

1991

**Book Review of SDA Organizational Structure:
Past, Present and Future, by Barry David Oliver
(1989)**

Jerry A. Moon, *Andrews University*

Besides problems in the central thesis of the book, a major irritation is the author's cavalier attitude toward the labors and opinions of those whose views disagree with his. He confidently and decisively settles such issues as the structure of Revelation and the OT text tradition of its author without offering persuasive evidence that he has grasped the complexities involved. Most unfortunate and unnecessary is a blistering eight-page attack on the rough draft of an unpublished work by A. J. Ferch written for a nonscholarly audience, causing one to wonder about the motives behind the whole enterprise. If the overt humility of the foreword had been continued in the body of the text, the book might not strike one as negatively as it does.

In conclusion, this is a book that offers many rewards to the serious student of Revelation, but one whose author is not consistently fair either with the text of Revelation or with those whose writings preceded his.

Andrews University

JON PAULIEN

Oliver, Barry David. *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 15. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989. xii + 433 pp. Paperback, \$16.95.

This is the second recently published dissertation on the development of Seventh-day Adventist church polity. Barry Oliver builds on Andrew Mustard's exposition of the initial stage of Adventist organization, which extended from 1844 through 1881 (reviewed in *AUSS* 28 [Spring 1990]: 99-100).

Oliver first describes the historical developments related to Adventist organization between 1888 and 1903. He then analyzes the theological premises that characterized the conflicting views of A. T. Jones and A. G. Daniells and their allies in 1901 and 1903.

Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and others (including W. W. Prescott until 1901) constructed their ecclesiology from the starting point of individual salvation, righteousness by faith, the priesthood of believers, and the sole headship of Christ (pp. 220-223). By 1901 they taught a strongly individualistic and congregational view of church organization. Waggoner came eventually to the conclusion that when the church reached spiritual maturity all human organization would "be left aside as the toys of childhood" (pp. 234-236).

Oliver describes this view as Christocentric and applauds its emphasis on what the church *is* over what the church *does*. It was one-sided, however, in its "failure to recognize that the church is not wholly, nor only, a theological entity," but also a "sociological entity" (p. 239).

A. G. Daniells and his allies (notably W. C. White and, after 1901, W. W. Prescott) based their approach to organization on an eschatological-missiological model (pp. 240-266). This approach was practical, but it erred in rejecting the valid contributions of Jones and Waggoner's more theological approach (pp. 262-265).

Ellen White took a median position, with a "dipolar ecclesiology" expressed as "unity in diversity" (pp. 266-270, 297). By this means she was able in 1901 to unite those who preferred a "congregational form of organization with diversity as its greatest value" and those who favored a "hierarchical form of organization with unity as its greatest value" (p. 270).

After the break with J. H. Kellogg in 1902 (over somewhat different issues), Daniells continued to hold the theory of "unity in diversity," but his practice shifted toward a more authoritarian maintenance of "unity" that de-emphasized "diversity" (pp. 295-296).

Oliver's dissertation is a well-balanced exposition which achieves a high degree of objectivity in analyzing conflicting views. He acknowledges the strengths of both Jones and Daniells without defending their weaknesses. Beyond comprehensive reporting, Oliver has wrestled extensively with the theological issues and has synthesized opposing views to suggest creative conclusions.

The work is well written and readable, nicely seasoned with concise quotations. It affords sympathetic insight into the ecclesiology of Jones and Waggoner, as well as some fascinating glimpses of Daniells' early administrative style.

Finally, this is a timely work for the present situation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Oliver denies any intention "to define new structures" for the church or even "to suggest that the existing structures should be changed." Rather, he has sought to show from the reorganization process that climaxed in 1903 "that change is integral to the very formulation of the structures themselves." When changes become necessary, however, principle should take priority over form (p. 331), and "mission" should be the "organizing principle" which determines the direction future change should take (p. 357).

It is tempting to see Oliver's study as justification for the kind of programmatic specifics set forth in Robert S. Folkenberg's "Church Structure—Servant or Master" (*Ministry*, June 1989, pp. 4-9). Both authors call for structures and policies that are "mission-driven, rather than tradition-driven" (Folkenberg, p. 9).

As a contribution to a current debate, this dissertation will be of interest not only to historians, administrators, and pastors, but to all who desire an in-depth look at the dynamics that operate when a church seeks to alter its form of organization.