

TEACHING HISTORY: A Seventh-day Adventist Approach

By Gary Land (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2000; 115 pp., softcover).

REVIEWED BY FLOYD GREENLEAF

In keeping with the spirit of integrating faith and learning in Adventist schools, author Gary Land's *TEACHING HISTORY: A Seventh-day Adventist Approach* addresses the dilemma that Adventist history teachers have sensed for years as they have attempted to combine historical integrity with their theological belief that God intervenes in history. This book is a climax of sorts to a century of Adventist participation in the profession of teaching history, which began with the first serious history of Seventh-day Adventism, published in 1905 by John Loughborough.

Loughborough attributed much to divine providence. Adventist historiography shows that while some historians have attempted to construct an overarching philosophy of history based on divine intervention, for the most part, Adventist historians have not succeeded in applying that notion to history at large. This does not suggest that they reject divine intervention, only that the absence of empirical data "proving" God's providence has made explanations next to impossible. As a result, some teachers have ignored the issue, while others have been overwhelmed with struggling to decide whether human behavior is determined or free-choice.

This debate among Adventist historians forms the platform from which Land speaks. While he holds that a belief in divine providence is biblical and therefore valid, he points out that it is beyond definition, which renders it problematic as a basis for analyzing history. "Once we move beyond New Testament times, the Bible gives little specific information regarding God's intervention in history," he writes (p. 40). Rather than trying to reduce human perception of God's inscrutable overruling authority in history to guesswork, Land offers alternative ways to create understandings with a definite Adventist flavor, hence the subtitle: "A Seventh-day Adventist Approach."

Land places such an approach within the larger genre of Christian history. The beginning point is the Adventist emphasis on a cosmic struggle between God and Satan, which leads to a climactic end. This essential framework of his-

tory has given Adventists a special appreciation of such universal issues as liberty of conscience and the notion of moral progress, or the lack of it. Relating to this are Adventist views about the remnant, the correlation of reform movements with religion generally and Adventism specifically, and questions of relationships among Christian groups, particularly Protestantism to Catholicism.

Although he is a specialist in United States history, Land draws examples from the broader spectrum of Western history, but he admits that his suggestions are not without shortcomings, primarily because they focus on a limited part of the world. However, by inference, readers may assume that his ideas can be applied to world history at large. Land suggests that when discussing the questions he has identified and whenever else appropriate, teachers should apply principles regarding Christian moral judgment, the biblical view of human nature, and the significance of a spiritual life. He offers a few case studies to show how they can accomplish this without succumbing to an attitude of moral superiority.

Although Land discusses philosophy as it relates to history, his suggestions amount to an Adventist approach to the topic rather than a comprehensive philosophy. He presents his arguments in simple literary style, which lends appeal

to the book. In some ways, it resembles a handbook or manual explaining how to approach history in the classroom. It is not difficult to sense the influence of the author's long teaching career at Andrews University as he blends the practical with the philosophical. His arguments may remove the weight of an impossible philosophical burden from the shoulders of Adventist historians, but practicing his suggestions will be not simple.

To help teachers develop their own Adventist approach in their classrooms, Land has included 20 pages of carefully categorized, annotated bibliography. His proposals will require teachers to develop honest, thoughtful opinions and values based on a worldview that is informed by both Scripture and history, and then to unapologetically share their ideas with students. Significantly enough, Land begins and ends his evocative book with statements acknowledging that experiential knowledge of Christianity is basic to an understanding of the intellectual niceties of a Christian approach to history.

Loughborough began the 20th century with a historical explanation of Adventism, and some 100 years later, Land has issued a challenge to history teachers of the 21st century. ✍

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