

Hartlapp, Johannes. *Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten im Nationalsozialismus unter Berücksichtigung der geschichtlichen und theologischen Entwicklung in Deutschland von 1875 bis 1950* ["Seventh-day Adventists in the Time of National Socialism, with Consideration of the Historical and Theological Development in Germany from 1875 to 1950"]. Kirche—Konfession—Religion 53. Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2008. 684 pp. Hardcover, € 76.00.

"As the ability to forget is indeed grace, remembering . . . belongs to a responsible life" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). It is with this fitting quote of the theologian and martyr of the Nazi era that Hartlapp opens a book that challenges the reader in many ways. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to reflect on the way of doing theology and being authentic Christians, especially the Adventist way, after Seventh-day Adventists, like so many other Christians, made terrible mistakes in the darkest hours of the twentieth century.

Hartlapp, who teaches church history at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany, wrote this study as a doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, University of Halle-Wittenberg. Its scope reaches back to the beginnings of Adventism in Europe and particularly in Germany. Rather than focusing on the Nazi period as such—the center of Hartlapp's interpretative focus—the book also gives accounts of the first generation of the Adventist Movement in Germany (chap. 1), the conflicts surrounding military service and the beginnings of the "Reformation Movement" during World War I (chap. 2), and the development of German Adventism in the Weimar Republic (chap. 3). While other authors highlighted particular aspects of these periods in earlier studies (e.g., Jacob Patt, "The History of the Advent Movement in Germany" [Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1958]; Gerhard Padderatz, *Conradi und Hamburg* [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kiel, Hamburg]), Hartlapp's oeuvre can rightly be called the first comprehensive history of Seventh-day Adventists in Germany with significant interpretative results. His main contribution, however, is a thorough treatment and in-depth analysis of Adventists in the Third Reich.

It is difficult to do justice to a monumental 600-page study, which is the result of the author's pursuit of the topic during almost three decades, in a short review. What is clear, however, is that the book will remain unrivaled

in its field. A significant part of the sources that Hartlapp brings to life have not been used in any previous works. He consulted fully seventy (!) church and state archives, and his bibliography is more than 50 pages long. What is more, alongside his major contribution to knowledge, Hartlapp provides most helpful listings of anti-Adventist polemical literature (67-68, 80-81, 128, 170-182, 197), detailed accounts of encounters with other denominations in Germany (66-78, 170-195, 307-315, 577-580), and a fascinating record of self-made prophets (195-199, 255) and apocalyptic speculations (83-86). It is interesting to note that even Ludwig Richard Conradi, the outstanding leader among early European Adventists, believed it would be only "one generation" until the end of history!

With regard to the focus of the study, *Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten im Nationalsozialismus* presents a detailed chronicle of state repression and Adventist attempts to survive under the Nazi government (chap. 4), a description of postwar reactions (chap. 5), and an attempt at interpreting this chapter of history by expounding German Adventists' worldview (chap. 6). Hartlapp succeeds in weaving together historical developments, critical analysis of factors that influenced denominational decisions, and an account of individuals' positions and contributions, e.g., those of Hulda Jost, who was in charge of the church's welfare activities and whose writings and actions revealed attitudes that resembled Nazi ideology rather closely (332-353). Of central importance is the account of church leaders' major failures, such as attempts at distancing themselves from Jews (281, 287, 587) or the dissolution of practically all Sabbath-keeping principles (356-368, 450-457, 550-558).

Hartlapp's evaluation of factors that contributed to many German Adventists giving up even fundamental principles of faith is accurate. It was not simply the consequences of Conradi's leadership, as a comprehensive postwar analysis by David Rose explained (499-502; Conradi had already left the church in 1932). Rose was a missionary from the Southern European Division and had been commissioned to investigate the real situation of German Adventism in Nazi Germany. But precisely because Rose's interpretation had the potential for "explaining away" what had happened, it did not help Adventists to learn from the mistakes that had been made.

