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**Book Review of James White and SDA
Organization: Historical Development,
1844-1881, by Andrew G. Mustard**

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One expects a book that outlines the significance of the gospel concept in the sayings attributed to Jesus in the NT. In fact, however, the book is theological/homiletical in orientation. As homiletics, it is often superb. As exegesis, it has its excellent moments, and MacArthur's conclusions are consistent with the general tenor of the "gospel" as portrayed in the NT. But he exhibits a lack of awareness of the best in current NT scholarship. As a result, his arguments are sometimes grounded on questionable assertions. For example, on page 39 he writes that "the Pharisees were hyper-legalists who externalized religion." This leads him to conclude that Nicodemus believed in salvation by works. While one could get such an impression of the Pharisees from a casual reading of the NT, recent studies in early Judaism suggest that this is at best an oversimplification.

A far more serious weakness is the author's assumption of the essential correctness of the dispensational hermeneutic of the NT. This limits the book's value to readers who share similar presuppositions. Right or wrong, dispensationalists read the NT differently from those who reject dispensational assumptions. Thus, as correct as MacArthur's conclusions may be, the nondispensational reader must always ask to what degree the argument stands or falls on the author's presuppositions. One is left wondering if the distortion of the gospel that MacArthur decries is not inherent in the dispensational system itself (see *AUSS* 22 [1984]: 373-376). Perhaps it is MacArthur who is inconsistent in accepting dispensationalism while denying its implications for the gospel.

The above is not intended to discredit MacArthur's book. While it contains many insights that can be appreciated by a wider audience, its limitations must be noted. As an in-house response in a dispensationalist debate, it is primarily valuable for a lay audience that has been affected by the teachings of MacArthur's opponents. For most readers, another recent Zondervan publication, *Justification by Faith* by Alister McGrath, is much to be preferred. Full of sound scholarship, McGrath's book offers much more convincing support for MacArthur's conclusions.

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Mustard, Andrew G. *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844-1881*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 12. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988. vii + 320 pp. Paperback, \$14.95.

Andrew Mustard's dissertation portrays James White as one who "overcame his bias against organized religion to become known as 'the father of church order among Sabbatarians'" (p. 190). He was the "driving force" (p. 1) behind Seventh-day Adventist church organization. Both the

theological undergirding of SDA church polity and the grass-roots promotion of it were predominantly the work of White.

White drew his principles of church government from scripture, especially the NT. Against opponents who held that "every detail of church order" must have an exact NT precedent, he countered that "all means, which according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed" (pp. 188, 268).

Consequently, SDA church polity developed on two basic principles: a clear sense of mission was wedded to pragmatic methodology. The benefits of structural and doctrinal unity coupled with "numerous conversions to the faith" were to White sufficient evidence that the organization he had promoted was a "perfect success" (pp. 173, 171).

Approximately two-thirds of Mustard's work deals with historical developments. The final one-third examines theological and philosophical factors that influenced the emerging SDA ecclesiology. Among other topics, SDA polity is compared with that of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists.

Mustard's research is readable, well documented, sprinkled with quotables from James White, and appears to be exhaustive for the period under study. In addition to his main topics, Mustard also deals significantly with related issues, such as the "shut door," the evolution of the doctrine of ministry and church officers, and the comparison of the effective centralization of authority in 1863 with the exercise of "kingly power" which developed in the denomination's General Conference during the 1890s.

Another recent dissertation, soon to be published, extends the work of Mustard by considering the years 1888-1903. Barry Oliver ("Principles for Reorganization of the Seventh-day Adventist Administrative Structure, 1888-1903: Implications for an International Church," Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1989) agrees with Mustard that SDA church polity has historically been structured on the twin bases of mission and pragmatism, but argues the need for a more thoroughly theological basis for church administrative structure.

Both studies represent careful historical analysis and will be useful to pastors, church administrators, and others interested in SDA church history.

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Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987. liii + 353 pp. \$24.95.

This volume may be classified as a middle-of-the-road conservative commentary on Genesis, well informed by up-to-date studies in literary