbath as a test of their collective conscience. The Adventist way served as a live alternative to the American way.

In addition, Adventists looked at the words, "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but didn't go in the direction of libertarian self-expression. For Adventists, the pursuit of happiness involved the "restraint of the emotions and the regulation of the appetites." According to Bull and Lockhart, Adventists devote more time to walking a "clearly marked and unbroken path that leads from earth to heaven" than enjoying "the fleeting moment."

The authors show their grasp of basic Adventist beliefs in recognizing that "Adventist [moral] perfectionism has never involved the mindless observance of a legal code: its orientation has always been toward purposive self-improvement—its objective, the re-assimilation of a remnant of the human race into the divine realm."

My only caveat here is that not all Adventists have caught the wisdom of this description—some see the

words but do not hear the music.

Thus for Adventists, in a particular way, the Church and its institutions have become the family home, and to some degree, America is a foreign land. It turns American civil religion inside out by introducing an alternative to where salvation would ultimately be found.

The authors also give a most illuminating contrast between the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Adventists, the most penetrating I have ever seen.

Part Three: Adventist Subculture

According to Bull and Lockhart, Adventists tend "to play caring, healing, and nurturing roles." For decades, the Church did not "see the differences in the sexes, choosing to impose a single feminine ethic on males and females alike." Dissidents arose who misused such biblical texts as the one that instructs "women [to] keep silent in church."

Before 1900, women were prominent in various denominational duties. The apparent shift came, according to Bull and Lockhart, in response to Ellen White's larger picture of the primary role of mothers and their "distinctive duties."

The authors neatly trace the role of women through



Pastor Roy &
Bennie Gee

AU '66

Auburn Gospel
Fellowship

"A SAFE PLACE
FOR GOD'S GRACE"

10:45 A.M. Sabbath

TWO CONGREGATIONS ONE HOLY CHURCH



Pastor Rick &
Nancy Kuykendall

AU '80

First Congregational
Church of Auburn

"STRIVING TO BE
AN ENLIGHTENED
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY"

10:00 A.M. Sunday

710 AUBURN RAVINE ROAD, AUBURN, CA 95603 • 530.885.9087

"How good and how pleasant it is to live together in unity!"

**Adventist
college teachers
came to see
themselves as
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than educators.**

the twentieth century, not only comparing women in denominational leadership, but also noting legal confrontations and General Conference stress over women ordination.

They also recognize the “the major difference between Adventism and American society is that there are fewer whites and more blacks than in the general population.”

Better-than-average research went into the authors’ recapitulation of how immigrants have contributed profound strength to the growth of Adventism, as well as to the slowness of the Adventist Church in some places to eliminate the color line. Bull and Lockhart see something that few Adventists generally see: “Since the 1970s black and Hispanic Adventists have proved relatively indifferent to white Anglophone attempts to liberalize the church’s beliefs.”

The authors also journey into a fascinating study of the relationship between Adventist medical personnel and its ministry, beginning with the Kellogg era. John Harvey Kellogg was one of the few people who took Ellen White’s views on health seriously, in contrast to the Church’s ministers, who did not, at that time, share Kellogg’s insights. Bull and Lockhart give an interesting recital of Kellogg’s diversion into pantheism and his social gospel, neither of which lessened this estrangement.

On the subject of education, I don’t think anyone will find anywhere a more comprehensive gestalt of the Adventist educational experience in seventeen pages. Bull and Lockhart perceive that in the twentieth century, “Adventist college teachers came to see themselves as scholars rather than educators.” This insight surely does not cover everyone, but it has sparked numerous interchanges between administrators and teachers.

Bull and Lockhart also monitor closely the issues of academic freedom, the influence of *Spectrum*, the perennial debate regarding the earth’s origin, the emergence of the Adventist Theological Society, and the development of sociology as a discipline.

As for the self-supporting movement, I was

pleasantly surprised at the interest that Bull and Lockhart devote to the parachurch entities, which imply “criticism of the church’s worldliness and thus provide a base for rigorist revivalism.” In so doing, they also provide a platform for “zealous individuals whose enthusiasm might otherwise lead them outside the church.”

Bull and Lockhart observe that the self-supporting schools and health care institutions have grown through the “initiative of laymen rather than through bureaucratic procedures...and that they are generally financed by a few rich individuals and maintained by the sacrifice of their workers.”

In a final wrap-up titled “The Revolving Door,” the authors look at Adventism as a process, accounting for its diversity, the varying socioeconomic status of individual Adventists, and the position of the Church within the American society. A big order, but neatly done.

“The Revolving Door” describes how members continuously enter and leave the Church. The author’s neat distribution of the Adventist experience into “aspirers,” “sustainers,” and “transformers” is worth the price of the book. Bull and Lockhart make the comparison between Reinhold Niebuhr’s six factors, which lead to a “reduction of tension between a sect and wider society,” and Bainbridge’s tension-maintaining factors, and make a valuable application to the Adventist experience.

The first edition of *Seeking a Sanctuary* contained remarkable insights that I rarely find in contemporary literature, particularly regarding the place of Ellen G. White in the Adventist experience, but this second edition is magisterial. Coupled with the authors’ remarkable facility to keep everything within the big picture, the sheer delight of reading words so carefully crafted is akin to listening to a Beethoven sonata.

It made me look forward to a third edition!

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