It is certainly more helpful to realize, as Hartlapp suggests, that Adventists both in Germany and in the General Conference were politically naïve to some extent (515). No one anticipated the Nazi tyranny and a world war, and therefore the German church leadership was left without guidance and external advice during those trying years. Moreover, the denominational eschatology had no place for National Socialism; the experiences of the period simply did not fit in with the traditional rational and schematic prophetic interpretation (524). Moreover, Hartlapp correctly shows that some aspects of eschatology had changed even in the years before the war (527). Therefore, the apocalyptic ground on which the denomination had grown was not as firm anymore as it had been in the nineteenth century. This situation contributed to a shift in emphasis from eschatological to ecclesial concerns, leading to the avoidance of persecution and, finally, the attempt at

saving the organization at almost all costs. Since this principle seemed to be sanctioned even by the General Conference (570-572), Hartlapp argues that these years were not simply a period of German Adventist apostasy; rather, evading persecution arose from an ecclesiological basis and thus revealed an implicit theology. With the same logic, church leaders avoided any thorough review of this history and the leadership decisions in the following decades (529): a declaration on Adventist actions in Nazi Germany was published only in 2005. After the war, the general eschatological orientation led to looking forward rather than reflecting on what had happened.

This leads to the question of how this period of history should be interpreted after more than two generations. Hartlapp's own evaluation is that Adventist remnant ecclesiology did not make any evident difference in the way the denomination acted during the Nazi period; as did other free churches, Adventists made compromises to an extent that put their very Christian identity in question (14). Ecclesologically, this calls for further reflection on the question of whether failures are unavoidable elements of God's church this side of the eschaton, and whether the distinction between *ecclesia visibilis* and *invisibilis* is a necessary ingredient of thinking "church," even in Adventist ecclesiology.

The main *theological* contribution of the study is, however, not ecclesiological, but a reflection on eschatology. Hartlapp argues that changes in Adventist eschatology after the era of the denomination's pioneers have not yet been properly reflected upon. He reasons that this is the case because in the first half of the twentieth century—and even now—many Adventists were and are not much interested in theological thinking, but in their particular current situation in the light of what they believe to be the final events of earth's history. Thus, according to Hartlapp's analysis (chap. 6), a subtle development of emphasis away from the parousia to the Sabbath happened in Adventism (552) and, later in Germany, from the Sabbath to the church. This led to the practical maxim that sustaining the church as an organization had the highest priority even when this implied far-reaching compromises.

Such an implicit logic can indeed explain how Adventist leaders and members went ever farther in bending to the demands of an anti-Christian government. One is tempted to ask what would have been the alternatives. The answer is probably the dissolution of the denomination, life in the underground, and persecution. While Hartlapp does not state it openly, his call for a theological return to focusing on the Second Coming would imply a relativization of the importance of an organized church in extreme situations such as Nazi Germany, and Christian readiness for martyrdom.

Hartlapp must be congratulated for clarifying many aspects of a history that is loaded with difficulties while trying to remain true to the demands of utter neutrality in historical scholarship. Of course a few questions can also be asked. One concerns the interpretative paradigm, which is not fully clear. While Hartlapp takes eschatology as a point of reference in his concluding analysis, at times the history he presents seems so descriptive that no clear framework emerges. This seeming weakness may turn out to be a strength,

however, because the multifaceted nature of the history is taken seriously, the different lines of development all stand alongside one another in their own right. Likewise, some detail mistakes (e.g., the emperor donation money that Adventists received for mission purposes does *not* imply that Catholics recognized Adventists—distribution was made for Protestants separately [77]; the language of the Pare is not "Mamba" but Chasu [51]) should not be taken too seriously in light of the overall contribution that the study makes. The only place where the reader might wish a different approach is in a few cases where detailed interpretations appear a bit overstated. Whether the "founders of the denomination did not construct in any way a closed system of beliefs" (213) is debatable; on their newly found "pillars," they were very much united. Conradi certainly had an irenic attitude toward other Protestant missions, but calling this "close cooperation" (223) is somewhat exaggerated. The view that Adventists had the tendency of dissolving instances of biblical dialectic such as justification and sanctification rationally and one-sidedly (607) is probably true for some Adventists but not necessarily for the mainstream.

Still, with its careful account of Adventists' actions in the Nazi context and the first systematic interpretation of the logic behind them, this book represents the finest scholarship regarding the history of twentieth-century Christianity, a lasting contribution to Adventist studies, and an example of a sympathetic, yet critical, historiographic approach to Adventism that is worthy of imitation. Thus, all students of Adventism and those interested in twentieth-century church history will find the book enlightening.

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