

ples, oriented, and trained by the church, will play an important role in mission for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Gerhard Pfandl ("Independent Ministries," pp. 445–53) deals with independent Seventh-day Adventist organizations and how these affect, in one way or another, the unity of the church. Pfandl suggests that the majority of independent ministries support the church and make a positive contribution. However, some independent ministries threaten the foundation and mission of the church. The article concludes with some guidelines that will help in responding to the challenges represented by these independent organizations. Enrique Becerra ("El significado de una misión escatológica," pp. 455–64) reflects on the mission of the church. He asserts that the mission must be proclaimed in the context of Scripturally-based truths, including the reality of the judgment, physical restoration, and education. Antonio V. Cremades ("El valor de la naturaleza para la iglesia," pp. 465–79) discusses the importance of nature in God's plan. The natural world was created in order to serve as a vehicle for knowing and worshipping God. He suggests that time and space be created in the church for recovering this area that has long been abandoned. René Rogelio Smith ("Educación y escatología en la eclesiología adventista," pp. 481–87) reviews the meaning of the educational work of the church. The message of the second angel of Rev 14:8 also involves the announcement that all educational systems (with their philosophies) have collapsed. Smith argues for the development of an educational "theology" based on the three angels' messages.

Pensar la iglesia hoy is a highly significant contribution toward understanding the exegetical and theological foundations of a biblical ecclesiology which, at the same time, also attempts to look beyond theology in order to integrate distinct contemporary perspectives into a Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology. Those truly interested in this vital area will find this book a gold mine of information and inspiration that helps to understand and creatively "think church" today.

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Once upon a Time in Asia. Stories of Harmony and Peace, by James H. Kroeger with Eugene F. Thalman and Jason K. Dy. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications/Jesuit Communications, 2006. Pp. x + 165. PhP 175.00. ISBN 971-0305-41-4.

This is a most unusual book to be reviewed in an academic journal. The title, design, and cover, as well as the included drawings, would normally

consign this book to the popular religious category. However, under this deceptively simple literary guise the editor and compiler explores profound cultural and theological themes. In his two-page introduction, Kroeger explains the motivation for the story genre of the book. He states that narratives automatically draw and keep the attention of the reader/listener and stimulate a search for meaning. They serve as an interpersonal link and greatly impact life and faith. They also provide an accessible medium in which to explore "the human experience", "the human heart," and "human relationships with God" (p. ix). According to Kroeger, stories also underscore the ecumenical nature of all spiritual traditions. They are remembered long after material learned by other didactic means is forgotten. Jesus himself was a master storyteller, drawing on daily life to challenge his listeners. Great Asian teachers such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Ghandi also made extensive use of stories. The material for the volume is drawn from numerous sources and a variety of forms, including poems, prayers, myths, fiction, and personal experiences.

The book is loosely organized into eight sections. Each section begins with a one-page overview followed by stories, poems, and illustrations. The author, source, and country of origin are listed after each entry. The first twelve pages are grouped around the theme of beginnings and include five Asian creation myths which are designed to explore the "profound insights that could never be achieved by scientific description or logical analysis" (p. 1). These myths underscore the interdependence of all living things. They also introduce the concepts of "temptation, sin and evil" (p. 1). The following section is organized around the importance of family (pp. 37-49). Eight entries underscore the special places assigned to children and the elderly within the extended Asian family structure and the impact of "poverty, secularization, and consumerism" (p. 37) on the family unit.

The next section moves beyond family to explore community. Twelve entries depict community as only being able to exist "by daily sharing and caring" (p. 51). They also demonstrate that community does not consist of religious exclusivism but is rather to be found in the harmonious interaction of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. The way the idea of a sharing community has permeated Asian life is reflected even in the formation of language, as in the case of Filipino where the "word for brother or sister is *kapatol* or *kapatid*, a piece of your umbilical cord; a spouse is *kabiyak ng puso*, half of your heart; a close friend is *kabagang*, one of your teeth" (p. 52). Hospitality is shown to play an essential part in the formation and preservation of community.

Since Asia encompasses a great number of different cultures, the following fourteen entries explore aspects of culture ranging from "the very mundane to the practice of fine art" (p. 73). Some of the humorous entries highlight the cultural misunderstanding when western and eastern cultures meet. Not surprisingly, one of the larger groupings of twenty-two entries centers around "wisdom from the Orient" (p. 95). Asia has long been known for its wisdom literature. The main purpose of wisdom literature is to teach by use of parables and proverbs that can easily be understood by all and translated into practical life choices and values. The Hebrew Bible consists of a large percentage of wisdom literature. In Asia, Jesus is sometimes understood as a "wisdom guru" (p. 95).

The penultimate section reflects the variety of religious faiths in Asia and is grouped around the theme of "One God—Many Faith Traditions." The introductory page notes that Christians "make up less than three percent of the population" of Asia (p. 127). In the six entries which follow, the reader is encouraged to see faith in action in the lives and experiences of different religious faiths. The Asian core-value of harmony is emphasized throughout this section. The last section of the book is entitled "seeds of God in Asian soil" (p. 139) by which the author seems to mean open religious expression in Asia. Unlike most western countries where religion is often viewed as a private affair and is generally not flaunted in public life, Asians are very comfortable with "external signs of religious conviction" (p. 139). Through the last twelve entries, the authors seek to demonstrate that "there is no apparent dichotomy between faith and life" in Asia (p. 139).

There is no formal conclusion. The volume simply ends with a thought provoking story entitled "Between friends" (pp. 159–161). The book includes a map of Asia as well as an alphabetical listing of entries, together with their countries of origin. The engaging black and white line drawings, done by Jason Dy, are in themselves important reflections of the main themes of each section.

The novel style of presentation makes this book very readable. It can be used as post-graduate class material, for sermon illustrations or reading to children. While the message of some of the entries may be questioned on theological or sociological grounds, the book invites reflection. It also points to the power of stories as a primary communication medium in both pre- and postmodern contexts. This is a must read for anyone interested in mission, contextualization, and religious cultural studies. Perhaps the greatest challenge posed by the book poses for Christians in Asia

is that since "God permeates all of life in Asia, anyone who claims to have faith must manifest it in holiness of life" (p. 139).

Chantal J. Klingbeil
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