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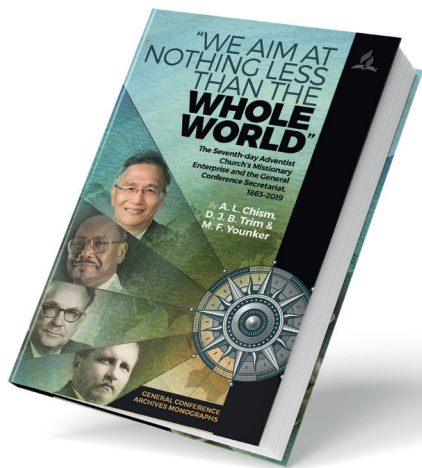
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“WE AIM AT NOTHING LESS THAN THE WHOLE WORLD”: THE SEVENTH-DAY-ADVENTIST CHURCH’S MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT, 1863-2019

By A. L. Chism, D. J. B. Trim, and M. F. Younker (Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.: Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2021), paperback, 312 pages.

Reviewed by Andrew Tompkins

The collaboration of three scholars on the organizational impact of the General Conference headquarters, the office of the Secretariat in particular, is a well-researched and welcome addition to the Seventh-day Adventist record of mission history. The book demonstrates painstaking hours of research and contains numerous references to primary documents that shed much light on the sending of missionaries by the official Seventh-day Adventist organization for almost 150 years.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first section comprises two chapters of introduction. The first chapter briefly details the authors’ definition of mission; the second chapter gives a detailed statistical report on the number of missionaries the church had sent through the decades. Chapter 2 is especially valuable because of the wealth of statistically based information it provides.

Chapters 3 to 7 present a chronological study of the evolving structure of the General Conference and how this structure has impacted the sending of missionaries. The major

organizational overhauls of 1901 and 1903 are at the heart of the structure, as they allowed for greater focus of time and resources by the General Conference administrators toward the world outside of North America. This resulted in a rapidly increasing number of missionaries serving the church, with the high-water mark coming in the 1960s. The office of the Secretariat, which fulfilled multiple functions, became the center of oversight for recruiting and sending missionaries. However, as time progressed, the authors argue, the Secretariat’s other duties, namely management of the church’s working policy, led to mission drift and, in some ways, a sidelining of the General Conference’s focus on sending missionaries to new territories.

The historical data is hard to refute, as the authors have done a careful job of defending their arguments with primary sources. Church leaders interested in having a better grasp of the history of Adventist emphasis on worldwide mission and how the organization got to where it is today will greatly benefit from the book. Organization and mission have a long history among Adventists and all Christian missionary-sending groups.

At times, the book falls into a tone of apologetics. It comes across that the authors are simply trying to defend an existing organizational reality, the Secretariat, by demonstrating how many fewer missionaries are currently sent out today. While this is an important point for discussion, one must be careful to recognize that there are numerous factors that impact how many missionaries are sent out, why they are or are not sent out, etc. Times have changed, and with those changes, views on mission and the sending of missionaries have gone through numerous critiques that demonstrate that the issue is far more complex than merely adjusting organizational structures. The book argues that good mission primarily hinges on the organizational structure. Rarely is the work of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the book as it relates to mission. Yet, from a biblical standpoint, it is the work of the Spirit that drives organizational development and change, not the other way around as is clearly shown in the Book of Acts.

Overall, this is a welcome addition for researchers in Adventist mission history. I commend the authors for their excellent work. Church administrators, mission-studies scholars, and others interested in the worldwide focus and work of the Adventist Church should take time to delve into the many insights contained in this volume. ☮

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