

Jewish relations, and the battle against anti-Semitism, has taken another step forward.

Walla Walla College
College Place, WA 99324

PEDRITO U. MAYNARD-REID

Knight, George R. *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom: Adventist Mission Confronts the Challenges of Institutionalism and Secularization*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995. 175 pp. Paper, \$ 11.99

In this challenging book, best-selling Adventist author George R. Knight pleads with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (which he currently serves as a professor of church history at the SDA Theological Seminary) to be frank about its past, critical about its present success, and open to change as it considers its future. The main thesis of the book is that Adventism is in danger of losing its mission focus as it uses more and more of its resources and energy to keep its bureaucracy alive and to maintain its numerous institutions. The author admits that the title could be understood in terms of sexist stereotypes, but feels that this is a small price to pay for the clear parabolic message it offers: The woman, a prominent NT symbol for the church—and by extension for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination—has “increasingly gained her identity through the size, number, variety, and quality of her packages [institutions and programs],” with the final result that she cannot enter the door to the Kingdom unless she lets go of these “packages”—something she is extremely loath to do (16). Knight suggests that the Adventist Church has taken on the role of “furthering the mission of semi-autonomous institutions,” while these institutions should in fact have the primary purpose of furthering the mission of the church (17).

All chapters of the book have been previously published as articles in various Adventist journals or books or have been delivered as formal papers. Although this causes some discontinuity in style, this has not seriously affected the flow of the argument. The ten chapters are arranged in four main sections. Section I deals with “The Threat of the Present versus the Challenge of the Future.” Section II focuses on “The Shape of Adventist Mission,” while the next section studies “The Relation of Institutions and Lifestyle to Mission.” The final section is entitled “Adventist Futures in Relation to Adventist Pasts.”

In his analysis of present-day Adventism, Knight utilizes David Moberg’s model of the five stages in the life cycle of a church. According to this model, church organizations go through five distinct stages: (1) Incipient organization; (2) Formal organization; (3) Maximum efficiency; (4) Institutionalism; and (5) Disintegration. Knight suggests that the Adventist Church, at least in the “first world,” is on the brink between stages 3 and 4. This may be true for North America, but from the perspective of this reviewer, who lives in Europe, it would seem that in some countries the church already shows evidences of entering stage 5.

Throughout the book the author insists that the Adventist Church must deal with two problem areas. First, it must redirect its energies. Traditionally, the Adventist “missiological quadrilateral” has consisted of the publishing, medical, educational, and conference aspects of the denomination’s work” (81). Knight does

not argue that this fundamental pattern needs to be changed, but insists that it must be retuned so that the church will regain its missiological effectiveness. Too many institutions and organizational entities have become ends in themselves and hardly, or not at all, contribute to the mission of the church.

Secondly, there is the matter of standards. Chapter 8 explains by what various ways Adventists arrived at their standards, and how even today the formation of standards continues largely on an "ad hoc" basis. The church must do better in relating its standards and values to the present-day cultural context, and must avoid the peril of "ghettoization" as well as that of "uncritical assimilation" (125).

The final and possibly the most insightful chapter explores the dilemma the SDA Church has to come to terms with: How credible is its proclamation of an imminent Parousia after more than 150 years? How can modern Adventism retain its prophetic vision and clear sense of mission? Some Adventists live in a past-oriented intellectual and/or social ghetto (158). This approach must be rejected just as decisively as another "dysfunctional" approach which is totally fixated on the future. But Knight adds that an exclusive focus on the present, in a search for relevance, is also not enough. Relevance needs rootage. At the same time Adventism cannot survive without a clear apocalyptic understanding. The Adventist Church, therefore, needs to be relevant, but it must be so within "the framework of the continuum of the past and the future" (158).

George Knight's view of what is happening in his church to a large extent coincides with that of this reviewer. I concur that the recent Global Mission initiative (76f) is a promising attempt to shift more of the church's resources and attention to mission outreach, in particular in areas where the church has not been active before. But Knight fails to signal how this "fresh" outreach model has already fallen victim to immense bureaucratization and institutionalization.

Finally, although Knight warns his readers that this book does not offer a "full-blown set of remedies" (8), his suggestions towards such a remedy are disappointingly meager. It is to be hoped that future publications will remove this disappointment.

St. Albans, UK

REINDER BRUINSMA

McGrath, Alister E., ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995. xxiv + 422 pp. Paper, \$21.95.

Alister McGrath has published this *Christian Theology Reader* as a companion book to his *Christian Theology: An Introduction* which, because of limitations of space, did not include many citations from original texts. The *Reader* is divided into ten chapters following the same broad thematic presentation as found in the *Introduction* but can be used as a resource on its own. It contains 280 seminal texts of Christian theology, drawn from 161 different theologians or sources representing significant landmarks in Christian thinking on various doctrines.

Characterizing this *Reader* as "a general introduction to the great tradition of doing theology within a Christian context," McGrath, who is research professor of systematic theology at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., has attempted to choose texts that are characteristic, intellectually and chronologically, of two